

The Living School developed through an initial residency with artist Brandon LaBelle at the South London Gallery in 2014 and resulted in a series of four public sessions between February and June 2016. Focusing on issues of social housing, common life, precariousness, and self-building, the Living School sought to work as an informal pedagogical platform aimed at supporting dialogue as well as collective making. Each session consisted of workshops and presentations led by invited guests and was held at specific social and cultural venues in London. Through methods of improvisation, somatic practices, experimental pedagogy, and self-organization, the Living School acted as temporary situations from which to draw out possibilities for reimagining what it means to live together, and what a social house might become.

Session 1: Expulsion (February 2016 / Peckham Liberal Club)

Jane Rendell, professor, Bartlett School of Architecture

zURBS, artist collective

Irit Rogoff, professor, Goldsmiths College

Session 2: Poverty (March 2016 / Ivy House Pub)

Andrew Conio, artist, lecturer University of Kent

Andrea Luka Zimmerman, artist, Fugitive Images

Liz Allen, archivist, Toynbee Hall

Session 3: Self-Built (May 2016 / Limehouse Town Hall)

Chris Jones, 56a Archive

RUSS, urban solutions initiative

Elyssa Livergant, artist, Limehouse Town Hall

Session 4: Shared Space (June 2016 / Open School East with the Anti-University)

Aria Spinelli, researcher, Radical Intention

Jonathan Hoskins, artist / researcher

Brandon LaBelle, artist-in-residence, South London Gallery

The Living School



Scenes from an art of community, tactic and tenderness

Brandon LaBelle

Shall we play dead?
Shall we run?
Shall we find the exit?
Shall we continue to dream?
Shall we honor the fallen?
Shall we storm the gates?
Shall we capture the flag?
Shall we wait?

Pause
Hesitate
Occupy

The coming together of the coming apart – the neighborhood torn at the seams – the bottles and the smiles, the sofa onto which he falls – the togetherness, the warm embrace, the disappointments that lead to crafting new bodies – this body, the one he hopes to give away – is this not the heart of the matter: the heart that wishes against the odds – he steals the opportunity, to create a context for sharing the deep innermost desire, the desire that pours out through the creativity that is living – the chairs gathered from out of the backroom, marked and scraped, and placed together: to stand as the articulation of an aesthetic expressivity, the arrangement that says: *let us speak, let us listen* – the folded blankets, the banners they make at home, on the kitchen table – the scribbled notes, the captured archives sewn together into an assemblage: *he she them this, and others* – the newcomers that we are – onto the scene, this scene of the new knowledge, like a material – like a mixed tape pirated from the media streams and nocturnal listenings: *wait, I love this song... !* – from the paintings taped together to the tables screwed into place, from the colors that speak of other worlds to the hand that reaches, suspended in mid-air as it constructs from nothing a body of thought, a resistant idea – *I wish for a new conscience, the project of loving relations* –

Shall we scratch the surface, or dig deep?
Shall we create another territory?
Shall we hold hands?
To carry the weight...
Together?

The street, the night, the hand, extending to float, to collapse, to exit the center only to come up again, to balance between the vague idea and the concrete form: what might such temporal constructs provide onto the field of social activism and the needs of the many – upon a line that becomes a glowing thread, vibrating with the excitement of new conversation, the uncertainties of the project, and the passion of heart-beating work – to lose, to find the brutal softness of nothing, and everything – the tension of this thread, always on the verge of breaking – he tries to hold it, they try to sustain the practice, the fragile community: what he learned during walks through the night with his friends, and the night birds with their silence and loyalty, these sounds that would always make his heart stop, to dream and to give shelter to the fugitive idea – where are the rooms into which these sounds may find their reverberation, their resonant becoming, today – where are the cities that could shiver with the touch of this vibration, the thread that may become a street under his steps, and hers and the others, so close, closer – his friends beside him, and he for them – that is the beginning, the first scene from which all the others emerge: the scene of love, and of rebellion –

Shall we turn the other way?
Shall we strike?
Shall we refuse to pay the rent?
Shall we build an underground culture, secret?
Shall we hold still?
Shall we disappear?
To search for the critical narrative, in the wind?

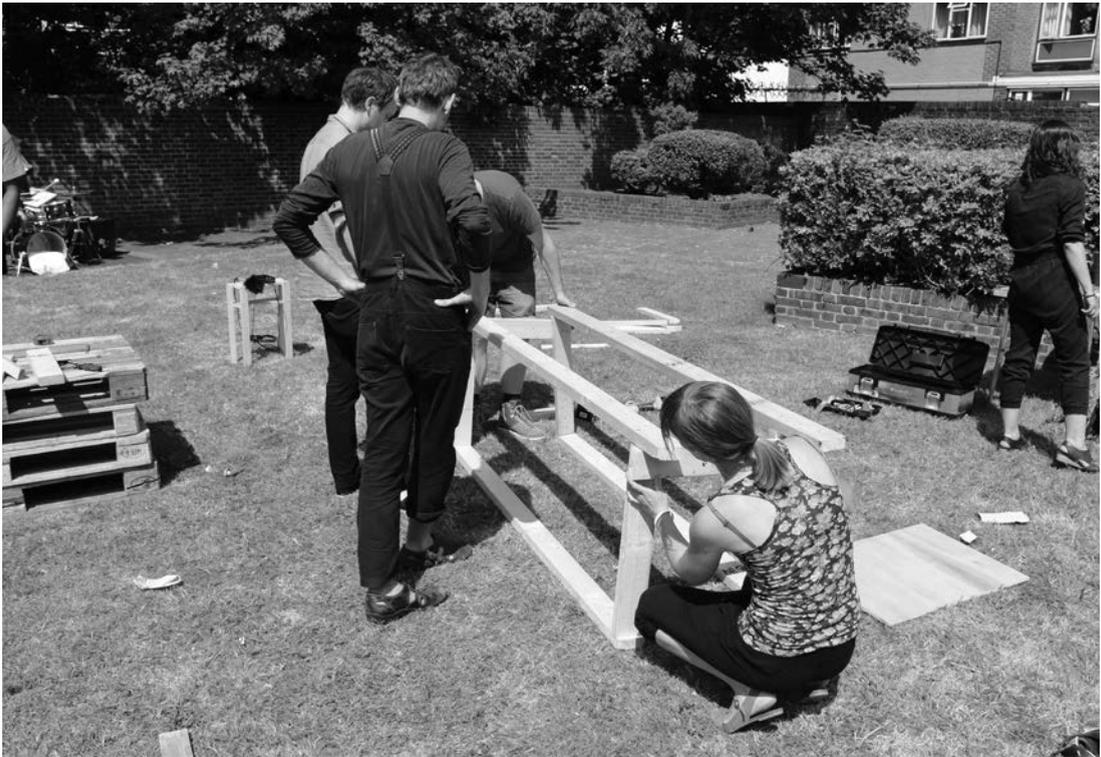
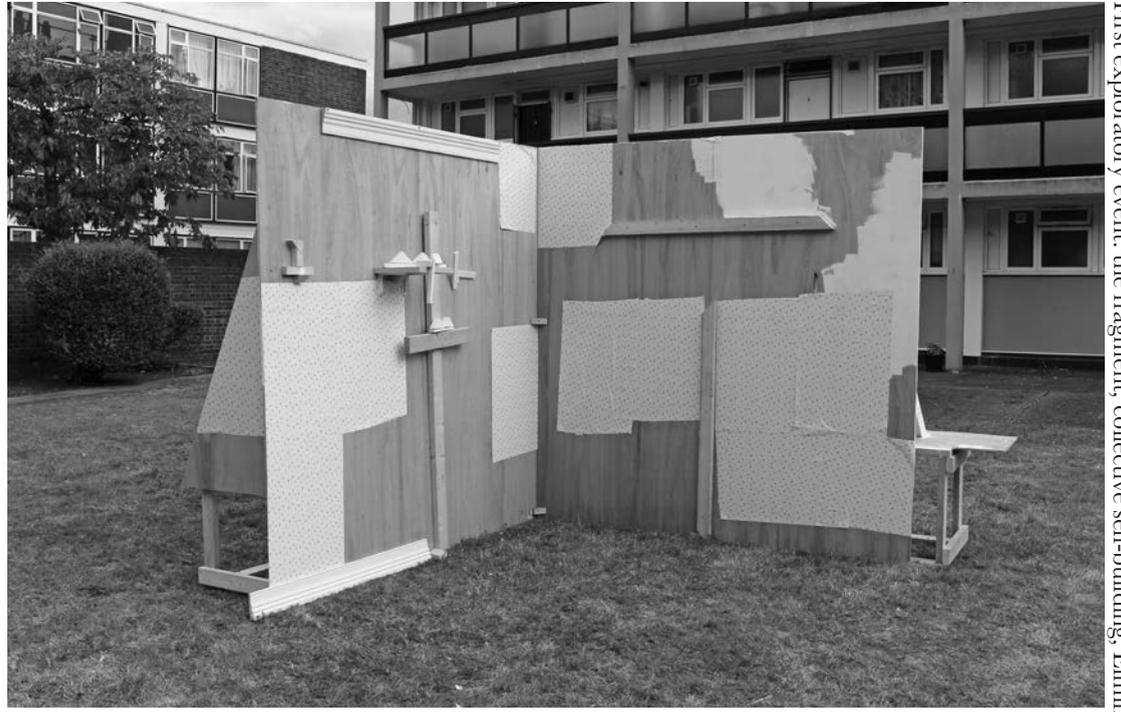
The stillness – the loss – the continual wishing, precarious, like a weak-strength – the weakness of this thought, nimble and resilient and persistent – expelled, evicted, trespassing, to run: to fan the flames of the crafting and the interruption: *he she them this, and others* – drawn together, the floating subjects – who teach and who give the knowledge scratched onto the palms, opened on this occasion, born from the blisters of loss and making – held together, blister to blister – the exchange that is always a question of shadows, what unworks the named and which intrudes, refuses to go away – the dirty figure, the dirty words, the dirty sound that speaks of contemporary culture – she tells of what was left behind, she maps the territories of broken homes, she argues for new concepts of welfare and the commonwealth – he speaks of the squats, the poverty and the crowbar needed, and the neighborhood parties they would create – and the others question, and they grasp the pile of straw and the bag of crumpled papers, making pillows and vague constructs which become benches and shelves for the books – to make an arena of dialogue – an art of making do –

You say then
I say now
You say to produce
I say to have and to need
You say when
I say whenever
You say the time has gone
I say the time has come
You call it the service provider
I call it the apparatus, anxiety, control
You say the said
I say the saying, as if

The living, the breathing, the journey and the social formation, suddenly – the night walks, the shadow bodies, the new knowledge, a fragile community – wishing and dreaming, losing and forgetting, a threadbare construct of common spaces, pulled out from institutional parameters and the discourses that refuse entry – the crafting from your experiences, and the shared narratives of survival, a glowing city – where we may meet – to shelter the expelled idea – what may come from this generosity – more than itself – found in what lies between: the joy and the urgency and the unthought – the ground across which some run, where others sleep, and where something may grow –

Shall we disrupt, extend?

Pause
Hesitate
Occupy



First exploratory event: the fragment, collective self-building, Elmington Estate, Camberwell, July 2014.

Compulsory Purchase Orders on the Aylesbury Estate

Jane Rendell / with drawings by Judit Ferencz (2015)

This is a summary of my Academic Expert Witness Statement submitted to Government Inspector Leslie Coffey on 23 April 2015, as part of The Public Inquiry into the Aylesbury Compulsory Purchase Order, held in Arry's Bar at Millwall Football ground from 28 April to 1 May 2015, adjourned until 12 May, and then adjourned again until 13-4 October 2015.

23 April 2015

I, Jane Rendell, of The Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London (UCL), 140 Hampstead Road, London, NW1 2BX, say as follows:

Professional Role

I have been a Professor of Architecture and Art at the Bartlett School of Architecture at University College London (UCL) since 2008. I worked as an architectural designer on social housing in the 1980s and 1990s. My forthcoming book looks at the destruction of 1950s/1960s welfare state housing designed and built by the London County Council (LCC), and how the democratic aspirations of the post war period to provide housing based on need have been replaced by a market-based housing model.

Methodology

(1) Literature Review

My statement is based on the following sources: (i) academic literature held in the public domain on housing, regeneration and the current London Housing Crisis, including evidence-based analyses of the Aylesbury Estate made by Professor Loretta Lees and Dr Richard Baxter; (ii) summaries of the on-going Aylesbury demolition on three key websites – 35%, Southwark Notes, and Better Elephant; (iii) material on the redevelopment of the Aylesbury Estate since 2005 from the Southwark Council website or accessed through FOI requests.

(2) Situated Knowledge

My published research draws on my personal experience, on what Professor Donna Haraway has described as 'situated knowledge'. Since 2010 I have been a resident leaseholder of a flat on the eighteenth floor of Crossmount House, on the Wyntham Estate, half a mile west of the Aylesbury Estate and the 'Order Land'. I have been a Strategic Member of the Aylesbury Leaseholders Action Group since November 2014, through which I have first-hand knowledge and understanding of the experiences of various Aylesbury leaseholders.

My experience as a Southwark leaseholder (over my own windows and balcony described in my statement) has highlighted for me:

(i) The imbalance of power in relations between Southwark leaseholders and South-

wark Council, and how Southwark Council has the power to make decisions that are extremely difficult for leaseholders to challenge without expensive legal advice. (ii) The lack of importance with which Southwark Council holds modern architecture, particularly the ways in which the views and the communal areas, which are integral to the design of 'point' and 'slab' blocks in post-war welfare state housing, are devalued with the insertion on my estate of poorly designed plastic windows and the locking off of laundry rooms.

My statement is based on research given *pro-bono*, partly to help my neighbours, and partly as my own home is in a post-war 'point' and 'slab' block estate in Southwark's renewal zone. I will return to the relevance of this definition.

Historical Context:

The Aylesbury as part of post-war Welfare State Public Housing

Crossmount House, where I live, was built in 1967, it is a point-block, one of five, designed by Colin Locus, one of the architects of the renowned LCC Alton Estate at Roehampton. With a target population of 10,000 the Alton Estate was the largest of the L. C. C. developments, and one of the largest housing projects in Europe. Alton East pioneered 'point' blocks, based on Swedish designs, of which Crossmount House is a fine example. Alton West pioneered 'slab' blocks, based on Le Corbusier's famous *Unité d'Habitation*, built between 1947 and 1953 in Marseilles, and situated in 8.65 acres of parkland, offering views to all its inhabitants: 'everyone looks out on trees and sky'. The *Unité de Marseilles*, was in turn inspired by the Narkomfin Communal House in Moscow, designed by Moisei Ginzburg with Ignatii Milinis in 1928–1929, a scheme which included green space, communal facilities and whose dwelling blocks were orientated to include air, sun and access to greenery, via ribbon windows and roof gardens. Key to the Unité and the Narkomfin designs were the communal spaces – the spaces of 'social condensation' – specifically the wide corridors, for people to meet and socialize, later termed 'streets in the sky' by the British post war architects, Peter and Alison Smithson, and which inspired the recently refurbished Park Hill in Sheffield, as well as the Aylesbury.

Current Context: The Aylesbury and 'Estate Renewal'

Much of Southwark's housing strategy for council estate 'renewal' is informed by research conducted by property consultants, Savills, who recommend that councils 'unearth the potential' of public land. The post-war 'point' and 'slab' blocks that make up most estates, including the Aylesbury, are not dense enough Savills argue; they must be replaced by mansion blocks situated on re-introduced old street layouts. Savills cite a report published by Create Streets, which claims that people do not like in living in post-war high-rise blocks. However, such viewpoints are directly countered by qualitative research, such as that conducted recently on the Aylesbury Estate by Richard Baxter whose oral history with residents on the estate counters the dominant trend to dismiss high-rise living as a failure, showing instead the importance of the high-rise view to people's sense of identity, and the pleasurable role

of vertical experiences in belonging to place and in home-making. Loretta Lees and Ben Campkin have pointed out how unfavourable representations of post-war estates like the Aylesbury in the media, have helped to create a biased impression of a violent underworld by those who do not live there, and thus participated in building an image of a failing housing estate which requires demolition. As London property prices have been leveraged up to unsustainable levels, the motive for ‘unearthing the potential’ of public land, which depends on the demolition of post-war public housing estates, is to open them up for private investment, rather than ‘the greater public benefit’. This is the context for the use of CPOs to acquire leaseholder properties.

Overall Argument

I question Southwark Council’s use of Compulsory Purchase Orders to acquire leaseholder properties on the ‘Order Land’. In my view, there is not a ‘compelling case in the public interest’, to ‘justify interfering with the human rights of those with an interest in the land affected’, by the use of CPOs which would go against Article 1 of the *Protocol of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*.

The Government Circular 06/2004, *Compulsory Purchase and the Crichel Down Rules*, notes that CPOs can only be taken when ‘there is clear evidence that the public benefit will outweigh the private loss’. The *Statement of Case made by the London Borough of Southwark under Rule 7 of the Compulsory Purchase (Inquiries Procedure) Rules 2007* states that:

... a local authority must not exercise its compulsory purchase power ... unless it thinks that the development, re-development or improvement is likely to contribute to the achievement of any one of more of the following objects: (a) The promotion or improvement of the economic well-being of their area; (b) The promotion or improvement of the social well-being of their area; (c) The promotion or improvement of the environmental well-being of their area.

The following seven aspects of Southwark’s regeneration scheme are not ‘in the public interest’, and thus do not justify the CPO of leaseholder properties on the ‘Order Land’:

(1) Choosing to demolish rather than refurbish

The Conisbee report of March 2005 is a structural survey of the Aylesbury Estate commissioned by Southwark Council. Based on an assessment of the buildings, the Jespersion construction technique used to construct the Aylesbury, and the Building Regulations current at the time of construction, it concludes that the only action required is minor repairs to the 5-storey blocks. Estates in other London Boroughs, built using the same construction system, such as Six Acres in Islington, have been refurbished rather than demolished. However, at a meeting on the 27 September

2005 Southwark decided to demolish rather than refurbish the Aylesbury. I have been unable to access information of any cost benefit analysis undertaken to determine the financial basis for the decision and a key numerical table on p. 10 of the Conisbee report is missing from the bundles of information sent to Leaseholders by Southwark.

(2) Reducing the number of affordable units

There are 566 existing units in the ‘Order’ land, of which 511 are social rented and 55 leasehold; these will be replaced by 830 new units of which only 406 are affordable. The addition of 424 units for private sale at the full market rate, against the loss of 511 social rented units, is evidence not that public benefit outweighs private loss, but of the reverse: that private benefit outweighs public loss.

(3) Displacing mixed communities

The ‘right to buy’ has produced a mixed community of estate residents – council tenants and leaseholders. This quality of mixed tenure is one of the prime features of diversity in most public housing estates across London, certainly in the Wyndham where I live, as well as the Aylesbury Estate and the ‘Order Land’. Southwark Council in its *Equalities Impact Assessment for Aylesbury Area Action Plan* (January 2009) describes a ratio of 18% leaseholders to 82% tenants.

They also describe the existing residents as highly diverse in terms of ethnic composition, with 67% belonging to a minority ethnic group, and around 21% over 60 years of age. By its own admission, the Aylesbury Estate and the ‘Order Land’ within it, is *already* a diverse community with mixed tenure, which contradicts a key reason that Southwark Council has given for redeveloping the Aylesbury Estate to create a ‘vibrant new neighbourhood’.

Of the 575 Aylesbury households removed from the estate to date (387 tenants and 188 leaseholders), just a third (195) have managed to remain in Walworth. Research has mapped how in the Heygate Estate, a mile to the north, tenants were displaced from central London into other boroughs, and leaseholders ejected from the city entirely. If the statistics for the Aylesbury households continue to follow this pattern of dispersal then the regeneration will have the paradoxical effect of displacing precisely those people who it was apparently intended to benefit.

A recent Government report states that ‘leaseholders should be offered a like-for-like replacement of their property, or a similar offer, wherever possible’, yet Southwark’s options for leaseholders which include them acquiring shared ownership or equity of the new intermediate units is not realistic given the difference between the sums leaseholders are being offered for their own properties and the price of intermediate units. For example, a two bedroom flat in the Aylesbury overlooking Burgess Park on the fifth floor or above might be valued (by Southwark’s valuers) between £120,000 to around £200,000 (after going to tribunal and in comparison

with other test cases). However, in new development Camberwell Fields, a two bed flat overlooking Burgess Park on the fifth floor is between £550,000 and £650,000, and those on lower floors with no park view are around £450,000. So if a leaseholder wished to remain high up, and to retain their park view, in the best case example, having suffered the inconvenience, loss of earnings and stress of taking the case to tribunal, and if after financial means testing they were offered equity or shared ownership, they would need to take on between £350,000 and £450,000 of debt to cover the difference in price. And this would be subject to the availability of a suitable flat and the ability to find a mortgage provider.

(4) Organising the new housing according to economic status

Southwark Council in its *Equalities Impact Assessment for Aylesbury Area Action Plan* (January 2009), states it will not ‘create an area of the “haves” and “have nots”’. Yet housing at Camberwell Fields is segregated into zones – private sale, social rent, and intermediate – according to the purchasing power of the occupants/buyers. In phase 1a of the Aylesbury redevelopment, the units are distributed so the south-facing views over Burgess Park previously enjoyed by a mix of tenants and leaseholders will mainly benefit units for private sale on the open market. The majority of units overlooking the park and directly behind this are for sale, while the intermediate are mainly located towards the back of the site, and the far back of the site is mainly social rented units.

(5) Ignoring the democratic decision-making processes

Unlike Heygate residents, who were denied a ballot on the future of their estate, Aylesbury residents were fully balloted. In 2001 76% of Aylesbury residents turned out to vote against a proposed stock transfer and regeneration (73%). This democratic process has been ignored by Southwark who have gone ahead with privatization regardless of the majority of residents’ wishes.

(6) Prioritizing private profit over leaseholder wellbeing

Southwark Council plan to compulsorily purchase properties that they previously sold to leaseholders. However, one key financial objective of the redevelopment of the Aylesbury Estate as stated in the report of the meeting of Southwark Council on 27 September 2005 is to allow developers to make 15% profit. How can making a profit for private developers be for the public benefit? When a local authority uses statutory powers to dispossess leaseholders of their homes and life savings, to the great benefit of private capital, trust in public institutions as systems of governance is weakened.

(7) Redaction of key information concerning ‘viability’

The claim made by the Aylesbury Area Action Plan that ‘replacement of all the existing social rented housing would not be possible economically’, is impossible to disprove since the viability studies and financial models that form the basis of the decisions have been redacted from key documents, and are unavailable for public

scrutiny. When requesting information concerning the partnership deal between Southwark Council and Notting Hill Housing Trust, Southwark Council asserted that ‘the public interest in providing this information does not outweigh the likely prejudice to commercial and economic interests of both the council and the third party.’ Southwark Council argues that the demolition of the ‘Order Land’ is in the public interest and that public benefit outweighs private loss, yet this contradicts its decision to protect the privacy of the developers’ financial information, while demanding that leaseholders should have their finances means tested and open to public scrutiny.

Notes:

1. See <http://crappistmartin.github.io/images/SummaryProfRendell.pdf> (accessed 11 August 2016).
2. See Loretta Lees, ‘The Urban Injustices of New Labour’s “new urban renewal” the case of the Aylesbury Estate’, accessed at https://southwarknotes.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/lorettalees_pptx.pdf. See also Campkin, *Remaking London* for his chapter on the Aylesbury and wider look at ‘regeneration’. Ben Campkin, *Remaking London: Decline and Regeneration in Urban Culture*, (London: IB Tauris, 2013), especially 77–107.
3. See <http://35percent.org/>; <http://betterelephant.org/>; and <https://southwarknotes.wordpress.com/> (accessed 9 January 2017).
4. See Donna Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective’, *Feminist Studies*, v. 14, n. 3, (Autumn 1988), 575–99 and D. Soyini Madison, *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics and Performance* (London: Sage, 2012).
5. See the description of this part of the Aylesbury Estate as ‘the order land’, in The London Borough of Southwark, *Statement of Case made by the London Borough of Southwark under Rule 7 of the Compulsory Purchase (Inquiries Procedure) Rules 2007*, p. 1 and throughout.
6. For secondary sources on Roehampton see for example Joseph Rykwert, ‘Architecture’, Boris Ford (ed.) *Modern Britain: The Cambridge Cultural History*, [1988] (Cambridge: The University of Cambridge, 1992), 253–77; Simon Pepper, ‘Housing at Roehampton’, Ford (ed.) *Modern Britain*, 279–87; and descriptions in Bullock, Nicholas, *Building the Post-War World: Modern Architecture and Reconstruction in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2002); Glendinning, Miles and Stefan Muthesius, *Tower Block: Modern Public Housing in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); and John R. Gold, *The Practice of Modernism: Modern Architects and Urban Transformation, 1954–1972* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007).
7. For the initial designs see, Le Corbusier et P. Jeanneret, *Oeuvre complete 1938–1946*, v. 4, publié par Willy Boesiger, architecte, Zurich (Erlenbach–Zurich: Les Editions d’Architecture Erlenbach-Zurich, 1946), 172–87. See also Le Corbusier, *The Marseilles Block*, [1950] translated by Geoffrey Sainsbury, from the French Unité d’Habitation de Marseille (London: The Harvill Press, 1953), where Le Corbusier describes it as ‘a block of 360 flats’, see 7, and as 337 homes, see 42. For specific contemporary commentaries and discussions, see Alban Janson and Carsten Krohn, *Le Corbusier, Unité d’habitation, Marseilles*, (London and Stuttgart: Axel Menges, 2007) and Jacques Sbriglio, *Le Corbusier: The Unité d’Habitation in Marseilles, and Rez-les-Nantes, Berlin, Briey en Foret, Firminy*, (Basel, Boston, Berlin and Paris: Birkhauser Publishers and Fondation Le Corbusier, 2004).

8. See *Contemporary Architecture* (1929) n. 5, 158–64 for plans and *Contemporary Architecture* (1930) n. 5, 6–13 for photographs of the just completed building. For Catherine Cooke’s translation of Moisei Ginzburg, ‘Housing Complex for Employees of Narkomfin, Moscow’, *Contemporary Architecture* (1929) n. 5, 161–2, see Cooke, *Russian Avant-Garde*, p. 120. See also Victor Buchli, ‘Moisei Ginzburg’s Narkomfin Communal House in Moscow’, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, (1998) v. 57, n. 2, 160–81.

9. See David Lewis, ‘Criticism’, *Sheffield*, A Special Number edited by Pat Crook, *Architectural Design*, (September 1961), 397–8; ‘Housing at Park Hill and Hyde Park, Sheffield’, *The Architects’ Journal Information Library* (21 July 1965), 160; and ‘Park Hill Development’, *The Architects’ Journal* (23 August 1961), 272.

10. See the work of Richard Baxter on the importance of the view to Aylesbury residents. See Richard Baxter, QMUL, and Mark Davidson, Clark University, ‘The Violence of Urban Regeneration: Home and Place Unmaking in the Gentrification of the Aylesbury Estate’, (April 2015) and Richard Baxter, ‘The High-Rise Home: Practices of Verticality on the Aylesbury Estate’ (April 2015), paper submitted to the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*.

11. See http://www.savills.co.uk/_news/article/72418/175241-0/4/2014/savills-research--london-regeneration-research-proposal (accessed 9 January 2017).

12. See <http://pdf.savills.com/documents/Foreword%20by%20Community%20Secretary,%20Eric%20Pickles%20and%20the%20regeneration%20research%20proposal.pdf> (accessed 9 January 2017).

13. See the report by Nicholas Boys Smith and Alex Morton, ‘Create Streets; Not just Multi-Storey Estates’ at <http://www.createstreets.com/> (accessed 22 July 2016). See also Create Streets’ ‘Better Regeneration’ and ‘Why aren’t we building more streets?’ and Savills, ‘Completing London’s Streets: Savills Research Report to the Cabinet Office’ (2016) <http://www.createstreets.com/reports/4589645468> [accessed 29 July 2016].

14. See for example Baxter, ‘The High-Rise Home’.

15. See Lees, ‘The Urban Injustices of New Labour’s “new urban renewal”’ and Campkin, *Remaking London*.

16. See *The London Borough of Southwark, Statement of Case made by the London Borough of Southwark under Rule 7 of the Compulsory Purchase (Inquiries Procedure) Rules 2007*, p. 4, para. 1.11.

17. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, *Compulsory Purchase and the Crichel Down Rules* (2004), p. 7, para. 17. See https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7691/1918885.pdf (accessed 22 July 2016).

18. European Court of Human Rights, *Protocol of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms* (1952), Article 1, p. 31. See http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Convention_ENG.pdf [accessed 29 July 2016].

19. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, *Compulsory Purchase and the Crichel Down Rules* (2004), p. 7, para. 19. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7691/1918885.pdf, see (accessed 9 January 2017).

20. The London Borough of Southwark, *Statement of Case made by the London Borough of Southwark under Rule 7 of the Compulsory Purchase (Inquiries Procedure) Rules 2007*, pp. 8–9, para. 5.2.

21. See Alan Conisbee and Associates, *Aylesbury Estate: Robustness Considerations to Inform Risk Assessments*, (10 March 2005), job no. 050041. Obtained from Southwark Council under FOI 493517.

22. Southwark Council, *Southwark’s objection statement version 2 - ALG Statement of case updated pdf*, (24 April 2015), p. 21, points 2.04–2.06.

23. See *Equalities Impact Assessment for Aylesbury Area Action Plan* (January 2009), p. 8. This is

no longer available on Southwark’s website. So see https://southwarknotes.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/equalities_impact_assessment1.pdf (accessed 9 January 2017).

24. Southwark Council, *Revitalise: Aylesbury Area Action Plan* (January 2010), p. 4. See http://www.2.southwark.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/13132/aylesbury_area_action_plan_2010_inc_appendices (accessed 9 January 2017).

25. See <https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/216037/response/534726/attachment/2/Freedom%20of%20Information%20request%20response%20for%20405721.pdf.html> (accessed 9 January 2017).

26. See <https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/216037/response/543034/attachment/3/lbsouthwark%20barfield%2025%2007%202014%2011%2004%2032.pdf.html> (accessed 9 January 2017).

See also http://www.peoplesrepublicofsouthwark.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3656:13-days-left-to-object-to-demolition-of-the-aylesbury-estate&catid=21:news&Itemid=156 (accessed 9 January 2017).

27. Lees, Just Space, and SNAG (Southwark Notes Archives Group) ‘The Social Cleansing of Council Estates in London’.

28. See <http://35percent.org/2013-06-08-the-heygate-diaspora/> (accessed 9 January 2017).

29. See <http://www.insidehousing.co.uk/journals/2015/02/11/t/u/j/KnockItDownorDoItUp.pdf> (accessed 9 January 2017).

30. See http://www.primelocation.com/new-homes/details/35797322?search_identifier=655ae7d606b9ab6729f3c4798d354200#rWFcveMRhiC3eWJS.97 (accessed 9 January 2017).

31. See *Equalities Impact Assessment for Aylesbury Area Action Plan* (January 2009), p. 5. https://southwarknotes.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/equalities_impact_assessment1.pdf (accessed 9 January 2017).

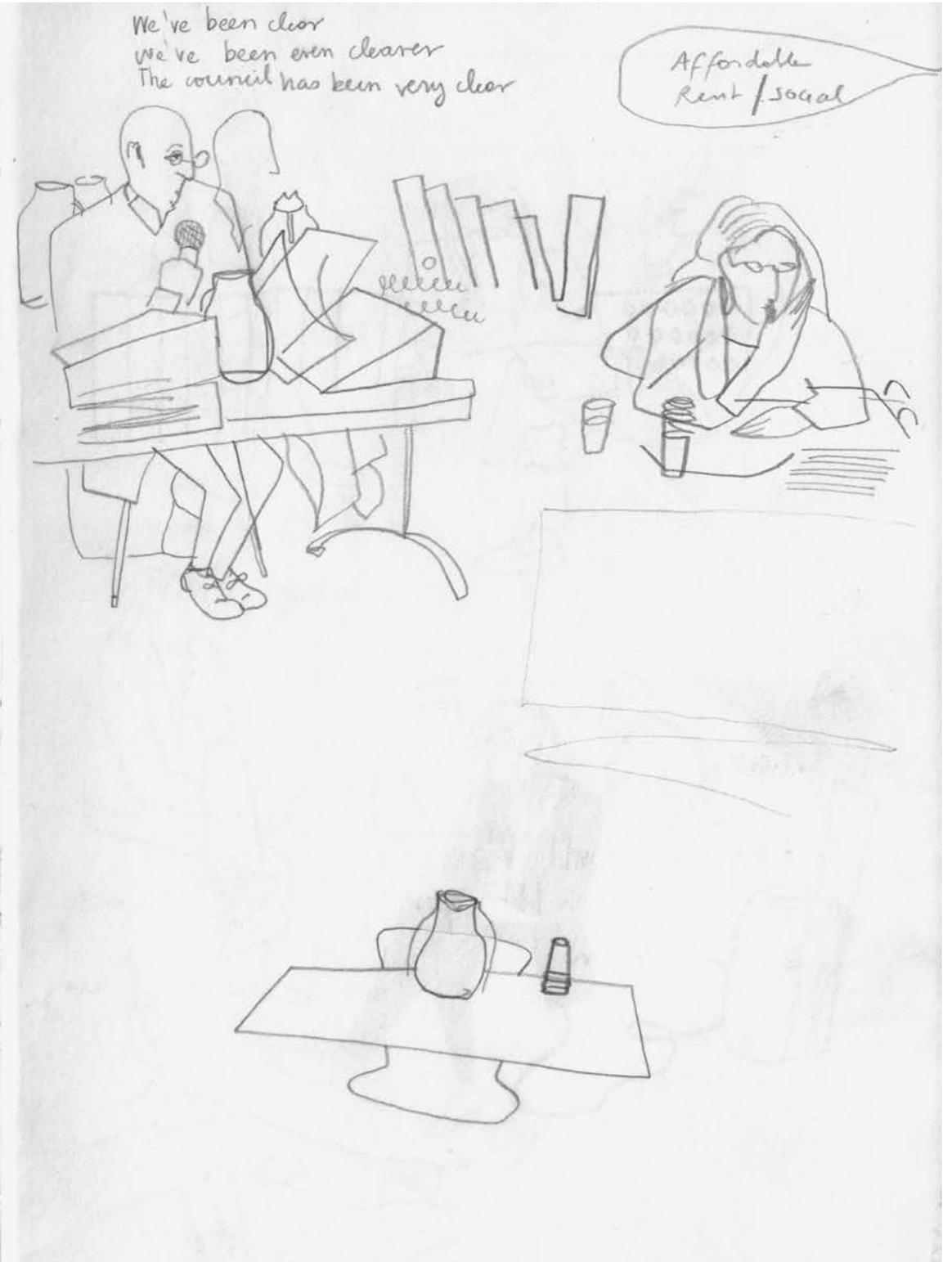
32. See the zoning of this development where Aylesbury leaseholders are being offered shared ownership deals. See <https://www.nhhg.org.uk/residents/> (accessed 9 January 2017).

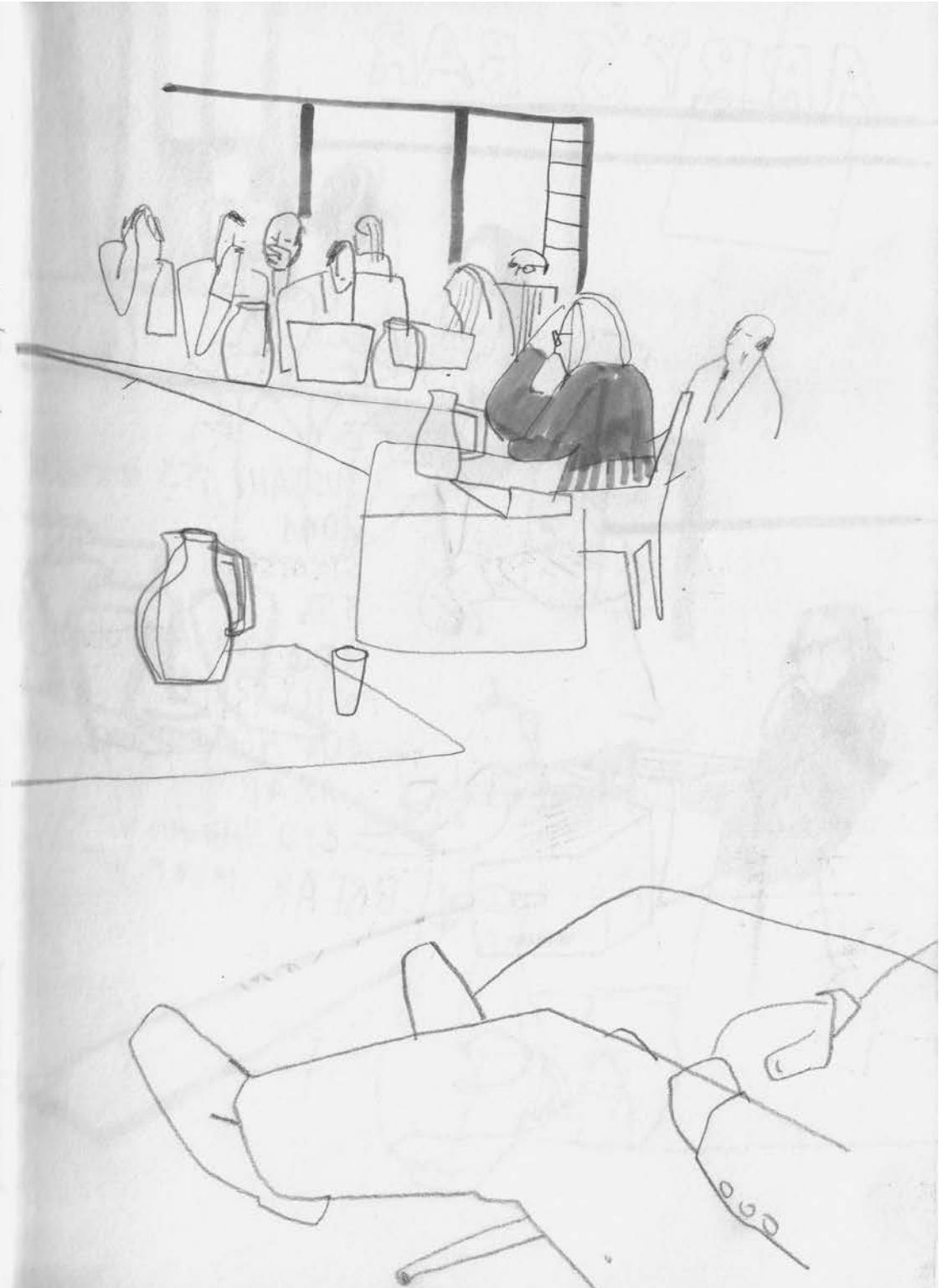
33. See <https://southwarknotes.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/aylesbury-phase-1a.jpg> (accessed 12 December 2015).

34. See <http://betterelephant.org/blog/2015/02/06/aylesbury-estate-facts-and-figures/> and <http://modern.gov.southwark.gov.uk/Data/Executive/20050927/Agenda/Item%2007%20-%20The%20AylesburyEstate%20Revised%20Strategy%20-%20Report.pdf> (accessed 9 January 2017).

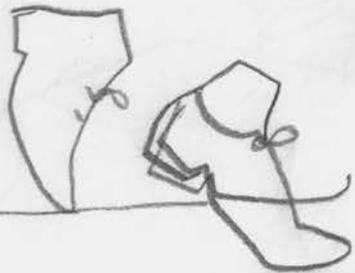
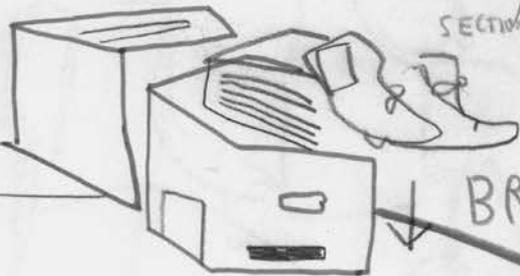
35. See Southwark Council, *Revitalise: Aylesbury Area Action Plan* (January 2010), p. 35, para. 3.3.5. See http://www.2.southwark.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/13132/aylesbury_area_action_plan_2010_inc_appendices (accessed 9 January 2017).

36. The email I received on 3 March 2015, in response to my request for information: 502731, in which I asked to see a copy of the Partnership Agreement between Notting Hill Housing Trust and London Borough of Southwark stated: ‘Your request has been dealt under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004. In response to it we have enclosed a redacted version of *Copy of the Partnership Agreement between Notting Hill Housing Trust and London Borough of Southwark*.’





ARRY'S BAR



3.1

SUSTAIN ITS NEIGH

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STRATEGY

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POLICY BHL

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DEAR CITY, GRANT ME THE SERENITY TO **ACCEPT**
THE THINGS I CANNOT CHANGE,
THE **COURAGE** TO **CHANGE** THE THINGS I CAN,
AND THE WISDOM TO KNOW
THE DIFFERENCE...

YOU - A GENTRIFIER?

Are you a well-educated, creative, privileged middle or high-income earner, student or self-employed by choice?

Are you living, working or spending your time in a predominantly immigrant or low-income neighbourhood?

Is this neighbourhood changing? Are hip coffee shops, vintage stores or yoga studios replacing the corner shop, the hardware store or the old shoemaker?

Are buildings being renovated and longtime residents moving away without anyone really knowing where to?



YOU - A GENTRIFIER!

In case your answers to most of these questions are yes, then accept it: your neighbourhood is gentrifying and you are a gentrifier.

But if you feel guilty about this, there are ways you can become a better urbanite.

We applaud the new cosy corner café while simultaneously feeling sad about it replacing the old corner shop. We buy our soy milk at the new organic shop while knowing we should support the local grocery store.

We enjoy the charm of our diverse and sometimes chaotic neighbourhood with its multicultural ambience, its lively community, its mix of traditions. At the same time we know that our very presence, being privileged and well-educated, is slowly making the area more homogeneous.

Let's regroup, admit these feelings of guilt and be honest to each other: As long as we live in cities, we will never completely overcome being gentrifiers. Acknowledging that, we shall aim to be good diversifiers in addition.



MANIFESTO

1. Openness:

Gentrifiers Anonymous (GA) is an open forum for discussion, where we aim to raise the understanding between you, your actions and gentrification. GA offers a space where everyone is welcome to share their relationship with gentrification and their city.

2. The Problem

GA understands gentrification as a shift in urban neighbourhood. The influx of middle-class residents and the cafés, boutiques and new amenities, which they bring with them, creates a homogeneous, unaffordable and hostile environment for those, who lived in and shaped the neighbourhood in the first place. GA acknowledges that cities evolve, and while gentrified neighbourhoods benefit from e.g. lower crime rates, the city turning into an elitist bastion or a generic suburb stripped of diversity is an even greater danger.

3. Us & Us

GA rejects any binary approaches that lead to an 'us & them' dynamic. There are no villains or victims in GA. In the terms of gentrification you can be both the offender and the victim at the same time.

4. Self-reflection

Reflecting on our own positions, motivations and agencies is crucial. GA believes in an open dialogue, which is taking our individual experiences seriously - not as a self-referential guilt-trip but advocating a self-reflexive and constructive critique.

5. Small change / big Change

GA does not ignore the broader dynamics of social, economic and material structures, but focus on how we support or resist these structures in our day-to-day lives. Our individual actions and choices DO matter. GA considers the individual position as an initial and important starting point for the bigger change.

6. Making Space

GA believes that we all must work toward fairer forms of multiplicity, as everyone has the right to be part of a heterogeneous city.

THE TESTIMONIES

The personal testimonies of Gentrifiers Anonymous are the brave and personal experiences of members, who attended the meeting in Peckham London.

Thank you for sharing.



Testimony no.1

Hi, I'm Sabeth, and by trying to be very careful about many things I find myself being a gentrifier nonetheless.
(clapping)

I care a lot for the environment. I'm very conscious in my decisions for products, for material, also the quantity of stuff I buy. I love that in my neighborhood there's all these cheap clothing stores, but I never go there to shop because I'd rather go to a second hand... or then I buy something very expensive which holds forever and is organic cotton.

Ehm, Same goes for meat. I try, ehm, I'm not... I'm a vegetarian, I don't eat meat, so, I would love to support the chicken grill downstairs, but it's really againsy my beliefs. And then I often - I say often, I'm honest here in this round - try to be vegan as well, so I need to get my coffee at the new coffee store around the corner because they have the soy milk.

Also, often when I'm in another city, then I even more have to go to these places, because I need the wifi, because out of my own choice,

I am this creative nomad, and I work from my laptop wherever I am, and I don't have a steady place where I live, but that's not a sign of deprivation but it's a sign of freedom for me, which is already a very privileged place to be. Still then, I go to these places more often.

On top of that, I'm a convinced feminist, so in conversations with people from other backgrounds, I get irritated or even offended or provoked by their ideas of family structures or of gender issues, so, sometimes, I just don't wanna have these discussions, and that also puts me in a highly exclusive bubble, everything together.

These are just a few examples of dilemmas I encounter daily, where I am trying to do the right thing, and I find myself supporting a development that I really don't know why it's there, that I really don't support at all and I don't think it's right and I'm part of it.

And that's why I'm here today.
(clapping)

On the horns of a dilemma



He just wanted to 'give something back'

Testimony no. 2

My name is Cecilie and I am a gentrifier.



So me and my boyfriend were really good gentrifiers. We bought a house in Clapton. At the 'murder mile' which is now filled with wine bars, a craft beer shop, several hipster cafés, a vinyl shop etc etc.

The house had an open yard where a lot of guys from the neighbourhood used to hang out and get drunk. My boyfriend is an architect and he wanted to build a second house in the yard. So he closed it off with a hoarding so that the guys could not hang out there anymore.

However, he wanted to connect with the neighbourhood and 'give something back' – not just come there as a privileged white boy and claim the land. So on the pavement outside the hoarding he built a table on one of the pollards, so that the guys could hang out around there instead. I just think this was such a nice gesture! Like: you take something and then give something back!



So the guys hang out, getting drunk outside our door. Sometimes up to 10 – 15 of them. It was kind of nice, they would greet me when I came home at night and stuff. I even learned what my name is in Ghanian...

But they could get quite loud and sometimes they kept us up at night with their yelling and shouting. And they peed on our front door. I

felt so bad because it got me really annoyed, and several times I had to ask them to keep it down. And my boyfriend started to talk about removing the table. But I refused.

Then we would be like the bad gentrifiers, the ones who just encroach upon a neighbourhood without giving something back. You see we really try to be tolerant. But in the end we just couldn't.

My boyfriend called the police. They made it a non-drinking zone. So now the guys would actually get FINED for drinking there. The guys were frustrated and started to attack the table.

My boyfriend went out and helped them and so they destroyed the table together. And that was the end of it...

What does that make us? I mean we really tried. But we just couldn't. We just couldn't. And god knows where the guys are drinking now. And it is still noisy outside our door... There are buses and sirens and...

I am just questioning over and over again whether there is something we could have done different...



The Game of Neighbourhoods

Testimony no. 3

Hallo - My name is Nina ... and I am a gentrifier. I live in this Atelier, in Neukölln - in Berlin, we call it the "Hidden Institute" ... And I guess really that is where my - erhm - G. story begins ... sorry - I just really find it hard using the G-word...

Well ... that is where my history as a gentrifier begins...

The atelier - you see - used to be a carpentry but the rent rose and they couldn't afford to live there anymore and well ... we got the place. I mean the rent is still cheap and all but we - three freelance, well-educated academics got the lease. And that displacement of a small business owner in favour of an artist studio that is the definition of the G-word right?

But I mean... It doesn't really matter where I would live... I would always be displacing someone... and well... It isn't us, the artists - nor the most flashy cereal cafes and the hipster baristas, come on! Who are the real gentrifiers in this process. We are not the real enemies.

We are mere distractions from where the most important decisions are taken. The real enemies are the booooring non-headlining developments and politics: Like the cynical redefining of "affordable

housing" to mean 80% of market rate- instead of bloody 50!!

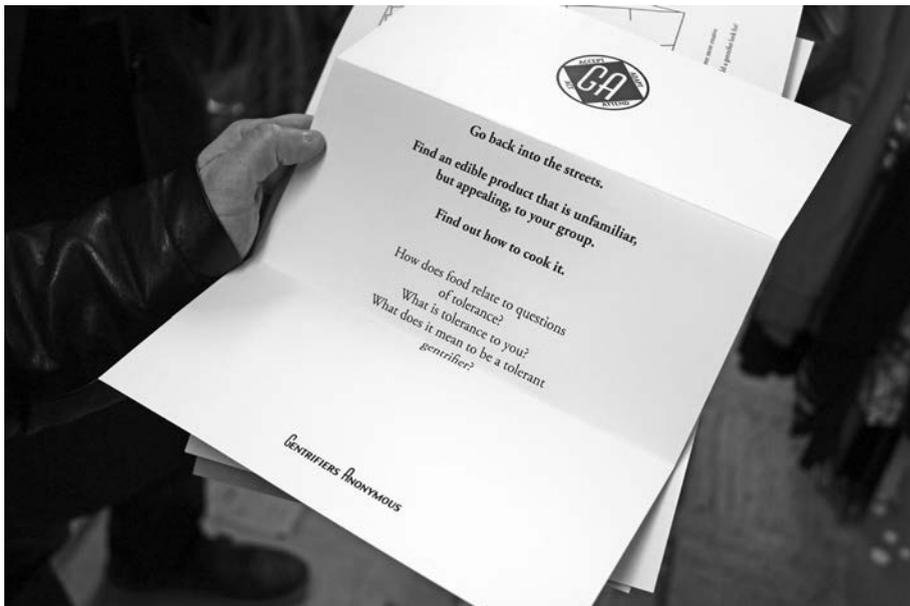
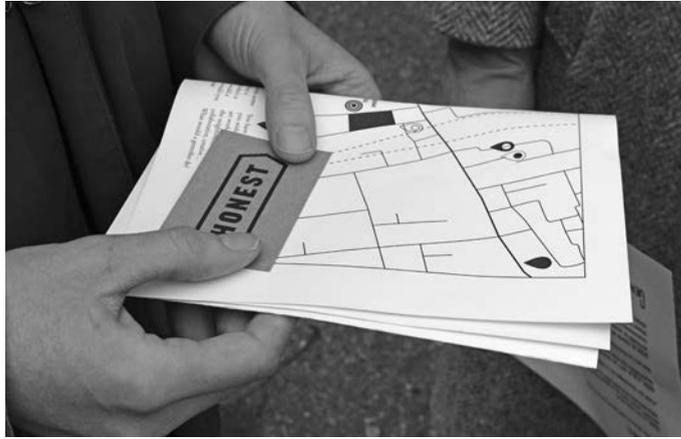
But okay ... denial aside - the hipster cafés and the bars are symbols of a change. They are fucking eviction signs saying "Very soon - you cannot afford to live here."

These shops are expensive for me too... but the difference between me and the original Berliners is my cultural capital ... just the fact that I am so bloody educated and aware of my role in this capitalistic Game of Neighbourhoods - THAT is what sets me apart from my area...

now...when I see a group of wealthy hipsters - like myself - ...I am ashamed... but no matter what I do now I cannot escape being middle class so-called creative - well-educated - white - privileged - at least I am not a man...

I feel like - I abuse the city and its citizens are just casualties of my privilege - I destroy what I love - the multicultural flair, the trashy aesthetics - the life - just by being there... - but should I really rather just not give a shit - let the city evolve as cities do... is the most honest just to admit to it - pay those 4 pound for my breakfast oats - discuss the latest episode of Serial loudly - and just relax without thinking of the G-word at all?





In “Gentrifiers Anonymous” meetings zURBS get you started with some basic first steps: We will enter the city, observe the status quo as well as our own behaviour, test and discuss some exercises and interventions, and will round it up with collective ideas of how to share our cities in more productive ways.

We are aware of the paradox that while we are shaming gentrification, gentrification is thriving because of our choices and our lifestyles.

Let’s regroup, admit these feelings of guilt and be honest to each other: As long as we live in cities, we will never completely overcome being gentrifiers.



You want meetings in your city? Let us know.

Meanwhile, we are posting interesting facts, mindful thoughts and writings and helpful exercises on facebook.



Photos:

From Peckham London Meeting:

Jack James and Sarah Coffils of South London Gallery

From "The Table" in Hackney: Matthew Dalziel

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Gentrifiers Anonymous is a project by zURBS.



Gentrifiers Anonymous primary purpose is to help gentrifiers stay conscious, humble and fair and help other gentrifiers understand their doings.

<http://www.gentrifiers-anonymous.org>

Revolutionary: What Do You Want?

Andrew Conio

A popular YouTube clip¹ shows a young student interrupting Jacques Lacan during a packed seminar at *l'Université Catholique de Louvain* in October 1972. He tears up Lacan's papers and pulps them in a water jug before pouring the contents over the table. Lacan gives way gracefully as the revolutionary student offers a critique of the spectacularisation of culture and Lacan's implicit contribution to it as 'priest', 'teacher' and promulgator of an inauthentic discourse. This inauthentic discourse of the master, he goes on to claim, unites alienated subjects behind an ideological spectacle that nullifies the authentic expression of self.

After soliciting permission to speak, in an avuncular tone Lacan asks, "By expressing yourself in this way in front of this audience, which is more than ready to hear these revolutionary statements ... what was it exactly that you wanted to do?" The revolutionary bristles; "That is the question which parents, priests, ideologists, bureaucrats and the cops always ask the growing number of people who act like me ... My answer is, I want to do just one thing – make revolution. It is obvious that at the stage we've reached ... one of our main targets will be exactly those moments when people like you are bringing to people like these [he gestures to the audience] justifications for their miserable lives. That's what you do."

Lacan ignores this scathing denunciation and nonchalantly incorporates the revolutionary's discourse into his own by claiming they share the same truth: that the revolutionary's demands are a sublimation of his desire for a return to an inexpressible love voiced in the inherently alienated and confused language "formed by the desires of your parents" which none of us can but speak. Trapped in these oscillations between an inarticulable love and an alienating language, the student is, according to Lacan, compelled to "beat the sky with his fists", something Lacan purports to know all too well as a shared psychic reality. The revolutionary is thereby positioned as a subject of psychoanalysis where his truth is no longer that of a political and social struggle but a psychic one, in which the revolutionary's words are "identical to the truth he believed at that moment": the truth of both his alienation and the greater truth revealed by Lacan's diagnosis. The power of interruption or irruption is thereby castrated, nullified and used to enhance Lacan's own discourse.

One of the Occupy movement's most distinctive features was its refusal to state what it wants. There are a number of reasons for this. On the one hand, Occupy didn't know what it wanted; it was a raggle-taggle of diverse, conflicted interests, which could not be brought into a single narrative. This is exemplified by OccupyLSX's decision to take down its talismanic *Capitalism is Crisis* banner three months after setting up camp outside St Paul's Cathedral in London. Only for some

was this seen as a sign of failure. As leading Occupy activist Spyro Van Leemnen explained:

"We decided to take it down. People preaching their personal anti-capitalist agenda, allowing the media to potentially judge the whole Occupy movement by it, doesn't help our cause. Occupy as a whole is neither anti- nor pro-capitalist. Acknowledging that there are fundamental problems with the economy doesn't make you anti-capitalist or a communist; it just makes you someone who wants to start a discussion about how to make things better and work toward finding an alternative."²

Diversity is here was a strategy, a methodology and an objective; any attempt to impose a master narrative was seen as a type of violence done to the myriad of micro struggles represented in the lived struggles of the movement's members. The question, 'What exactly do you want?' was thus viewed as illegitimate, an attempt to de-legitimise, belittle and close minds.

This does not mean, however, that no themes or demands are discernable. Occupy's first unwritten demand was that those who ask 'What do you want?' from a position of authority and violence must, first, understand the nature of that interrogatory violence, its history and how it is perpetuated. Only then can a properly authentic conversation, in which none of the ontological and epistemological norms that provide the cognitive balustrades for capitalist society are taken as given, can be entered into. These norms include determinations of what counts as a life, what constitutes a life worth living and worth grieving (Judith Butler 2006).³ Given capitalism guarantees the immiseration of millions, unstoppable climate change and grotesque inequality is guaranteed, a fundamental reassessment of what constitutes culpability and responsibility is called for. At stake in a full and authentic discourse would be a reappraisal of both the anthropomorphism that governs the human relation to the planet and the outright denial of our responsibility for the lives of future generations – who at present seem to be destined, as we reach the tipping-point, to the virtual certainty of ecological disasters heading toward an inhospitable planet.

Capitalism's first ideological principle is the sanctity of the individual whose drive for success and fulfilment precedes the collective, is the motor of development, and the measure of success. At stake in any authentic discourse, then, is a potential revision of the relationship between the individual and society and a restatement of the hegemony of the collective and the *a priori* consubstantiality of the self and its other. Since what counts as sustainability, justice, economy and health are all distorted by capitalist values, and since capitalist history is founded on colonisation, the mythology of benign imperialism must give way to an equally vivid history of suppression, expropriation and in some cases astonishing brutality and genocide.⁴ This other history

forms the social and ontological unconscious of our world. Equally unacknowledged by the capitalist miracle are the alienated, depressed and docile worker and the willing consumer, both of whom lack meaningful autonomy and are entirely functional within the system of capitalist production.

The failure to answer the question ‘what do you want?’ did not, then, imply a lack of interrogation and analysis. Indeed, Occupy’s intensive programme of debates, teach-ins, working groups and assemblies was arguably its most definitive feature. For all this openness and radical experimentation with consensual democracy, there was a broadly agreed-upon narrative that provided the social and conceptual underpinnings for the Occupy protest. It runs something like this: the predicates of the present economic system are; survival of the fittest, the logic of creative destruction, the rational actor thesis, the efficient market hypothesis, the price mechanism and the theory of marginal utility. These are subtended by the idea of the inherent stability of capitalism, the scarcity paradigm⁵ and the purportedly democratic nature of the market. Taken together these principles and predicates have the appearance of natural laws legitimised as a direct expression of human nature, yet are utterly incompatible with the efficient use and allocation of the planet’s resources and the values of co-operation, equality and economic justice. The last 30 years, in particular, have seen the short-term extraction of profit ride roughshod over the long-term sustainability of environments, cultures and species. Corporations have effectively subverted the political system, and governments are increasingly at the beck and call of an oligarchy that largely determines fiscal policy, investment decisions, wage rates, and, indeed, what counts as possible within the realm of state intervention.⁶

Corporations have achieved their ultimate goal when the state, with its bailouts and quantitative easing⁷ programmes, effectively raises taxes on their behalf. Here is the ever reliable Anne Pettifore who led the Jubilee Debt Campaign to cancel approximately \$100 billion of debt owed by the world’s poorest nations; ‘ironically even as capitalism continues its attack on the state and as prolonged economic weakness and financial failure persists, capitalist finance has become more dependent on state financing. It has succeeded in capturing, effectively looting, and then subordinating States to the interests of – capitalist finance.’ This blurring of the boundaries between the banks and the state is captured incisively by Josef Vogl (2012), who opines:

“The socialization of private debts corresponds with the privatization of national debts. Financial markets became integral to the administration of public debts, *accompanied by an expansion of their logic, their rules, their imperatives and interests.* This implies ... the shifting of the reserves of sovereignty ... the markets themselves have become a sort of creditor-god, whose final authority decides the fate of currencies, social systems, public infrastructures, private savings, etc.”

Or, to phrase it with the immediacy of campaigning journalist Matt Taibbi (2012): in becoming a kind of shadow government and exacting a monopolistic tribute, Wall Street ‘tired of making money by competing for business and weathering the vagaries of the market, wants instead something more like the deal the government has – regularly collecting guaranteed taxes’ which is straightforward extortion of enormous sums from the population, and as directly, the public and the planet. It might seem that terms like ‘vampire’⁸ (Taibbi 2010⁹), ‘predatory’ (Ferguson 2012)¹⁰ ‘vulture’¹¹ and ‘disaster’ capitalism (Naomi Klein 2007)¹² are hyperbolic. We should also be wary that affective pleasures are to be gained from washing one’s hands in capitalism’s blood. However, in the information age, sufficient data is available to substantiate these claims to the extent that far from hyperbolic these terms are empirical. Investment banks operate as a cartel, maleficence and downright criminality is endemic in the financial services industry, (Andrew Conio 2013)¹³ there has been a colossal ‘gush up’ of money from the poor to the rich (Thomas Picketty 2015)¹⁴ (Richard Wilson and Kate Pickett (2009) on a scale not seen since before the first World-War. Trillions of pounds are secreted in tax havens allowing tyrants to rule and public services to be decimated, as Nicholas Shaxson (2011)¹⁵ argues, in one of the most important dissections of the role of Tax Havens, which ‘are the most important single reason why poor people and poor countries stay poor’. The financial services industry has sequestered public money to pay for their greed and reckless behaviour in the form of \$12 trillion in quantitative easing and have commandeered the entire economy to meet their needs. We find speculators acting as wolves hunting in packs while billions live in poverty¹⁶; social and public sectors decimated, whole sectors of society financialized and millions of people forced to use food banks and to work zero hour contracts while millions of homes have been foreclosed¹⁷. Based on information provided by Credit Suisse’s *Global Wealth Data Book 2016*¹⁸, Oxfam (2017)¹⁹ estimates the grotesque spectacle of 8 billionaires owning as much wealth as half the world, and (of 2015), the richest 1% owned more wealth than the rest of the planet. It is almost impossible to express with the appropriate incredulity and dismay the fact that the wealth of the world’s top 100 billionaires (\$1.4 trillion)²⁰ is enough to feed, house and educate all of the world’s poor. What mathematically valid, economically efficient, or ethically defensible logic can justify the existence of 1.3 billion people barely surviving on a dollar a day alongside a shadow banking sector worth \$67 trillion (one million million) which is likened by Baudrillard (2002: 23,24)²¹ to some kind of new ozone layer.

“the hyper-realization of big finance capital [is] orbitalized above our heads on a course quite beyond our grasp, and a course which is . . . also beyond the grasp of reality itself. . . . The billions of dollars of speculative capital have become a satellite-heap, revolving endlessly around the planet.”

The other reason why Occupy could not answer the question ‘what do you want?’ is that Occupy ‘wanted everything’ – its demands were legion. On September 29th 2011, the NYC General Assembly produced the *Declaration of the Occupation of New York City*.²² Its long list of grievances and demands included an end to: foreclosures, bailouts for the banks, exorbitant bonuses, the monopolisation of the farming system, the genocide of animals in the factory farming system, attacks on the Trade Unions, the privatisation of healthcare, the granting of personhood to corporations, the militarisation of the police force, the for-profit Prison Industrial Complex, and ‘straight-up corruption’.

The struggle is thus to be fought on every front: from healthcare and education to the media and the prison system; for the rights of disabled people, minorities and endangered species, and against both a legal system designed to protect the property rights of the few and a moral code that sanctifies a world of perpetual production and consumption and that distracts and alienates in equal measure. Naomi Wolf’s writings often capture many of the Occupiers first-hand experience. Recently she wrote of America’s headfirst dive into becoming a fascist state,²³ a key feature of which is the crushing of legitimate protest and the suppression of democratic freedoms.

Occupy attracted support partly because its lack of a fixed identity meant that its emotional, cognitive and ideational boundaries were porous. This has led to an influx of a diverse range of people over the widest range of issues.

Occupy’s numerous workshops – Tent City University, the Really Free University, the Bank of Ideas²⁴ and the School of Ideas²⁵ – signalled the release of a pent-up desire for the expression of life and self-organising community. At the Occupy information tent – all day, every day – an influx of donations, offers of support, requests to use a space or to set up the next group, indicated that bureaucracy and corporate ownership are seriously impeding the unfulfilled needs of a huge range of self-organised groups.²⁶ Such events are emblematic of what happens when space is liberated and education deterritorialised.

Academics and writers from a vast range of disciplines²⁷ hastened to Occupy because it offered a place where voices were not compromised by the underlying moral ambivalence and institutionalised paranoia of the state Higher Education system. More importantly, it offered a ‘schooling in life’, in how to live and organise collectively, acting as a communications centre and strategic political bridgehead right in the heart of the beast, from which further protests and demonstrations could be mobilised and launched.

Occupy was a coming together of a raggle-taggle group of disparate political activist groups all extremely frustrated by the failure of even the financial crash to dent the self-certainty of the Blair-Bush doctrine. From the established campaign groups such as Friends of the Earth and Oxfam to Hacktivists to envi-

ronmental groups, such as *Plane Stupid*, single-issue groups such as *Bring Back British Rail* and new groupings, such as, the UK version of *Black Lives Matter* there is no let-up in the struggle to engage and create a better world. After the occupations ended, Occupy dispersed back into its constitutive groups and *Momentum* (where we see the joining of the trade-unions and activist groups) has emerged as the driving force behind the struggle to transform the Labour party. Here we see the struggle over representation being repeated; ‘Jeremy What Do You Want?’ insist both friend and foe with the demand for a strong leader of a unified movement. And the answer might be the same: despite the ample evidence to support the preceding claims and the near mathematical certainty (under the current system based upon debt and growth) of planetary crisis, the position of the saviour or the adoption of a non-compromised or non-complicit stance is an illusion that repeats the logic of exclusion and domination.

We should be wary of investing in the notion ‘capitalism’ as a terrifying behemoth, lest we both misunderstand it and create a monster that can only be challenged by matching its scale and its weapons, in turn affording it even greater power. Instead, as much as can be achieved is meaningful discussion across a range of multivalent idioms and social realities many of which are contradictory. Derrida says the ordeal of the undecidable must be gone through to make a decision worthy of its name. In this light, Occupy’s answer to Lacan’s question was: we want the right to ongoing reflection; to experiment, to not be defined by the violence of your summons, to be open, porous, multiple and uncertain in the face of either your or our unitary and totalising certainties.

Notes:

1. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GTT8rpS8jhM>
2. <http://www.vice.com/enca/read/what-s-up-occupy-london-0000081-v18n12>
3. Judith Butler (2006) *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso.
4. See Caroline Elkins (2005) *Britain’s Gulag: the Brutal End of Empire in Kenya*. Random House, London. David E. Stannard (1993) *The America Holocaust*. Open Humanities Press: USA
5. ‘The scarcity paradigm [is] advocated by classical and neoclassical economists in order to motivate economic competition’. Riccardo Baldissone, “Beyond economic fundamentalism”, *real-world economics review*, issue no. 45, 15 March 2008, pp. 33-53, <http://www.paecon.net/PAERreview/issue45/Baldissone45.pdf>
6. Aided by government policies that 1. Reduced taxes on the rich. 2. Allowed industrial consolidation. 3. Protected inefficient firms. 5. Protect monopoly rights (e.g. big Pharma)*. 6. Produces hugely distorting subsidies (auto and agri-businesses) 7. Impeded protests from unions. 8. Kept workers wages low. 9. Permitted massive financial sector frauds. 10. Bailed out the financial sector. 11. Shielded corporate crime from law enforcement action. *for a brilliant analysis of how big Pharma sequestered between \$460 and \$670 billion from the

public purse in 2014 through patent and copyright monopolies See Baker, Dean (2016) *The Upward Redistribution of Income: Are Rents the Story?* Review of Radical Political Economics, Sage vol. 48(4) 529-543

7. Bank of England explains on its website: 'Instead of lowering Bank Rate to increase the amount of money in the economy, the Bank supplies extra money directly. This does not involve printing more banknotes. Instead, the Bank pays for these assets by creating money electronically and crediting the accounts of the companies it bought the assets from. This extra money supports more spending in the economy to bring future inflation back to the target.' <http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetarypolicy/pages/qe/default.aspx>

8. Capital is dead labour that vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks.' (Marx (1887) *Capital* Vol. 1: 160)

9. Taibbi, Mark (2010) *Griftopia: Bubble Machines, Vampire Squids, and the Long Con That Is Breaking America*. Spiegel and Grau. USA.

10. Ferguson, Charles (2012) *Predator Nation: Corporate Criminals, Political Corruption, and the Hijacking of America*. Crown Business: NY.

11. 'Vulture' funds; a more rapacious or parasitic species of hedge funds that buy up debts, including sovereign debts in poor countries, to extract crippling repayments. Couze Venn, (forthcoming) *Protocols for a Post Capitalist World*

12. Klien, Naomi (2007) *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*

13. Guilt free Economics, STIR. <http://stirtoaction.com/guilt-free-economics/>

14. Picketty, (2014) *Capital in the 21st Century*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.

15. Nicholas Shaxson. (2011) *Treasure Islands: Tax Havens and the Men Who Stole the World*. London: Bodley Head. (2011)

16. For example: 'In the last six months of 2010 alone, more than 44 million people were driven into extreme poverty as a result of rising food prices. At the same time, banks and financial investors are making a killing. We estimate that Barclays makes up to £340 million a year from betting, or speculating, on food prices. In the last five years, the amount of financial speculation on food has nearly doubled, from \$65 billion to \$126 billion. <http://www.globaljustice.org.uk/food-speculation>. Since 1996, the share of the markets for basic foods like wheat held by speculators has increased from 12 per cent to 61 per cent.

17. More than 250,000 are homeless in England - Shelter

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-38157410>

18. Credit Suisse (2016) 'Global Wealth Databook 2016'.

<http://publications.credit-suisse.com/tasks/render/file/index.cfm?fileid=AD6F2B43-B17B-345E-E20A1A254A3E24A5>

19. Hardoon, Deborah (2017) *An Economy of the 99%* Oxfam briefing paper. London: Oxfam

20. Bloomberg Billionaires rich list. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-11-01/the-world-s-200-richest-people.html>

21. Baudrillard, Jean. 2002. "In Praise of a Virtual Crash." In *Screened Out*, 21–25. Trans. Chris Turner. London: Verso. (Orig. pub. 1988.)

22. <http://www.nycga.net/resources/documents/declaration/>

23. Naomi Wolf's (2007) definition of a proto-fascist state: creation of an internal and external threat, secret prisons, paramilitary police force, ubiquitous surveillance, infiltration

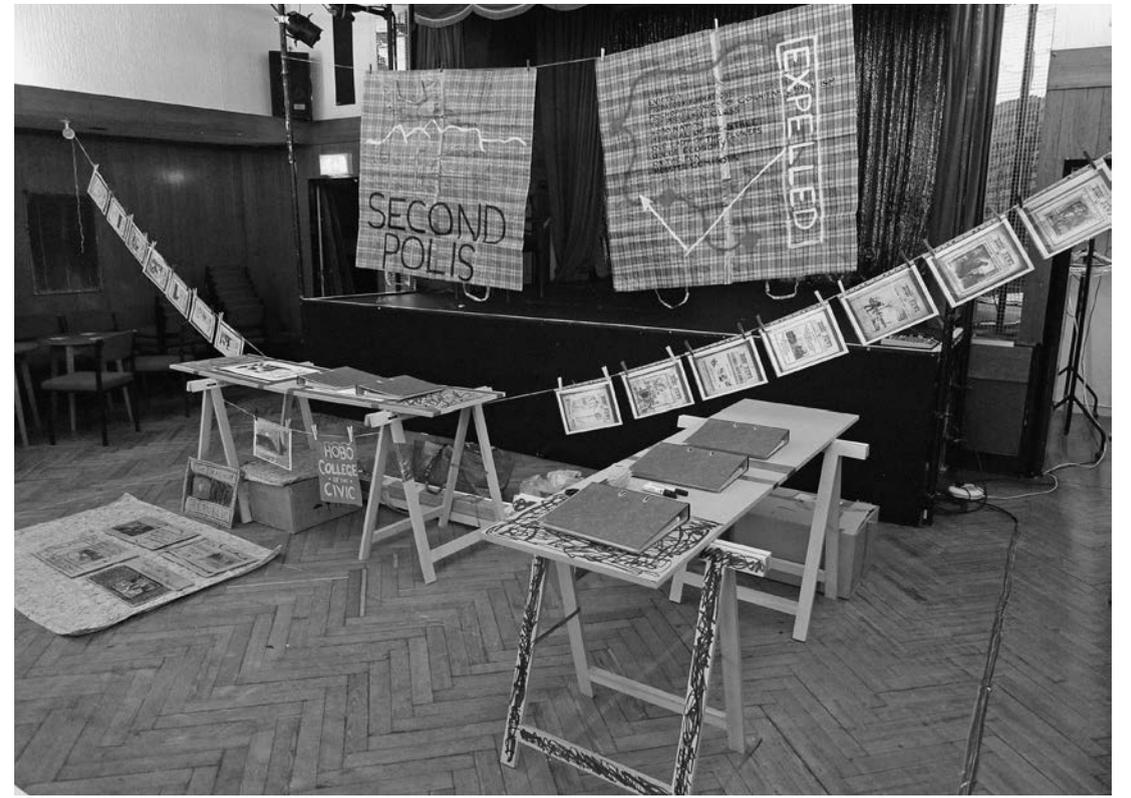
of citizens groups, arbitrary detention, targeting of key individuals, press restrictions, define criticisms as espionage, treat dissent as treason, subvert the rule of law.

24. In Dec 2012, OccupyLSX took over an enormous multi-story block previously owned by USB.

25. A beautiful disused primary school north of the second London encampment in Finsbury Square.

26. Such as, The Peoples Tribunal – (they stage quasi-judicial procedures for testing the rights and treatment of isolated workers immigrants, internships, servants). Stay for the day. Rise Up. The National Trust (armed wing). Battle for Britain (The armed wing of the trade union congress) Arts against the Cuts. University of strategic optimism. London student assembly. SOLFED (anarcho-syndicalist). UK UNCUT. Resist 26 (organising hub for dem- os). Six billion ways. National campaign against fees and cuts. The Really Free University.

27. To name just a few, Slavoj Žižek, Doreen Massy, Nina Power, Nickolas Shaxson, David Harvey, Jesse Jackson, George Monbiot, performances by Massive Attack and Radiohead and in America speeches by Angela Davis, Judith Butler.





London, August 21, 2016

Dear Brandon,

When you asked me to participate in your Living School Project, I felt immediately that I would like to do so. I enjoy and admire your work hugely, your way of thinking and your way of asking questions by proposing another kind of looking, responding, experiencing.

You asked me to participate in your event regarding Poverty. There are so many different kinds of poverty. Is it absolute, or is it relative? And even then, what is absolute, and what is relative? Where is the viewpoint from which we look on such a subject? When politicians speak about poverty, or the aspiration towards the erasure thereof, what is it that they mean, and how do they imagine this might be achieved? It is perhaps interesting to note at this point that, unlike many words, the etymology of the word is unchanged from its Latin origins. In this sense, 'poverty' has always meant poverty. The poor have always been with us...

I grew up in poverty, statistically at least, and for most of my adult life I have earned only as much as has put me below the official poverty line. Poverty is instrumentalised by politicians, just as progress is, or democracy, or freedom. These are words that have lost a significant part of their meaning, for general, conversational purposes at least. However, they – or their lack – are of course far from meaningless to those experiencing directly what these words or their absence may mean.

When politicians speak of erasing poverty, they often impose structural violence, as a means towards this eradication. To me, as a child, what was far more important was the hope that I would not have to endure actual, physical violence, enacted on my body: violence at home.

And then, the many other local, everyday forms of violence more often

delivered in words, looks and prohibitions (the parents of other children, who warned their offspring not to play with me, as I came from the 'estate').

You asked if I could show my film *Estate, a Reverie*. *Estate* is a spirited celebration of extraordinary everyday humanity. Filmed over seven years, the film reveals and celebrates the resilience of people who are profoundly overlooked by media representations and wider social responses. Interweaving intimate portraits with historical re-enactments, landscape and architectural studies and dramatized scenes, *Estate, a Reverie* asks how we might resist being framed exclusively through class, gender, ability or disability, and even through geography... who is allowed to dream?

In London, in the interwar period, 'neo-Georgian flatted dwellings' were erected to last as long as their historically named counterparts. Now many of these newer buildings have been demolished, including my own former estate of Haggerston, to make way for residencies 'fit' for the 21st Century. We are caught in these modes of thought, not our own, rarely of our choosing.

With our known and loved sites demolished, we now live in a modern, luxury apartment complex; like our own historical buildings replacing the slums in the first half of the last century, where those 'deserving poor' could be housed in buildings new and bright, so the same now.

But where do those go who no longer fit, who are not able to perform the required role of a resident who might inhabit such a place? Such as those who fall behind in their rent, who have a life that cannot be determined by the steadfast ability to work and bring in the necessary income; such as those who may do things that are invaluable but unseen, and if they are seen, are related to others by those in authority as worthwhile (but tiny) acts of kindness. In many of my fellow residents I witness regular and startling acts of humanity, and it is precisely these such gestures and offers to others that have made me feel at home in such a place.



When you asked me to show a film, I could not yet show *Estate, a Reverie*. So instead I chose *Dark Days*, made by Marc Singer. I love this film, except for the ending. And this is curious, because it is precisely that ending that opens up an uncomfortable space for discussion. *Dark Days* is about home-making in the most unlikely of places, the so called 'Freedom Tunnel' in the underground system of New York. Singer spent two years making the film, with people who became friends. They helped make tracks for the camera, portable lights, and opened the doors to their self-made houses, constructed from material gleaned in the streets above. Puppies, sofas, showers. The story (and the film) ends with their eviction and their being given homes above ground. Flats that are bright and airy. No animals allowed.

This is why *Dark Days* feels profoundly connected to both my film *Estate* and to my own experience in London. In both these cases, the architectural and social space I found (as viewer and resident), porous and fluid, allowed for a genuinely shared and constructive form of community to develop. This is not to deny the challenges of such a space, of course, but the visibility of these challenges meant that they could be addressed directly and with humanity, as opposed to being bureaucratized away, far from direct human interaction.

Both these populations described now live in 'better' accommodation, 'secure-by-design'. But poverty is not just about new walls, air tight doors, fluent piping, access to the city '10 minutes from this address'. It is not about manicured courtyards and weeks spent without speaking to another person, and eviction letters delivered after a fortnight in arrears...

With my warmest wishes,

Andrea Luka Zimmerman



Andrea Luka Zimmerman, *Estate, A Reverie* (2015)
Photo: Briony Campbell

Limehouse Town Hall and the Living School

Elyssa Livergant

Following his talk/demonstration on squatting, Chris Jones from 56a Infoshop leads us over to the piles of material collected around the front of the bar. Wood. Netting. Tarp. Old bicycle rims. Rope. Tools are laid out on a table. Drills. Saws. Nails. Screws. We can use what we want and do what we want. How do we begin? What are we beginning? How do we organize ourselves? There is a brief collective pause and then the building begins. Banging. Drilling. A frenzy of activity. People work alone or in pairs to put up their structures. As the building session winds down a couple of people walk a makeshift flagpole up from the ground. A City Dockland property sign rises upward, higher and higher, into the space just below the peeling blue ceiling.

The grand hall quiets. Light shines dimly through the grand windows. The City Dockland real estate sign looms above us, sitting atop three wooden beams hastily drilled together and stabilized by two other beams that lay across the wooden floor. The hand written words on the property sign are obscured by red mesh. The 'TO' appears faintly crossed out with a black marker or paint. An apostrophe and an S added to the word 'LET'. And the word LEARN is scribbled in at the end.

TO LET
TO LET
TO LET'S
TO LET'S LEARN

I – Introduction

Reflecting on the Living School's participatory session comes out of both my theoretical interest in how being together is imagined, valued and realised and my practical work as an artist, community organizer, researcher and teacher. As the flagpole rose in what were to be the final moments of the Living School's building workshop at Limehouse Town Hall I expressed uneasiness to those around me. While I appreciated the symbolic gesture it seemed, for me at least, woefully at odds with the broader material realities the session raised. And, on an individual level, the impact of seeing a real estate sign rise up into the heavens of the grand hall may have resonated differently for me than for many of the other cultural and arts workers in the session visiting the space for the first time. I am one of many who work, volunteer and participate in activities at Limehouse Town Hall. My contribution to this pamphlet reflects my own views and experiences.

Right now, for those of us who think about art and politics, questions of co-creation and co-production and how they might function to support forms of organizing and living that differ than those promoted through state violence, global



The Living School, Limehouse Town Hall, May 2016.

capitalism and fear of otherness are key concerns. In accounts of activist-arts and social arts the privileging of the symbolic and its communicative potential is common. Scholarly discussion, artistic funding and practices focused on the formation of networks of anti-authoritarian participation and production have tended to prioritize the event, how it feels and what it can communicate over the conventions, modes of support and mechanisms that reproduce its appearance. In this short contribution I want to trouble this tendency to over-identify with the potential of the temporary and the symbolic. I want to push critical consideration on how social art practice might be deployed to support strategic planning and long-term structural change, and consider the challenges that come with that aim.

II - The Town Hall

Limehouse Town Hall is a former nineteenth century civic building in East London. Although used only briefly as a town hall (the parish boundaries changed before it was completed) it has served as a civic centre and the nation's one time Labour History Museum (before the collection moved to Manchester to become the People's History Museum). In 2004 the arts charity Limehouse Town Hall Consortium Trust began managing the grade II listed building as a work and gathering space for artists, cultural workers, community arts organisations, activists, Bengali women and young people, amongst others. The low cost geography of the area supported the varied groups aims and aesthetics, which for the most part eschewed capitalist economies and development. Improvements to the structure of the building repaired the leaking roof and mold ridden rooms and the Trust continues to maintain the building for use. The former Victorian Town Hall offers reasonable rent and its mild dilapidation a productive aesthetic mix of grandeur and marginality.

The Trust formed through varied community and diy arts and culture organisations already in the building banding together to take over the lease from the local council. Adopting what is now a relatively widespread organizational form for the arts, the not-for-profit company turned charity, the Trust is governed by a range of mechanisms, conventions, rules and scripts that shape the way the organisation functions. The institutional form of the charity and the grassroots collective management of the space by its users and the varied communities they serve has been fruitful. However, the ongoing affective and reproductive labour - the emailing, the shared lunches, the toilet paper buying, the listening, the hours filling out council rate relief forms - that maintains the building and keeps its activities and relations alive on a daily basis, requires an immense amount of time, energy, and organisation. For example, 55 emails and three pre-production meetings with Brandon and South London Gallery went into making the Living School appear at Limehouse. The money to use the space for the session went into the building's rent and the



1. Exterior of Limehouse Town Hall. 2. Monthly Bike Workshop @ Limehouse Town Hall. Courtesy of the Tower Hamlets Wheelers. 3. Performance Workshop. Photo by Christa Holka.



Dorkbot @ Limehouse Town Hall.

majority of time spent preparing for the session's arrival was unpaid. The ability to give this time and energy is still just possible for me, a relatively privileged pseudo professional white woman, but is increasingly challenging as the ability to sustain a life in London becomes increasingly difficult for more and more people.¹

Over the years the Trust has developed to support the exploration of ideas, processes and actions that challenge dominant socio-economic and political practices; a place that values the cultural knowledge and aesthetics of the periphery. As a deepening understanding of the need to focus as much on the infrastructure that supports its practices as the practices themselves, over the last two years the varied communities that use the space have begun in earnest to develop cross conversations and collaborative activities that extend beyond the building. The building itself is a relatively modest, as former Victorian civic buildings go, and modest in scale as a current cultural producer. However, its impact on the appearance of an alternative performance of the civic in London has and continues to be significant. In September and October of 2016 alone the Town Hall's creative residents, including its largest entities the Boxing Club and the community arts charity Stitches in Time had: co-hosted fundraisers for other London based arts and culture organisations and spaces associated with left of left cultural production including anti-work, labour and anti-fascist organizing; co-organised the first ever exploratory project on Basic Income in the UK; launched a peer to peer arts and sewing network led by unemployed and underemployed Bengali women from the surrounding area; and continued to host the Tower Hamlet Wheeler's monthly DIY bike workshop. Concurrently the fascinating social history of the building - its relationship to not only state administration but also pleasure, activism, labour relations, and anti-racism

has come further to the fore. As a multi-purpose space the building's programming has been driven by the activists, artists and cultural producers in the building. It is a slow, and at times fraught, process; an unfolding of conversations and events comprised of more and more people. It is a complex process, one that values inefficiency and celebrates conviviality while attempting to attend to the uneasy economic realities of making something together. And as broader understandings of the desire for structural change embodied in and by the Town Hall come forward I have been drawn to wonder: What effect can an anti-institutional institution have in a city like London today?

III- City and Docklands

Limehouse Town Hall sits on the edge of a local catchment area with one of the highest indexes of multiple deprivation in a local authority with the highest rate of child poverty in London (and the second highest in the UK). According to local government reports, Tower Hamlets also has one of the most diverse populations in the UK, including the largest Bangladeshi community. The building sits a short walk west of Canary Wharf, where average salaries are the second highest in the UK after the City.² Canary Wharf, bought in 2015 by a Qatar and Canadian partnership, is one of Qatar's most significant recent real-estate investments in the city, and its new proposed eastwardly expansion one of the largest privately owned mixed use development sites in London.³ Just days before departing from office and leading Brexit's leave campaign the former Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, approved a plan for private developers to build high rise towers on the Isle of Dogs. The Isle of Dogs sits just to the south of Canary Wharf and is now forecasted to become the most densely populated area in Western Europe. As I write this there are several property developments in the immediate vicinity of the Town Hall (near completion or in the planning proposal stage). Local traders on the road leading from the canal to the Town Hall have recently been notified of 100% increases in their rent in the coming year. Across from Limehouse Town Hall is Locksley Estate, a housing estate on council owned land identified as an 'in-fill' site; a site that has been earmarked for further residential property development.

In a 2016 marketing brochure for City & Docklands Property Group, the area around the Town Hall has been rebranded 'Canary Gateway', a 'new quarter' in Limehouse. The promotional material explains:

Canary Wharf is not only an international landmark for urban regeneration, but is home to many of the world's most prominent business organisations, institutions and professional services. [...] Today, Canary Wharf is so much more than a business destination - it is a corporate lifestyle in itself - and one that will continue to support the ever growing demand for high quality living space within its immediate surrounds.⁴

Many are familiar with how this story of gentrification goes. I've seen it happening throughout urban areas in London at rapid speed. Places identified by government as 'opportunity areas' for development are mobilized through the repetition of terms like underutilized space, dereliction and vulnerable and the displacement of existing, often marginalized, populations replaced by professionals and creatives moving into a 'new' part of the city. All of this is supported through policy and legislation and lack of affordable housing. As the City & Docklands brochure declares, the financial centre is committed to making space for a corporate lifestyle that must meet its demands for space.

Might the Town Hall leverage claims to social art's civic promise in order to critically engage itself and others in the current shifts at play in its locality? In what ways can its imagined anti-institutionalism work in concert with the conventions that it rests on to organize and support structural change?

IV - Participation

To even begin to approach these questions requires a taking up of the issue of participation. Since the early 2000s there has been a steady increase in talk and championing of participatory theatre, performance and visual art practices civiness in the global north. In December 2016 the Royal Society of Arts in London hosted the launch of an inquiry into the civic role of arts organisations initiated by the UK Branch of the philanthropic Galouste Gulbenkian Foundation. Andrew Barnett, the Foundation's UK Director, explained that the term civic might be most usefully employed to describe the emotional fabric of a town, the thing that binds us to one another.⁵ Funders, lobbyists and arts organisations are not the only ones mobilizing the term civic to stand in for affective and hyper-local cohesion that participatory art seems to promote. Theatre scholar Jill Dolan's work on utopia emphasizes the 'modes of embodied civic engagement' demonstrated by theatre and performance that should be capitalized on.⁶ And American artist activist LM Bogard calls upon Boal and Debord to help promote a model a playful and participatory civics that can be realized through tactical performance.⁷ Given the varying uses, rationales and cadences for deploying the civic it seems almost impossible to pin down what the political and moral discourse of the civic actually is in relation to socially-engaged contemporary art practice. In truth, I'm less interested in finding out what the civic truly is but rather how mobilizing civic feeling tends to obscure broader socio-economic forces.

To do so, let's take a short detour to sociologist Sharon Zukin's critique of Jane Jacobs and her influential 1961 book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Zukin argues that Jacobs' critique of monolithic urban planning of the 1950s misfires through focusing its attack on planners rather than the actual drivers of urban change, the developers and financiers. In doing so, Jacobs mobilized



The Living School, Lincolnhouse Town Hall, May 2016.



a community-based approach to city building through an idealized version of the hyper-local authored by middle class tastes that neglected key concerns of economy and infrastructure over the power of affect. This lapse converged with the racial bias and systemic disinvestment at the base of urban development. Jacobs' championing of the feeling of authenticity and vibrancy associated with 'the local' did not include practices of zoning, rent control and economic commitments to deprived suburban areas. Subsequently, Zukin argues, Jacobs' legacy finds itself more at home in the contemporary place-making activities driving gentrification.⁸ Approaches which appear to have absorbed and sterilized the communitarian activism Jacobs espoused. Jacobs' blind spots echo the challenges for social arts practices and those who reflect on them in the tendency to prioritize the symbolic or communicative over the conventions, structures, modes of production and mechanisms that (re)produce its appearance.⁹

It is worth noting that the visibility of the participatory in arts practice and urban gentrification emerge together in the 1970s. Practice of and writing on participatory, social, relational and place-based work continues to grow as the effects of deindustrialization have become a central issue for liberal states; as aggressive disinvestment in social welfare, wage stagnation and an increase in the cost of living has intensified the challenge of reproducing livelihoods of individuals, families and communities; as global flows into urban centres have continued to diversify and increase their populations; and as the legacy of western imperialism plays out through increasing racial, class, religious and environmental tensions and violence.

The temporary gatherings of theatre and performance experimental workshops of the 1960s and 70s are a useful object for considering the character of alternative civic participation engendered by social arts practice. These workshops sought to create anti-institutional and risky assemblies that liberated individuals from the market and the state, if not from the type individualization linked to both. A shift toward a paradigm of performance in the 1960s and 70s emphasized the liminal, co-presence and 'the real'. It sought to create anti-authoritarian assemblies while still holding fast to an ideal of a shared space of participation and creativity that was so basic to liberal order that it seemed to go without remark. Workshops, sites historically associated with work and labour, were divorced from their socio-economic character and reimagined as sites of unalienated labour and community. With its emphasis on psychic liberation and communal feeling workshop practices of the 1960s and 70s sought to break from the rigidity and repression of administrative production toward a more flexible, free and self-managed subject position. Isabell Lorey and others have written on this position of anti-institutionalism, highlighting the ways it is not just critically resistant to the historical conditions of the time but also conditioned by them.¹⁰ The performance of anti-institutional assemblies, like 1960s workshops, can also be seen to operate as a training ground for the skills increasingly

demanding by the capitalist labour market. And 1960s workshops' performance of reproducing sustainable social relations under capitalism might serve to preclude the contradictions of capitalism from being made visible.

V – Living School

In reflecting on the uneasiness that characterized much of my time in the participatory building session, I have been fortunate enough to continue taking up the Living School's offer to 'wonder aloud as to the future of public living'. Prior the building session I've been writing about here, Chris Jones had staged an opportunity for Living School participants to negotiate how we might live together in a newly occupied space. He had set out the outline of a building on the floor using pieces of wood. They mapped the floor plan of a building he had once squatted. As we stood outside the building's outline, Chris guided us through how we might go about entering the unoccupied building. Once we had tentatively made our way in a kind of paralysis took hold around how we might move forward together. This immobility was markedly different from the playful industriousness that followed in the building period. Throughout the building exercise our activities skirted along the boundaries of the symbolic and the actual. We built things with our bodies in time and space. But what we built was primarily symbolic. In performing the construction of a temporary community, we moved far from the actual material practices highlighted throughout the rest of the session: the difficult co-operative work and strategies of squatting discussed by Chris; the Berlin garden based project Prinzessinnengarten & Neighbourhood Academy mentioned by Brandon as a frame for the session; and Rural Urban Synthesis Society's presentation on their housing project in the borough of Lewisham. We also relied heavily on the imagined progressive politics of participation and moved away from considering the actual social relations that underpinned this appearance of the Living School at Limehouse Town Hall, including South London Gallery as a player and who might be privileged in this kind of wondering aloud about the future of public living.

The temporary and the participatory as aesthetic categories have their limits; like the civic they can serve to amplify culture's social character while simultaneously divesting it of its economic and conventional constitution. Eschewing the material realities of bodies and embodiment while promoting an individual's feeling of agency in being together requires putting to the side the mundane, the conventions, the institutional and the economic conditions that support its appearance. It is this turning away from the administrative, economic and organisational and over-identification in an imagined authentic and experimental togetherness, that has characterised so much anti-institutional cultural practice since the 1960s. Practices that throw into relief the ways capitalism is particularly adept at creative repurposing.



The Living School, Limehouse Town Hall, May 2016.

In his writing on theatre, innovation and Brecht scholar Michael Shane Boyle points to the biggest challenges for those who are interested in the future of public living. Boyle explains that for Brecht there were two types of innovation. The first experimented with form or content, renovating a thing so it could survive and/or thrive in its historical moment. The second sought to transform the social function of a thing (in Brecht's case theatre) so it might move society beyond capitalism. It was the latter approach Boyle explains that was, for Brecht, the true innovation. This true innovation embraced the necessity of the total transformation of the thing itself to enable it to work against the social reproduction of capitalism.¹¹ How such a transformation might work and what it might bring is far from certain.

And so, I return to the refurbished property sign looming high above our construction of a temporary community. It is, I propose, an urgent signal to refocus attention to the conditions of production for those, including Limehouse Town Hall, claiming a progressive politics. Perhaps it is in the uneasiness I felt during the Living School building session that I can find the most productive way forward. Bringing occasions of affective co-relation into direct dialogue with the socio-economic and psychic conditions that determine the possibilities of its appearance is difficult but necessary. Doing so means living with the ambiguities and discomfort that such an approach brings to the fore. And doing something about it means finding ways to continue without collapsing into immobility or charging ahead through

a facile productivity. This is by no means an easy feat. However, should Limehouse Town Hall want to intervene imaginatively in contemporary urban transformation to change the conditions of its possibility then a great deal more time, energy and attention is needed to address the co-determining relationship between culture, the valorisation of civic feeling and the current economic and political system.

Notes:

1. I am currently a part time casualised lecturer at a university in London and generate other income from art work.
2. Office of National Statistics (ONS), 2015.
3. Neil Callan, 'Qatar, Brookfield Take Full Control of Canary Wharf Group', *Bloomberg*, April 20, 2015, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-04-20/qatar-brookfield-take-full-control-of-canary-wharf-group> [accessed 01 October 2016].
4. Canary Gateway, 'A Brand New Quarter', City & Docklands Property Group, p. 10.
5. Andrew Barnett, 'Introduction to the Inquiry', *Place, Politics, Power: What is the Civic Role of Arts Organisations?*, Royal Society of Arts, 08th December 2016.
6. Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), p. 13.
7. L.M. Bogad, *Tactical Performance: The Theory and Practice of Serious Play* (Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 64.
8. Sharon Zukin, 'Jane Jacobs (1916-2006): Why Neo-Cons loved communitarian urbanist Jane Jacobs', *Architectural Review*, October 26, 2011, <https://www.architectural-review.com/archive/reputations/-jane-jacobs-1916-2006/8621634.article> [accessed 01 October 2016].
9. Howard Becker is a key reference point for examining the complex networks of co-operative activity involved in producing an 'Art World'. Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).
10. Isabell Lorey, 'Virtuosos of Freedom: On the Implosion of Political Virtuosity and Productive Labour', trans. by Mary O'Neill in *Critique of Creativity* (London: MayFlyBooks, 2011).
11. Boyle's argument is much more nuanced than it appears here. In his article, Boyle explores the relationship between postdramatic theatre and Brechtian innovation. The questions he raises about experimental forms like the postdramatic might be usefully applied to visual arts embrace of the participatory and theatre's move towards socially engaged practice. This would be a welcome area for further research. See Michael Shane Boyle, 'Brecht's Gale', *Performance Research*, 21.3 (2016), 16-26.

Self-Build Session

At The Limehouse Town Hall on Saturday, May 7th 2016

Chris Jones

In the session on self-build as part of the Living School you took us through a set of questions in relation to the act of squatting. This included an understanding of squatting being related to both austerity as well as emancipation. Can you say something about this relation – how is squatting speaking towards austerity and emancipation?

I will try to answer your questions with references to the day's collective work during the Self-Build session.

Throughout the day, we tried to move ourselves through some histories of what we can consider dynamic material moments of self-building such as informal camps and housing, squatting and occupations but also what could we mean mostly straightforwardly for ourselves as building something from what we have right now – emotionally, experientially and dream-wise.

Private property relations are centered on an act of exclusive possession backed up by the authority of law. My house is my house regardless of whether I use it as a home or whether you have a home or shelter or not. If you occupy my house I can use law to reclaim possession of my house. The act of squatting throws this legal assumption into the air and claims a right of use of the nonsense of a 'private' property. In the UK there is no protected 'social function' of a building or land as has been, for example, a long and much defined constitutional protection in Brazil. In the U.K, you can own 500 homes and keep them empty if you like based solely on your right of ownership and use. There is no question of how this is basically anti-social.

Worldwide capitalist accumulation seeks to dispossess many from the basic means to live – land, food, shelter, water, medicine, education, etc. – to enable endless cycles of profit to take place. For example, throwing peasants off common land and giving it to landed farming interests. Such eviction forces peasants to seek survival in the cities as workers and as renters (or squatters!). Another example – the demolition of public housing forces those who have been able to live cheaply in the city to be displaced from their neighborhood to the cheaper rents of the periphery and to commute into the centre to work. Increasingly housing is financialised as capital circulates round the world looking for the next opportunity to accumulate. In this way housing becomes less about homes and social function but acts more as a speculative venture. In London, thousands of homes are built, bought by investors

(individuals and finance vehicles) and remain empty as their value increases month by month.

Can we then fight back against the imposition of austerity upon ourselves, the poor, and the accompanying privatisation of common resources? Can we repossess socially what we need to live? In times of austerity when wages are low, public resources and services are cut back and housing is unaffordable, the act of squatting tries to detach living from the regimes of wages and rent. Squatting acts against the increasing dispossession of the many for increasing gains of the few. This means to re-impose a use-value on direct living through occupation of homes and land for collective reproduction but also with joy.

It was interesting in the session where we went through the motions of what does it mean practically to occupy an empty building. After entering the premises and checking what repairs and defences we needed, one participant stepped out of the makeshift floor plan as she felt she didn't belong inside there. It was a gentle moment to open up this moment of who has a right to be inside someone else's property and how such rights (essentially fictions) are codified and embodied by us in different ways.

On emancipation, in another part of the session, we looked at the interesting question of private ownership in the UK as expressed in the 20th Century Plotlands movement of informal house building on rural and coastal lands. In that time working class city dwellers uprooted themselves from the misery of city life as proletarians and bought cheap rural plots of lands and built unregulated informal homes. Often such plots together began to form small towns. In anarchist Colin Ward and Dennis Hardy's book 'Arcadia for All: The Legacy of a Makeshift Landscape', there is a great summary of the tense Plotlands question of private ownership and emancipation. Were such informal homes the making of conventional, liberal and individualist home ownership aspirations or could it be said to be class conscious and springing from a deep rooted English peasant ideal of utopian small holdings updated to 20th Century rural England? Against the 'Liberty' of home ownership and the upholding of 'Property As Theft', Plotland communities can be read as a revolt against the inequality that is materially organised in the urban realm of house and factory, labour and rent and where individuality is achieved not in competition but as wholeness. This latter has been called 'Property As Freedom' especially when constructed with a Utopian wish to extend its social function, not specifically as a communal dwelling, but as a part of a communal town building and maybe collective food growing.



You also introduced us to your own activities in squatting, and in particular, to a squat you were involved in back in 2007. What kinds of experiences did this give you – what did you learn from squatting? And do you still carry these lessons into your current work and ways of being?

‘Essential Squat tools (crowbar & water key) that we can handle, use, play, dance, ritual, make a game of. Playing with the materials, with our stories, annotations, outlining in materials how to open up a new squat, what are we faced with – a ramble through practical tasks and historical moments, mess, adversity, repression, fun with learning and expanding...’

From planning notes for the Self-Build Session

The experience of the Black Frog squat in Camberwell, South London in 2007 was a very special and intense one for all involved, from breaking in and fixing up to inevitable eventual eviction. It was this tale that our game and role-play of how to squat used to explore ‘cracking a place’ and dealing with everything we needed to learn along the way – how to open a place (we used a 3 stage ladder to access an open window on the 3rd floor); how to deal with the landlord when he came round (he called the police who asked him to leave as he was violating our squatter rights from Section 6 of 1977 Criminal Law Act); how to fix up a mouldy building with leaking pipes (we called a general meeting the day of the occupation and 30 people came by to help rebuild the place); how to run a collective building with

events almost everyday (we formed a building group that met every Monday night to organize things and deal with tensions); how to deal with tensions (we learnt we had to listen to all no matter how long this took and that the closeness and attention of listening brought respects and resolutions); how to open up the building to others (leaflet the local area inviting people to open days, free food, film nights, book sales, free haircuts, disco parties, etc.). It’s true that the Black Frog collective was mostly made up of long-term squatters who had previously been involved in other social centre squats and this did make things easier in that many negative experiences in squatting (police, eviction, entropy, internal disputes, etc.) had long been familiar and expected. However squatting is a school whether it’s your first or fiftieth time – it’s all about learning. Fast learning and slow learning but a collective education in possibilities.

Collectivity is tough but beautiful and it’s also something that increasingly is being promoted by a neoliberal appropriation. Capitalism seeks to use the power of collective action to perversely individualise moments where people come together. It creates an image of team players, non-hierarchical leaders and ‘participants’ who come together to build solutions or have ‘empowering’ adventures none of which question the difference between bottom up grassroots power and top down repressive power that masks eternal profit-making. Such a professionalization of collectivity is threatening also when it seeks to take from collective action only partial ideas and beliefs of what makes people come together. It is also not through a type of liberal-minded active or social citizenship that rebels and radicals come together. It is to break and rupture the circulation of capital by blocking its flows but also to break social isolation by experimenting with practical collective adventures that can create radical communities that sustain, extend and can defend themselves.

In a skewed but good sense, for me there is no ‘current work’ fed by these histories and experiences only a desire to take care that the representation of these pasts and practices must remain a collective project and mechanism, and heart that beats loudly.

Squatting brings us up against the politics of urban space, real estate, and public and private architectures. How might we engage this politics today – are there tools and tactics found in self-building that can support political forms of resistance or transformation within today’s neoliberal city?

It’s interesting that in the U.K the trajectories, continuities and support structures of squatting are now mostly maintained by the anarchist movement since the Left parties in the late 70s abandoned occupation and the creation of communal resources by the community. Anarchist practice emphasizes the need to attack power here

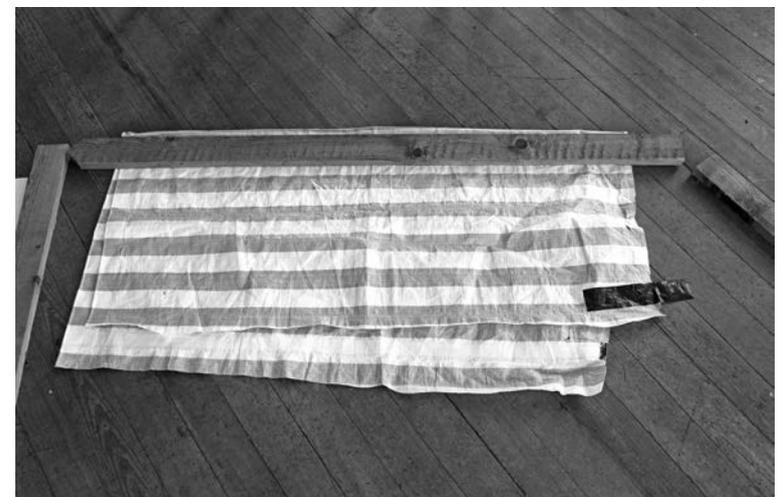
and now and not wait until a mythical time after the revolution where hierarchical social relations may mysteriously wither away. Squatting as an emancipatory act as well as being a means of survival needs to be reflected through the wider question of class dispossession and the necessary critical take that brings when the question of who squats and why is looked into. Squatting as an experimental playground for all is great and should be encouraged but there is a question that is often obscured in the squatting scenes own representation – the question of what does it mean if when you get bored of squatting and communal life and you can simply walk away and rent or buy a house and re-occupy your own middle class privilege?

The most invisible histories of squatting in the UK are the stories of the most precarious and poor squatters. They are also often the story of the most intersectional struggles (women occupying homes as refuges from domestic violence or poor Bengali communities taking over empty housing estates, for example). Recent years have seen a great return by squatters to housing struggles centered in class dispossession where squatting has been a tactic to aid and abet tenants resistance on council estates threatened with demolition as well as occupation being the thing in itself of actual self-help housing. That squatting can also be a way of life does not need to obscure the actual mutual aid it can enact beyond its own community. The UK has many examples of squats providing wider support in differing communities (strike support centres, food co-ops, free schools, refugee sanctuaries, convergence centres for mass protests, woman's centres, places of skill sharing and radical cultural production, places to socialize and party, community bookshops, libraries and archives, etc.).

These ideas and actions of solidarity and direct action are still constantly feeding radical notions of the right to the city and the need to expropriate for common use all that we need. We can investigate and enact 'self-building' as pedagogy, as an imaginary for the future now, as an actual building of real things here and now with what we have at hand:

'We might have exhausted ourselves, some of us working 9-5, some of us working precariously but we always found more energy to keep building. What we discovered (once again), is that far from there being a scarcity of energy, knowledge, ideas, there is always a beautiful surplus available when we make our own decisions. We didn't need a shop-bought plan or a foreman. There was no book to tell us what to do. There was only our imagination and the fantastic possibilities that dreamers tend to come up with.'

From 'Yes, we are dreamers... An Invitation to Black Frog' (April 2007):
<https://socialcentrestories.wordpress.com/2008/04/29/yes-we-are-dreamers%E2%80%A6an-invitation/>



RUSS / Rural Urban Synthesis Society

Creating a sustainable neighbourhood

The Rural Urban Synthesis Society (RUSS) is a volunteer-led Community Land Trust in south east London, founded in 2009 to create a sustainable neighbourhood with genuinely affordable homes. It currently has over 250 members and has been named preferred bidder for a council-owned site in Lewisham which means it can now develop its proposals in detail.

Mix of dwellings

The preliminary design is for 33 flats and houses in three and four storey terraces facing south onto shared open space. The proposed mix of dwellings is:

- 4 x one-bedroom flats - offered for social rent to people currently under-occupying larger council accommodation
- 1 x large four-bedroom house - offered for social rent to families living in overcrowded social rented accommodation
- 2 x three-bedroom shared flats - let at affordable rents for young people unable to afford market rents
- 8 x one & 6 x two-bedroom flats - offered for shared equity (at an 80% discount on open market rates) for people wishing to downsize or to own their first home.
- 5 x three-bedroom; 2 x four- bedroom homes; 1 x 1-bedroom and 4 x 2-bedroom flats - offered for shared ownership for households who cannot buy on the open market.
- Shared facilities - including community room/dining room with kitchen, office, workshop and guest accommodation

The dwellings are to London Plan minimum floor areas plus 10% and to Passivhaus energy standards. All dwellings have a private patio or balcony. It is estimated that overall 20% of the work will be self-built and that the project will be more affordable because of this. Self-build opportunities range from doing most of the construction oneself or installing partitions, stairs, kitchens, bathrooms and services within an airtight, weathertight shell built by a contractor - or even simply installing finishes and carrying out the decorating. The structural work will be carried out by self-builders working in teams from a site workshop whilst the finishing will be carried out by individual self-builders.

The RUSS vision for a sustainable neighbourhood

RUSS aims to establish a model development process for creating groups of charming, low-energy homes in sustainable neighbourhoods managed by residents, which will remain genuinely affordable for future generations and which can be replicated in Lewisham, London and across the UK.

Towards this aim, RUSS has developed 10 guiding principles through workshops with its members and the wider community. These principles govern the activities of the organisation and inform the development of its first project at Church Grove in Lewisham.

1. RUSS will create socially, environmentally and economically sustainable neighbourhoods in the city.
2. Our neighbourhoods should balance the interests of residents, the wider community and the Council as landowner.
3. RUSS should build truly affordable homes.
4. Decisions that affect our neighbourhoods should be under the control of residents.
5. Our developments should be embedded in the local community and include space for community use.
6. The neighbourhoods should reflect the local population with a mix of families, couples and single people, both young and old, and with a range of incomes.
7. RUSS' neighbourhoods should not only reduce environmental impacts by efficiently using energy and building materials, but should proactively create resources of power, water and food.
8. Residents should have the opportunity to be involved in the design, construction and management of neighbourhoods.
9. RUSS developments should create opportunities for training in organising and building for residents and others.
10. Our projects should be self-financing with robust financing and delivery systems.



Finding it stubbornly bounded, we respond with discipline, and put to use what is there.

Jonathan Hoskins

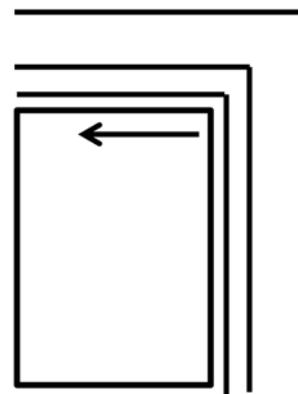
with photographs by Graham Parsey

Months later, I go back to my notes from the walk in June. The notes are the only object from the walk, besides some photographs. They are the only original effort I made for it; everything else came from research for the book that was nearly complete. Now, months later, the book is done, and I go back to my notes.

The walk was simple. Left out of the door, left at the crossroad, right at the first turn. Circle, cross over the road, cross back. Circle, and a left back to where we started. The only demand upon me was to find the exact locations. Thirteen locations for thirteen photographs, some taken just a few metres apart, some taken eight years apart, throughout the 1970s.

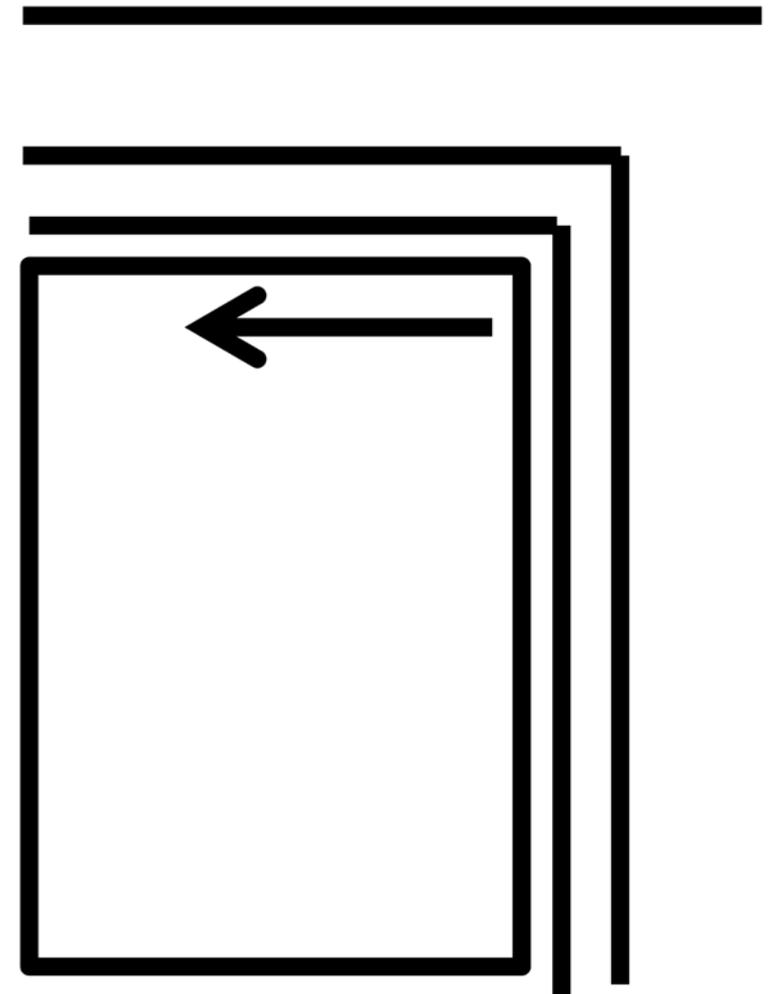
Those locations, over those eight years, were changed through the collective action of people who lived nearby. The purpose of the walk was to introduce other people to that collective action, and to the intersections it has with the fracturing social imaginary of that time, read along the walk and extracted from neighbourhood folklore, specialist histories, personal anecdote, parliamentary transcripts, speculation, embellishment and fact.

The walk feels like a dialogue – and an authentic one at that, because we are in those locations – but it's all projection. The locations of now are very different from the locations of then, so towards the task of finding them, the photographs help very little. Instead, I make a diagram-aid for each one.

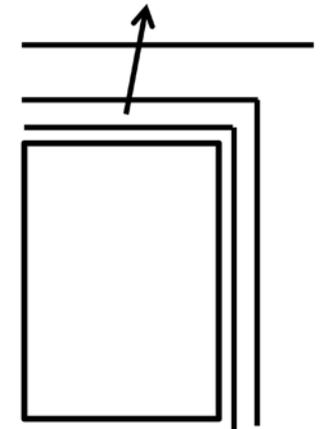
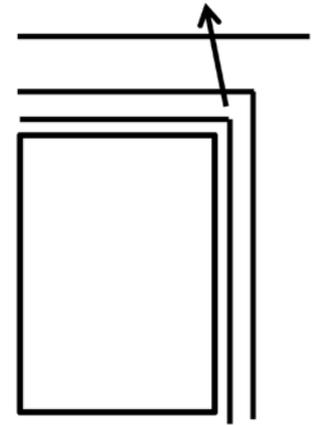
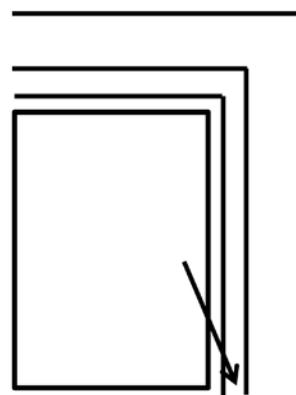
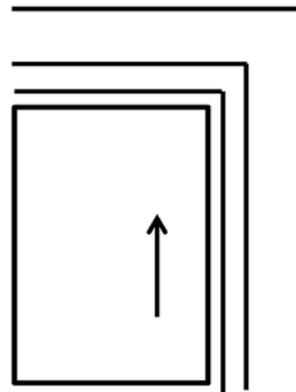
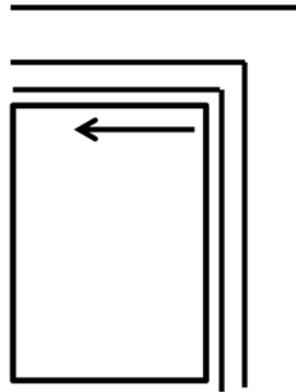


The aids have one axis, of utility. They have location in relation to surrounding boundaries and orientation, only. I can use them to arrive at the viewpoint where the photograph converges with the walk; or at least, to where the convergence is as close as possible. There's always a shortfall, which frustrates, and makes present the force of this collective action from four decades before.

At this time, before the walk, I think I'm only recording the details that I need to approach each location, and each viewpoint. Months later, I realise the aids could each be read in another way, as an effort to represent graphically each one of these near-convergences.

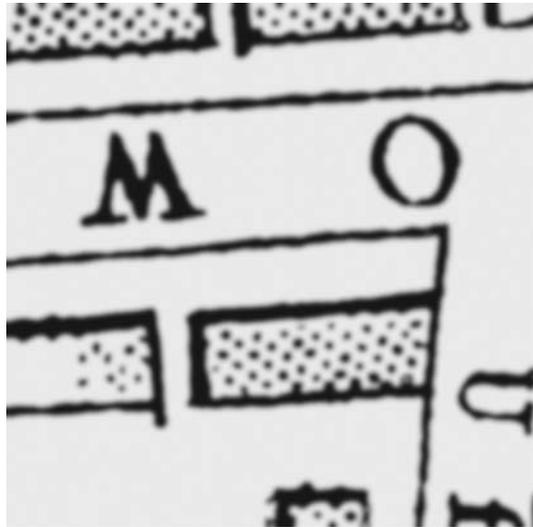


The lines refer to boundaries that exist around each location now, but all of those boundaries have analogues in the photographs. Better said, the lines denote what is common between the location now, and the location then, when the photograph was taken.



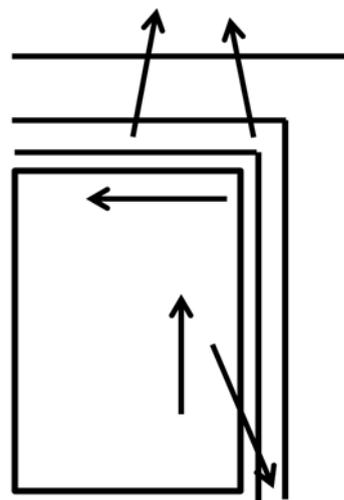
It is easy to account for this. The neighbourhood was laid out in a single masterplan in the early nineteenth century, and most of the boundaries created in that masterplan still remained in some form in the 1970s, and still remain now.

That needs to be qualified. Most of those boundaries still remain now, on this side of the road. On the other side of the road, nothing is recognisable from the nineteenth century. It was all demolished in the 1960s and a social housing estate was built in that space. The same was planned for this side of the road, but some of the



residents organised to campaign in opposition. Through a combination of their own work and wider circumstances, they were successful.

The campaign lasted several years and brought many other grievances into common visibility over that period, through meetings, events and a neighbourhood newspaper, hand delivered by the campaigners to all of the four thousand homes in the neighbourhood. Five years after the campaign began, some of those involved decided to clear a derelict site at the centre of the neighbourhood, and built an adventure playground in that space. This was the space of the walk.



Months later, I was asked at the book launch, “are we all fucked?”. I thought for a moment and remembered these people, relocating rubble on the derelict site, collecting scrap wood and reassembling it to fill the space.

I framed my response within the term ‘political populism’. The guest speaker at the launch was one of those campaigners in the 1970s and had said to me before, “we were populists, in the proper sense”. Since then, I had discovered the argument that a populist movement is one that creates some means to concretely conjoin disparate grievances that otherwise bear no such conjunction, and thereby creates a singular identity that may cohere into a movement. Sometimes the grievances are conjoined through the construction, denigration and vilification of an ‘other’. Sometimes the conjunction comes through the careful representation of the disparate grievances in question. “Yes, I think that’s what I was trying to say”, the guest speaker interjected.

repairs, etc. to owner-occupiers or leaseholders (with 5 years to run on their leases) in the area. Landlords who agree to conditions safeguarding the rights of their tenants can also get grants. Friendly advice is available from Mr Peter Haler, Hackney's Improvement officer, at 146 De Beauvoir Road (tel. 254-1924).

Improvement grants are not directly available to tenants, but they can press their landlords to improve their homes. They can also apply to the council to serve a notice on their landlords to make them instal basic amenities (that is, baths, wash-basins, sinks, hot & cold water, and lavatories).

COUNCIL SWOP

Hackney Council and the Benyon Estate (Brown & Brown to most of us) have reached agreement to exchange interests in four houses in the area. The Council is to acquire the freehold of 64 and 68 De Beauvoir Road (in the southern area) and in return to give up their leasehold interests in 99 Mortimer Road and 112 Southgate Road (in the central area), plus £7,500. This seems in line with what is suspected to be the council's plan to acquire several blocks of houses in the southern area for redevelopment. At the last GIA residents' steering committee meeting in May the

priorities! Why can't local people do it. Why not? Perhaps Coun Ken Wilson, your interests and the De Beauvoir Association can provide a solicitor free.

chairman of Hackney housing management

PLAYSITE NEEDS MUMS and DADS



Helpers to supervise children playing on the new play-site in De Beauvoir

The Inner London Education Authority have given us a grant of £225 for the

Pre-fab hall for New Town

Hackney Council has promised to erect a pre-fab community hall for the New Town estate for use until the promised community hall, plus library, is built. The committee of the revived New Town Tenants' Association recently wrote to ask the Council to receive a deputation to discuss providing a temporary hall. But Coun Lily Karpin, Labour's chief whip on the council, replied that she saw no reason why the tenants should bother to send a deputation. A prefab hall would be provided within two months for tenants on the estate.

The question now arises: "What should we use the hall for?" Apart from the usual Bingo, social evenings, etc, Mr Tom Dunne, newly elected chairman of the tenants' association, would like to begin an amateur dramatic society - the De Beauvoir Players. A small group has discussed forming a drama society & prospects look good. If you're interested in being a founding member, get in touch with Mr Dunne at 48 St Brelades Court, N1

As we spoke, a wall-sized slideshow behind us rotated between images of social housing plans, derelict sites, relocated rubble and neighbourhood newspapers. The newspaper images encompassed all of the others, segregating each within letraset boundary lines.

The newspaper was called De Beaver, the phonetic spelling of the common pronunciation of De Beauvoir Town, the neighbourhood that was masterplanned in the 19th century, an area bounded then, now and at all times since by major thoroughfares on all sides. Hence, it was simple to determine which grievances should be encompassed in De Beaver, and which homes it should be delivered to. The guest speaker at the book launch lived along the northern boundary, but on the south side; had he lived on the other side, the newspaper wouldn't have been delivered to his home.

The newspaper was delivered to the 1960s social housing estate but, from the conversations I've had, it made far less of an impact there. I spoke to one man who has lived there since 1971 and was chair of the estate's eminently active residents association for a time. "We never imbibed that in what we represented here, on this estate", he told me. "Discussion in those days centred on the use of open spaces, the canal walk, and looking after repairs. Those are the things we were concerned with."



Fourthland
(Louise isik Sayarer and Eva Knutsdotter Vikstrom)

Incantation (scroll)

(Collective utterance)
I made these forms to speak this tongue
I speak this tongue to shape these forms

Imbue our tongue

Wrapped in bundles, Imbued and carried
They arrived with the ruins of civilisation on their backs
Dust, bones, fragments
golden hands, creased with potential

Hands lead hearts
to follow traces
through charcoal
water
bowls of clay

in the steps of folk beyond
The Ancients
Call us in
To compost, moisture, mould and churn

at the depth of our being
echoing
composting
olden into something yet to be seen

with a stone
I grind
bones
skins
old pots
pulping

stretching
moulding
on finger tips
lips
in search of something
Ears
fold inwards
Threads poke outwards
Debris hewn

A woven man
A pot and 10 thousand grains of sand
some found
others made
inherited
ground together

vessels
to feed
mouths to form
tongues to speak
held
evoking

Our palms shaping the words
Kneading and folding the stories to come
Upon our tongue
To speak this scroll
to moist this mouth

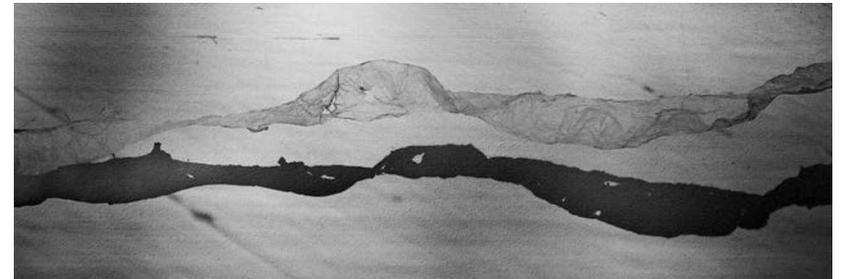
Listen for the breath
Hold and let go

(Collective utterance)
I made these forms to speak this tongue
I speak this tongue to shape these forms

Imbue our tongue



imbue our tongue



In the intricacy of production; language, form and ritual are of the same source. One does not exist without the other.

Whilst seeking to find a new language for our practice we realised that seeking could not be found in words, forms or ways of meeting that already existed. How could this seeking become part of a way of working with the practice? How could these forms become new mouths, skins and tools for excavating words and gesture as a collective act?

This new language would be made through travelling to the source of how language was initially formed. Taking us back to where we have not quite been, through the source gestures that connect pulsations, forms and things. Where magic becomes language, through motion and collection.

Taking us back to the breath as it flows through the body, to the object breath, where we create and manifest and let go. Pass on. Handed down and handled. With materials that allow oxygen to pass through.

Within these layers of manifestation, completion and transformation, there is an opportunity to connect, to evolve and to share experiences. In this place, “mother” is a mode of gathering and communication – not a gender – and the language is born between gestures. Opening our intimate experience as individual creators, to become shared vessels of creative potential.

In this vessel

Fourthland creates work with elders, with objects with interruptions from one place to the next. And through this work a language is formed.

Moving like one body, with equal emphasis on all its essential parts. Some moving the fingers, others flow the blood, and so on. Becoming like an industry of collective production and reproduction. Wherein the material has its own voice of agency and its own archive of inheritance.

Our workings of art – thus become a shared place of landing, both temporal and permanent – a lattice of fragments and ideas held within a home, a shared house-holding. Finding through this new collective domesticity a route of harmony, care and trust. Each as a carrier and a space of fertile exchange.

These moments are malleable and flow like magic. Moments, where we commune within deep, shared and evolving wisdom. To form a language that continues to manifest as it flows, moulds and churns. A language where all language as we know it, in all its different cultures and worlds, becomes one and the same. And within that sound from humble hearts, wild souls can awake and **dance freely.**

AND

Once the new words arrived the qualities of the actions changed
As did the texture of the sound and the meeting

What was spoken
What was shared
became a collective act
a collective tongue

Where speech is the home
A living school
A breathing act

The word as an extension of the breath

The Living School: Reflections

Brandon LaBelle

What types of activity can be deployed to counter or redirect the economics of privatization? How might public life be figured today as well as a sense for what may obligate us towards others? From within the dominating ‘logic of expulsion’ identified by Saskia Sassen as central to neoliberalism, based on the continual extraction and enclosure of global resources, is it possible to counter the general insecurities that govern people’s lives and homes? (Sassen 2014: 78)

Following this questioning, I’ve been interested in artistic practices that work to nurture a politics of possibility. This politics is one shaped by the “new normal” of crisis and precarity, as well as by the critical and creative dynamics of what Dimitris Papadopoulos terms ‘Generation M’ (Papadopoulos 2014). The Making Generation is cast as an emergent social body of contemporary subjects, one shaped by collective intelligence and new sensate knowledges gleaned from network culture and its coalitional possibilities. According to Papadopoulos, the culture of ‘making’ signals a deep potentiality, one that is currently inspiring new forms of social solidarity and co-operative instituting that extends to the side of governmental and academic offices. In this regard, experiences of expulsion and insecurity, of eviction and crisis pervading contemporary life are countered through a general ethos of collective crafting, leading to acts of joining together and building commonality, which, as can be seen from the mayoral platform initiated by Ada Colau in Barcelona, may also lead to new possibilities for participatory governance (see Colau 2014). Colau, whose work with Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (PAH) aimed at finding solutions for the loss of homes and livelihoods throughout Spain following the economic fallout in 2008, has continued to develop new institutional structures specifically designed to support citizen practices and notions of the common good.

It is against this backdrop of thinking and making, together and through states of crisis, that the Living School was developed and organized. Held between February and June 2016, the School focused on questions of social housing, rights to the city, and conditions of precarity. The project developed out of an artist residency I had at the South London Gallery beginning in 2014, and which culminated in the Living School activities. Organized in collaboration with the gallery’s education and outreach program, which primarily focuses on working with local residents of nearby housing estates, the residency coincided with an intensification of protests and debates against the privatization of the city’s social housing stock and the related demolition and reorganization of major housing complexes, for example, the Aylesbury Estate in Elephant and Castle. From the beginning I found myself confronted with a deeply urgent as well as challenging situation; in order

to participate as an artist-in-residence it became clear that my activities should both engage and be guided by prevailing debates, struggles and protests that were specifically surrounding the gallery and its outreach program. At the same time, I was aware how my role as an artist could perform a ‘gentrifying’ act, capturing these challenging realities within an artistic project that would inevitably fall short of providing ‘critical solutions’ while additionally appropriating real crisis into the marketplace of creative capital. Like many artists, these are questions I often confront. In the context of the residency, I attempted to work through this challenge by expanding the frame of the project as much as possible; by involving a range of collaborators and partners through open dialogue as well as direct participation. I felt these gestures would enhance the direction of the residency by integrating the critical tensions embedded in the issue of social housing, thereby grounding as well as unsettling the operations of ‘the project’. Instead, I was interested in developing a social framework in which a range of voices and positions could be active and as such would interrupt my own. (I hope this publication may also work to further such a collaborative framework and ethos.)

While it became necessary and important to take a number of steps toward those active in local protests, I was also interested in the way questions of social housing were activating other social and cultural arenas, for instance within academic and artistic communities. My approach was therefore nurtured not only through direct conversations or readings, or by following related activities in the city, but additionally by organizing a number of research events. These took the form of a public event located on site at the nearby Elmington Estate in Camberwell, as well as a public seminar presented at the South London Gallery on the topic of ‘neighbors and strangers’. Each event included a range of invited collaborators who gave input through critical reflections and reports, as well as through material works and creative responses. Each event additionally attempted to create an interweave of theoretical concepts and collective activity; it felt important to support the more corporeal and affective engagement with local politics – how we cope as bodies and with others – and to enrich critical thinking by grounding it within particular sites and acts of participatory making.

The event at the Elmington Estate organized in the summer of 2014 focused on a participatory, self-build activity and was an attempt to reflect upon the basic materials as well as skills required to build a house, drawing these into play as a collective or co-operative process. The event was attended by a mix of artists, musicians, academics, and local residents, especially a group of local youth, as well as a resident who pulled his stereo out onto the lawn to provide a steady mix of reggae, blending in with the drumming of Paul Abbott, a London-based musician who was invited to engage with the event through improvisational playing. Through this mesh of participation, the resulting form of the self-build activity – the construc-

tion of a set of walls standing freely on the lawn of the estate – came to capture an overall diversity: this half-formed room, erected rather clumsily and with a set of awkward appendages and sculptural embellishments, articulated the meeting point of different people, manifesting the responses and imagination of those who happened to join in. This structure, this strange form, began to suggest the importance of giving space to the passions and disappointments, the hopes and realities intrinsic to living and working with others, and which we might emphasize as the basis for what a social house may enable.

Following the initial residency, the Living School was finally organized as four one-day public sessions held at different venues in the city of London. Each session brought together artists, researchers and activists to present ideas, share research and experiences, and engage in processes of working and playing together. It was the overall intention of the School to approach pedagogy as an experimental and situational event – to locate it within particular spaces while using these spaces as a context for nurturing free thought and being. These conditions and dynamics were additionally shaped by incorporating a range of prepared artistic and documentary materials to act as a general scenography that could performatively enrich discussions and activities. It felt important to insist on the materiality of the sessions, as structures of address, to envelope collective and discursive work with an artistic expressivity, which might complicate or reframe the hard facts of local conflicts with the drive of an imaginary. For myself, I felt this to be a way in which aesthetics might work to interfere with and extend the operations of discourse, connecting ideas to the materiality of life experience.

The sessions were framed around four topics, including expulsion, poverty, self-building, and shared space. The topics acted to identify particular aspects surrounding the issue of social housing while expanding beyond local disputes so as to build a larger framework of thought and sharing. Each session included a diversity of workshop strategies, from roleplaying and collective sharing to experiments in group dynamics and performative actions: walking tours, co-operative building, listening and reading together, these were essential to bringing into play the experiences of living with crisis and possibilities for imagining otherwise. Through such approaches the sessions were less about arriving at points of conclusion and more about developing conditions for coming together and engaging issues of concern, often touching very real and personal stories.

Following the experiences of the Living School, I'm interested in continuing to explore methods of collective and pedagogical work as part of the framework of artistic practice. It feels important within today's environment of crisis and dispossession, of expulsion and enclosure, as well as imagination and independent making, to search for ways of integrating within creative work gestures of social solidarity, which may support in their small way the co-production of learning

and imagining together, while allowing for what Jacques Rancière terms 'politics' (Rancière 1990), which flows from the plurality of differences. If, as Sassen suggests, neoliberal logic is one of expulsion and eviction, working to generate new practices through which to recreate what a 'shelter' might be seems crucially important.

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Biographies:

Andrew Conio is an artist, writer and Senior Lecturer in Fine Art at the University of Kent. He has published on painting, language, moving image, architecture, institutional critique, creativity and edited *Occupy: A People Yet to Come* (2015) Open Humanities Press. Andrew is currently writing a book entitled *The Anatomy of Money*.

Judit Ferencz is an illustrator, originally from Hungary. She has published with Vintage Classics, Random House, L'Harmattan and Granta. She is currently a PhD student in architectural design at The Bartlett, UCL where she is conducting a RIBA funded research on the conservation of architectural heritage through the graphic novel.

Fourthland is a collaboration between artists isik.knutsdotter; Louise isik Sayarer and Eva Knutsdotter Vikstrom. Fourthland's work exists as a series of long-term projects, social and public space: 'public spaces with public creation', exhibition, workshop programmes and extensive research through practice. Their recent work has been exhibited and hosted by SPACE, Barbican, Somerset House, Arnolfini, PEER, South London Gallery Local and Errant Bodies, Berlin.

Chris Jones is a long-term volunteer at 56a Infoshop in The Elephant & Castle, South London. We started as a squatted premises lasting until 2003 when we became subject to regime of rent. Shit happens! We are still here and we never sleep. We sell radical books, pamphlets and newspaper. We also have a massive open-access archive of probably 70,000+ things: books, mags, posters, badges, pamphlets and leaflets. It's also a hang-out space and that's important. We share our building with Fareshares Food Co-op and 56a Bike Workshop.

Jonathan Hoskins is a visual artist and writer living in London, UK. He typically works with individuals with an expertise outside of visual art, towards projects with distinct practical consequences. Recent and forthcoming projects, writing and events include: Tate Modern; Somerset House; Open School East; South London Gallery; Market Gallery, Glasgow; Spacex Gallery, Exeter; Bloc Projects, Sheffield.

Brandon LaBelle is an artist, writer and theorist working with sound culture, voice, and questions of agency. He develops and presents artistic projects and performances within a range of international contexts, often working collaboratively and in public. Through a residency at the South London Gallery, he initiated The Living School in 2016. He is the author of *Sonic Agency* (2017), *Lexicon of the Mouth* (2014), *Diary of an Imaginary Egyptian* (2012), *Acoustic Territories* (2010), and *Background Noise* (2006; 2015).

Elyssa Livergant is an artist, researcher and community organiser. She contributes to the running of Limehouse Town Hall. She is co-editor of Contemporary Theatre Review's *Interventions* and a Teaching Fellow in the Department of Drama at Queen Mary University of London.

Andrea Luka Zimmerman is a filmmaker, artist and cultural activist exploring the impact of globalisation, power structures, militarism and denied histories. She co-founded the artists' collective Fugitive Images (*I am here, Estate: Art, Politics and Social Housing in Britain and Estate, a Reverie*). Her forthcoming film *Erase and Forget* premiered at the Berlin Film festival in 2017.

Graham Parsey (1938-2011) was a highly respected UK architect, with a long career extending into architectural journalism and building appraisal. He was also central to many decades of localised collective action in the neighbourhood of De Beauvoir Town in East London between the 1960s and 2010s. He was instrumental in saving the neighbourhood from wholesale demolition in a campaign lasting for several years around 1970 and produced many plans for public space in the neighbourhood that were implemented in full and continue to characterise De Beauvoir Town and much of the wider London Borough of Hackney. His personal archive comprises many thousands of documents, plans and photographs of De Beauvoir. Images from this collection are reproduced in this publication with the kind permission of the Estate of Graham Parsey.

Jane Rendell's work crosses architecture, art, feminism, history and psychoanalysis. She has introduced 'critical spatial practice' and 'site-writing' through her authored books: *The Architecture of Psychoanalysis* (2016), *Site-Writing* (2010), *Art and Architecture* (2006), and *The Pursuit of Pleasure* (2002). Jane is Professor of Architecture & Art at the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL, where she is Director of History & Theory.

The Rural Urban Synthesis Society (RUSS) is a volunteer-led Community Land Trust based in south London, founded in 2009 with the aim of creating sustainable neighbourhoods and genuinely affordable homes. RUSS's mission is to reduce their local communities' dependence on fossil fuels, increase food security, encourage bio-diversity and provide affordable housing for Londoners. For their first project, RUSS is developing a scheme of 33 new sustainable, high quality homes amongst shared open space at Church Grove in Ladywell, Lewisham. The project, which is planned to start construction in January 2018, offers self-build opportunities for local people.

zURBS is an urban research- and art collective, which aims to look at and re-think the city in new and different ways. By working with a wide range of urban citizens through a social-artistic approach, zURBS aims to pose alternatives to how we live together in our cities (=the social), through creative and imaginative processes (=the artistic).

The Living School

A project initiated by Brandon LaBelle
in collaboration with the South London Gallery, 2014-2016.

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