WICK SESSION NO.20

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THIS WICK ZINE PRESENTS A SERIES OF RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS RAISED IN PUBLIC WORKS’ WICK SESSION NO.19 ‘VALUES OF TEMPORARY USE’ (CO-ORGANISED WITH MARA FERRERI) AND NO.20 ‘CO-PRODUCING THE MAKESHIFT’ (WITH ISAAC MARRERO-GUILLAMÓN, AND INCLUDING A WALK LED BY RICHARD BROWN).
THE MAKESHIFT CITY

ISAAC MARRERO-GUILLAMÓN

The Oxford Dictionary defines makeshift as ‘acting as an interim and temporary measure’ and ‘a temporary substitute or device’. The Thesaurus reveals a slightly richer semantic field: ‘temporary, make-do, provisional, stopgap, standby, rough and ready, substitute, emergency, improvised, ad hoc, impromptu, extemporary, extempore, thrown together, cobbled together’. Re-instating some of these multiple meanings was one of our goals organising Wick Session no. 20 and publishing this zine. Non-permanence, informality and fragility were our three ‘lines of flight’, the first steps towards an open and positive definition of the makeshift – and by extension of the ‘makeshift city’. These three ‘lines’ may be seen as so many structuring tensions:

1) The makeshift city’s temporality is, in principle, one of temporariness, of interim or interstitial interventions; an interval, then, which we may define as a tactical recess within a longer duration it cannot control. However, the makeshift’s non-permanent condition is not definite; indeed the aspiration to last, to project itself onto the future and abandon the limits of provisionality, is a powerful impulse in many makeshift practices.

2) The makeshift city is made by collective improvisation and ingenuity, using informal and vernacular methods, involving anybody who wants to be involved. It is not the city of experts, architects and planners, but that of an empowered, self-managed pleb. And yet, these distinctions may be too simplistic; this zine presents several examples of spaces produced by architects who have committed their expertise to the minor forms of the makeshift.

3) The makeshift city is a precarious city; it not only depends on the delicate balancing of collective desires, but its non-hegemonic, unsanctioned character makes it vulnerable to power - vulnerable, however, in a seemingly contradictory way. Mainstream urban development and policy seems to fear and love the makeshift in equal measures. It’s a complicated relationship; makeshift spaces are routinely recuperated and even simulated - almost as frequently as they are annihilated.

Throughout this zine we approach the makeshift city in relation to two diverging political projects: urban commoning and austerity urbanism. Regarding the latter, critical literature argues that the makeshift is a convenient strategy in the context of the rolling back of the state: it substitutes public provision with engaged citizens, plays into the ‘big society’ ideology, and helps to underplay the consequences of state retrenchment. Moreover - it is argued - makeshift spaces end up often being low-cost location boosters: they occupy interstitial spaces and prepare them for development. For all these reasons, the makeshift is said to actively contribute to gentrification processes and more generally to the neoliberal city.

But, it’s also been argued that these self-managed spaces are islands of resistance against the increasing enclosure and privatisation of public space, that they produce urban commons, i.e. spaces that are neither public nor private, but shared, removed from the logic of the market, de-commodified. Makeshift spaces would constitute ‘an infrastructure of common life that provides sites of autonomy, creativity and collectivity in the making and re-making of cities’, experimental sites where ‘people come together to assemble alternative lifeworlds’. From this perspective, the makeshift city has enormous transformative (one may even say emancipatory) potential: it embodies an alternative to hegemonic forms of urbanisation; a city made from below, collectively, by non-experts; a machinic assemblage of lay knowledges, tools and subjects engaged in their own co-production.

The tension between conceptualising the makeshift city in relation to austerity urbanism vs urban commoning is, in our opinion, productive as an unresolved tension. It is precisely because makeshift spaces can veer towards either that they deserve our attention. We want to ask difficult questions to these practices, and use them as lines of inquiry to interrogate the city at large. We want to know, among other things, what kind of collectives and possibles are being created through makeshift spaces; what kind of values are being produced by/in them, and who is collecting them; what learning processes are being enacted, and which knowledges are being recognised as such. The texts published here are a first step towards this.

There is an old saying: ‘we make the city and city makes us’. If that’s true, co-producing the makeshift city, making and remaking urban space together from below, will not only change the cityscape and its political horizons, but will contribute to renew and reimage our condition as urban citizens.

THE COMPETING VALUES OF TEMPORARY USE

MARA FERRERI

Temporary uses of vacant spaces are an emerging part of London’s social and cultural landscape, existing at the intersection of competing imaginaries and material dynamics. Over the past decade forms of temporary occupation of vacant land and buildings have been gaining recognition by planning authorities, policy-makers and developers, and have entered mainstream urban culture with a fanfare of excitement and social and cultural promise. Imaginaries of experimentation and collective appropriation of wasted resources mobilise modes of valuing space and coming together that, however, may sit uncomfortably with the diktat of continuous urban development, to which interim uses are often cast as ancillaries. Within the framing of the London Festival of Architecture 2014, and its ‘Capital’ theme, Wick Session no. 19 brought together practitioners and urban researchers to explore the overlapping systems of values mobilized around temporary use and their relationship to wider dynamics of urban transformation.

SPACE, EVERYDAY USE AND A ‘POP-UP DISQUIET’

The evening began with Marie Murray and Brian Cumming’s passionate presentation of their experiences and hopes for the Dalston Eastern Curve Garden, a green space open 7 days a week from 11 to dusk as a community garden, a café, a children playing area and a workshop space. While on the surface the site may appear as the successful legacy of a previous temporary intervention by architectural platform Exyzt, the garden is actually rooted in a longer-term collective investment by organised Dalston communities. As part of the ‘Making Space in Dalston’ strategy project in 2008-9, community groups such as Open Dalston worked with architects muf and J & L Gibbons to find solutions to the urgent need for open green spaces in the area. Of the 70 projects proposed, only 5 were realised, of which one was the Dalston Eastern Curve Garden.

The initial funding by Design for London enabled to clear the site, which had been used as a dumping ground. The ensuing temporary art/architecture summer events – part of the Barbican’s Radical Nature exhibition (Jun-Oct 2009) – raised the city-wide profile of the place. The rent-free use of the land was negotiated with its two landowners, the Borough of Hackney and the owners of the Kingsland Shopping Centre, and an initial two-year grant enabled the site to remain open. When the grant ended in 2012, Marie and Brian set up a social enterprise to generate income for the maintenance and coordination of the gardening, education and social activities. A much desired and used local green open space, the garden is however under threat of demolition to make space for a paved alley to connect the planned residential redevelopment of the Shopping Centre to Dalston Lane.

Reflecting on the experience of insecurity of the site, despite its clear social benefits and widespread support, Marie’s presentation questioned the very idea of temporary use as worthwhile. She described feeling a ‘pop up disquiet’, observing how temporary projects seem to draw on and drive an insatiable appetite for the new at the expense of the values of the ordinary and the everyday. While the communities’ desire for green open space took the form of a pilot temporary garden, the plan was always towards achieving a permanent green space for the neighbourhood. In contrast to imaginaries of exciting short-term pop-up events, built on transience and a taste for constant novelty, Marie and Brian argued that the most valuable aspect of the Curve Garden is the possibility of enabling and developing ordinary, everyday relationships between people and spaces, a growing community of learning and caring. Their stance is firmly rooted in the belief that green space is a right, not a privilege or a luxury, and for this reason they refuse the label of a ‘temporary garden’ and are committed to its future existence. What value(s) can thus be mobilized to ensure its permanence?

In their on-going campaigning to keep the space, besides highlighting the value of informal everyday use, they have also been arguing that a permanent green space can only be beneficial to the real estate values in the area, particularly for the hundreds of new private dwellings planned to be built locally. While private developers appeared to be not insensitive to the argument, the Council
maintained the view that the logic of the approved masterplan takes priority over the garden’s value as a public amenity. In this, the experience of the Curve Garden points at the tension of translating the common social values mobilized in the creation and maintenance of open use of vacant land into the values upheld by those who own it, who may endorse open community uses only if and when their existence does not encroach upon plans for residential and commercial expansion and if and when they can be directly translated into profit in the form of increased real estate values.

**COMMON VALUES AROUND AND THROUGH PRODUCTS**

The question of the common values produced through social interactions in and with the use of space was raised by the presentation of Kim Trogal, researcher and visiting design fellow at the School of Architecture, University of Sheffield. While ‘the commons’ are often understood spatially, either as open spaces or buildings or as site-specific practices and collective uses, she proposed to expand the idea and to introduce the possibility for products to constitute commons by enabling different kinds of social and economic relationships between people. Kim’s thinking originates in the study of the tradition of ‘objects of mutual aid’, particularly from practices of rural subsistence. These objects could either be owned collectively, such as tools, or produced through non-monetised acts of solidarity, as for instance in the case of the collective labour of building the roof of a house or of maintaining a community garden.

In her intervention she invited the audience to consider how objects might enable ethical economies of commoning and sharing, and in particular to think how this expanded understanding could enable practices of commoning to travel beyond small-scale site-specificity. In relation to temporary use, Kim’s reflections expanded the frame within which to think about the values of common use as inclusive of objects whose production and forms of circulation can function as tools for the creation and maintenance of alternative economies. Many temporary urban projects rely on voluntary and non-monetised economies and the recycling and repurposing of objects and materials, and it is therefore important to bring into a discussion of value a question of the commons as circulation and collective ownership and use. The shift from commons as space to commons as object, however, is not unproblematic, and there is a need to reflect on how the implicit mobility of such objects risks to reproduce and celebrate a model of adaptability to insecurity and transience that appears resigned to dynamics of displacement.

**THE VALUE OF CONTINUITY**

The question of displacement and transience appeared strongly in Bean’s presentation in relation to the performance and live art studio and venue]Performance Space[. Bean reflected on the trajectory of the communities that her space comes from and caters for, and particularly on the loose past affiliation to a performance art platform called ArtEvict (2009-2011), which made use of countercultural spaces such as squatted buildings. She noted that in less than five years nearly all those spaces had been evicted and that a once-established political and artistic community has now become largely invisible in London. The transience and insecurity of squatted spaces had in fact informed the decision of setting up [PS] in 2011 in a rented warehouse in Hackney Wick, as a stable home for performance and live art through which a community and network of support and practitioners could be built and maintained. Despite the cultural recognition gained over the last few decades by live art as an artistic practice, [PS] was the first organisation in the UK to be set up to provide both event and studio space specifically for live art performance artists. As such, the project has been recognised by many high profile performance artists as well as by the Arts Council, which is funding their current programme of events.

However, in spite of this popularity, in early 2014 the lease of the warehouse was not renewed, and [PS] lost their space. They moved to Swan Wharf, but as the venue developed and veered towards the creation of Fish Island Labs, their presence in the building became more of a stop-gap on the path towards establishing a new space in Poplar (on a 5-year lease). The decision to move out of Hackney Wick was difficult and not without bitterness. Reflecting on the values brought by [PS] as a venue and group of practitioners to the area and to Swan...
Wharf, she commented that all too often the cultural capital of pre-existing low-budget self-organised projects is absorbed by new spaces and organisations claiming to create a cultural hub. As the rental costs of studio and living spaces increase, existing communities find themselves displaced elsewhere. While the live art and performance practices of JPS are ephemeral, Bean is adamant that in order to thrive, learn and grow any cultural community needs time, stability and access to cheap rehearsal and exhibition spaces. To sustain this, the permanence of established spaces should be valued above and beyond the excitement of constant mobility and its accompanying uncertainty.

SEDUCTIVE VALUES OF TEMPORARY USE: ACTIVATING VACANCY AND ‘POP UP PEOPLE’

To conclude the session, I offered a few reflections on the recent history of temporary urban use in planning, cultural and urban policy. With the increased recognition of temporary use as a practice and an imaginary, two sets of narratives seem to have become central. The first concerns the institutional encouragement of architects, artists and other practitioners to engage in temporary uses with the aim of making visible and ‘activating’ allegedly ‘forgotten’ urban spaces. Vacancy, often the visible manifestation of a logic of spatial scarcity produced through raising rents and practices of land banking and property speculation, is being presented to practitioners as an opportunity for experimenting, a (temporary) space of possibility. While the appeal to practitioners is crystal clear, what are the values of ‘activating’ and making such spaces visible? How are the values of professional recognition translated into place marketing by local authorities and developers seeking to attract investors or increase their profit margins?

The second narrative concerns the ‘pop up people’ expected to take on these ‘wasted’ spaces and generate value from them through temporary use. My research into the materialities of temporary use in London shows how projects often presuppose ‘on demand’ availability and the ability to draw on pre-existing professional and social networks. Practitioners involved in temporary uses are often in intermittent and flexible employment and have uncertain live/work arrangements, making participation into such projects at once exclusive and precarious. The value production and circulation of temporary uses risk therefore to become self-referential to selected groups and to a specific flexible and transient approach to the city. As Henri Lefebvre already put it in 1970: ‘If at some point in the near future, the ephemeral becomes more prevalent, which is entirely conceivable, what would it consist of? In the activities of groups that are themselves ephemeral’.

Ideas of temporary and mobile architecture and impermanence originated in the 1960s cultural and social critique of fixity and permanence as associated with routine, lack of dynamism, conformism and homologation, but also in radical experiments of open-ended spatial production. The historical and material context of such a critique is however entirely different from the widespread condition of heightened work flexibility and life insecurity that characterises present-day global cities such as London. There is therefore a need to rethink and reclaim a space for the values of such a societal critique, and the possibilities of self-organisation, spontaneity, re-invention of the rules of commoning and experimentation under these new conditions. The challenge, for practitioners and urban inhabitants, is not to be disingenuous about the seductions of a ‘temporary city’, its ‘forgotten vacant spaces’ and ‘pop up people’, and to find ways to ask which values are promoted and which city is imagined, and by whom, through temporary use.

Over the course of the evening, the tensions existing within a discourse of temporary use that draws on activating spaces and connecting them with people while simultaneously expecting their displacement once the site is re-appropriated by capital came to full view. Permanence appeared recurrently as a strong desire in the narratives of practitioners feeling the full burden of temporariness as a disabling condition in their projects. At the same time, the idea of permanence did not seem to entirely exhaust the question of
what to value about temporary uses. Members of the audience reflected on how short-term intensive projects can offer an entry into practices and spaces for many residents and workers whose engagement with place is increasingly contingent on insecure housing and work dynamics.

Overall, there's a need for a more nuanced understanding of the commoning potential of temporary space occupations, and of which forms of long-term continuity could be built. Beyond understanding and sharing a critique of the dominant uses of temporary urban projects, a more important question is how to distinguish and separate, in practice, values of horizontal, collective, open-ended experimentation and use from their framing and appropriation by spatial market dynamics and its powerful actors and intermediaries on the ground. The question of what would constitute a radical temporary use experiment today, and what values should it embody, remains ever more salient.

Mara Ferreri is an urban researcher interested in the potential of temporary art/activist practices in spaces of contested urban transformation. After an MA in Contemporary Art Theory, Goldsmiths College, she completed a PhD in the School of Geography, Queen Mary University of London, with the thesis 'Occupying Vacant Spaces: Precairous Politics of Temporary Urban Reuse'. She's currently researching the values of temporary uses in Hackney Wick, in collaboration with the art/architecture practice public works. http://www.geog.qmul.ac.uk/staff/ferrerim.html

The theme of this session reflects on some of the research questions of Revaluing Temporary Urban Use, a collaborative research project between public works, postdoctoral researcher Dr Mara Ferreri and Dr David Pinder of the School of Geography, Queen Mary University of London. A longer article titled 'The seductions of temporary urbanism' will appear in spring 2015 in the special issue 'Saving the city: Low budget urbanity at time of austerity' of the journal Ephemera: Theory and Politics in Organisation.

1 www.dalstongarden.org
2 www.performancespace.org
3 See RIBA's recent Forgotten Spaces competition.
CO-PRODUCING
THE MAKESHIFT:
A REVIEW
SHANE BOOTHBY & TOBY AUSTIN LOCKE

On 11 July 2014, at 90 Main Yard in Hackney Wick, a group of practitioners, neighbours, researchers, and students got together to discuss ‘the makeshift city’. This Wick Session, co-curated by public works and Isaac Marrero-Guillamón, sought to bring to light the contribution of vernacular, collective forms of architecture and urbanism to the production of non-hegemonic urban spaces. The idea of establishing a dialogue between local makeshift practices, related projects in London and Madrid, and the regulation of space through policy was manifest in the choice of speakers and venue.

The event demanded of its attendants a particular readiness to be made uncomfortable, to reflect anew on the lives of urban spaces, their relation to wider forces, the often hidden or unrealised significance of local networks and relations of mutual dependency/cooperation as well as some of the tensions that lay beneath or across them. The introduction by Marrero-Guillamón explored some of the key associations with makeshift practices (temporality, improvisation, precariousness) and situated them within the tension between austerity urbanism and urban commoning. The tactical, disruptive relationship to mainstream development that makeshift practices share and their potential fragility in the face of larger forces was made clear.

Tori Bravery, representing our hosts, the social innovation centre 90 Main Yard, introduced the project and the challenging and winding roads taken to build the space. After signing a 5-year lease for this large warehouse, a series of raves were organised to help fund the transformation, which included the huge clearance of a building left empty for 3 years, demolishing of walls, clearing of dust and creation of new divisions within the shell - all done by themselves and with repurposed materials. The legal side was equally - if not more - exhausting: the endless hoops to jump through with regards to planning regulations, health and safety, or the fire officer. 90 Main Yard is now a successful space, with extensive relations with the community. It follows a common spatio-economic model in the area, where the bar and restaurant which occupies the ground floor is used to subsidize a range of affordable workspace upstairs (e.g. a music recording studio, rehearsal space and co-working space). For all its celebratory and positive aspects, however, Bravery’s presentation provided the evening with its first dose of realism - the all too present reality that the building may not exist in the near future, as it is set to be demolished to make way for a bigger bridge. Regardless of the benefit that 90 Main Yard may be producing for the area, its future existence depends on something else, a masterplan whose priority is vehicular traffic.

Adolfo Estalella, researcher at the University of Manchester, started by talking about a remarkable self-managed and self-built space in Madrid, El Campo de Cebada (‘the barley field’). Established in 2011, this huge plaza in the centre of the city was the result of the occupation, by neighbours and architecture collectives, of an empty plot left behind by the crisis (the projected community sports centre was never built after the old one was demolished). This is a public space run by an open assembly, and which hosts a variety of uses, including an open air summer cinema, a community garden, a popular university, theatre functions, and a football and basketball pitch. The project is closely related to the issues tackled by and methods deployed by the 15M movement (now morphed into a myriad neighbourhood assemblies). Estalella highlighted the pedagogical element of the project (to which we return below), and described it as a device for collective learning based on the experience of relating to the city and to others in new and alternative ways. Estalella finished by briefly discussing another project, La Mesa, which may be defined as a hospitable space of mediation between social movements and the local government, in which issues of grassroots urbanism are discussed outside the rigid confines of the law. It is an attempt to create the possibility of learning from each other and valuing each other’s knowledges and practices - hopefully with a view to hold off a return to the status quo once money is available and development resumes.

Bringing us back to London, Pippa Gueterbock’s presentation sought to explore the relationship between the two projects that...
book-ended her career, Reclaim the Beach and the London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC)'s Grassroots Interim Uses. Reclaim the Beach began with a desire to bring aspects of Critical Mass (a now widespread event involving a large number of cyclists traversing the city in semi-chaotic fashion, asserting ownership over public space from the tyranny of motorised vehicles) to bear on an often overlooked public space in the centre of London, the banks of the river Thames. A series of unsanctioned events including sandcastle competitions and barbecues, as well as renowned raves, sought to break scepticism and associations of the foreshore as a dirty or dangerous place. A website provided support for its DIY ethos, listing tide times, activities and resources. Unchallenged by the authorities, who relied instead on the tide naturally evicting them, the events became something akin to Temporary Autonomous Zones.

Moving forward to the present, Gueterbock briefly discussed her current role at the LLDC. The ‘view from inside’ the organisation responsible for urban planning in the Olympic Park and its surroundings (including Hackney Wick), certainly allowed an interesting reflection on the spectrum of sanctioned/unsanctioned practices that could be described as makeshift. The Grassroots Interim Uses programme, as its name indicates, aims to nurture bottom-up approaches to space-making.

One of the underlying goals of ‘Co-producing the Makeshift’ was to reclaim or at least influence the trajectory of the notion of the ‘makeshift city’. The scheduling of this Wick Session, following one concerned with the ‘Values of Temporary Use’, provided a useful platform for exploring the distinction between temporary and makeshift. Several notions seemed to emerge as central to the practices and projects which come to be understood as makeshift: interim or interstitial use, vernacular methods and knowledges, horizontally organized networks, fluidity, and improvisational and contingent working practices. These approaches represent a departure from the hegemonic forms of design and production of urban space, which rely exclusively on expert knowledges and aspire towards permanence. In contrast, the co-production of makeshift spaces tends to be more participative and democratic; their design, rather than an abstract, formal exercise, happens in and around the sites themselves and makes use of whatever ideas, materials and methods are available through those involved.
As a practice that draws upon vernacular knowledges and improvisational working methods, the makeshift can arguably be described as a form of collective pedagogy. Makeshift spaces often serve as places of experimentation in which technologies of collaboration and knowledge dissemination can be continually made and remade. Rather than unidirectional knowledge transmission where those who know convey their wisdom to those who do not know, knowledge is produced collectively and collaboratively, and indeed disseminated at the very point of its production, rendering any division between experts and non-experts inapplicable.

These knowledges, however, do not only concern particular techniques or practices, but encompass much broader questions regarding how we relate to urban space, how we relate to one another, and how we occupy, use and interact with the city. As Reclaim the Beach demonstrates well, spaces can be transformed through their use: the Thames shoreline can be seen as a site of pollution and risk, or reimagined as a carnivalesque space of celebration. In this manner, forgotten, abandoned or neglected spaces can be reshaped in such a way that the relationship to them is not only transformed for those directly involved, but for passers-by, onlookers and communities yet to come.

Such reimagining of urban space often brings with it the production of new value. The effects of this surplus on those who generated it and the local community more generally, as well as the spatial and social dynamics associated with its capture (or redistribution), are recurring - yet elusive - questions in the debate around gentrification. There is no doubt that makeshift spaces may contribute to their own destruction through value production, and generate in the process a new cycle of displacement. It is also arguable that regardless of whether it has been aided by ‘regeneration from below’ or not, the capitalist city will remain a site of surplus capital absorption and accumulation by dispossession.

For some, the makeshift city should be understood as a reaction, and an antidote to, the gaps produced by recent austerity measures. Such an understanding sees the temporary and informal practices encapsulated by the makeshift as a response to the increased precarity, scarcity and the reduction of state support that are resultant of neoliberal austerity politics and economics. The up-cycling and reuse of materials is understood as an answer to reduced resources and funding opportunities; and the organisation of horizontal networks and the use of vernacular knowledges becomes a fitting response to reduced opportunities for specialists. In short, the makeshift emerges as a collective effort to fill in the cracks left by austerity politics.

Arguably, such conceptualisation of the makeshift greatly impoverishes it. Rather than acknowledging the active and affirmative practices and knowledges that are at work within and emergent from the makeshift, and their collective pedagogical implications, the concept becomes strictly reactive. Rather than a means of imagining and enacting new urban possibilities, makeshift practices and projects become the patches that stitch up the social fabric torn asunder by austerity economics; they do little more that ‘fill the cracks’ left in the wake of the withdrawal of public services and become a self-sustaining enactment of the ‘Big Society’ narrative.

Contrary to this reductionist “doing the work of austerity” reading, the cases discussed at both Wick Session 19 and 20 show us the complex and multi-faceted relationship between the state and the makeshift. Many of these projects (e.g. 90 Main Yard, El Campo de Cebada) are far from enjoying a smooth “gap-filling” relationship with the authorities, and have to engage in constant negotiation with them in order to achieve a relative permanence (or simply their existence). Makeshift projects are often precarious in their dependance upon specific political ecologies and relations, and even subject to violent repression if deemed dangerous or disruptive, as we’ve repeatedly seen in relation to squatting and occupations (clearly examples of makeshift spaces too).

At the same time, the example of La Mesa or the LLDC’s Grassroots Interim Use programme show instances of a desire to incorporate the experiences and alternative approaches enacted in makeshift spaces back into the mainstream management of the city. These two examples are a powerful counter to the notion that makeshift practices are only responsive to particular conditions and instead suggests a constitutive or prefigurative element in them - the capacity to create and disseminate new ways of producing and inhabiting urban space. Rather than simply filling in the cracks of austerity capitalism, the makeshift may expand these ‘cracks’ through opening up new spaces of the possible.
A TOUR OF THE MAKESHIFT SPACES OF HACKNEY WICK

- Albion Kids Show Mobile Playspace
- Cre8 Centre
- Wick Green
- Oslo House Studios
- 90 Main Yard
- Street Interrupted
- Vittoria Wharf
- German Deli
- Stour Space
- The Yard Theatre
- Frontside Gardens
- Converted warehouse studios
- Guerrilla Playground
- Wick on Wheels

Wick on Wheels
90 MAIN YARD. This warehouse has been home to a dye-cutting factory, live-work units, many raves and, since 2012, an ‘innovation hub’ complete with co-working space, music studios and a bar-kitchen. Tori Bravery, Remi Landaz and Bruno Cabral founded and self-built this multi-use space using repurposed materials and lessons learnt from having previously lived, worked and transformed the peanut factory in Fish Island. Its future is uncertain, due to the planned demolition of the building.

STREET INTERRUPTED is a public realm intervention by muf art/architecture and J+L Gibbons, commissioned by Design for London and completed in 2011. A tulip tree planted in the road and street furniture fixed at either end block the traffic, mimicking – and making permanent – the kind of improvised street closures frequently seen in the area. The terrazzo (made from reclaimed demolition rubble), the curtain-shaped garden fence, and the Hackney Wick sign are also part of the project, and were commissioned to local practitioners identified in a mapping exercise (‘Made in HWFI!’)

FRONTSIDE GARDENS. This skatepark is located on what used to be the site of Bangla TV. The site is owned by the LLDC, which designated it as an Interim Use Pilot Project in 2012 (originally for just four months). Andrew Willis won the competition and self-built the skatepark with very little time and money, using almost exclusively repurposed materials. This temporary project is meant to inform the strategy for the development of other interim use sites within the Olympic Park.

THE YARD. This theatre venue, originally conceived as a temporary project, was designed and built by Practice Architecture in collaboration with Christopher Daniel. Using reclaimed and recycled materials, a dormant warehouse was transformed into two separate spaces, an amphitheatre and a bar.

CRATE BREWERY. Drawing from their previous DIY experience with Counter Café, the Crate team and their collaborators scavenged a range of materials and built this bar in six weeks. Old railway sleepers, ladders and ratchet straps were repurposed as interior seating; old bed springs up-cycled as light fittings; pallet benches and scaffold plank tables make up the canal-facing furniture.

STOUR SPACE is a pioneering multi-use warehouse conversion. It was self-built using reclaimed materials; it introduced an socio-economic model based on a combination of income-generating tenants (in this case Counter Café), a programme of community-oriented public activities, and affordable studio provision. It has also led the way in the struggle for affordability, having been designated an Asset of Community Value and attempted to gain permanency through collective ownership.

VITTORIA WHARF is representative of the kind of live/work conversions that have transformed Hackney Wick warehouses into “creative factories”. A large central communal space and individual studios provide generous workspace for the tenants, who also have self-built bedrooms piled on the sides.

GUERRILLA PLAYGROUND. For a few months in 2011, a series of swings made out of Olympic hoardings and a basketball hoop were attached to certain trees in Fish Island. This guerrilla intervention may be seen as a makeshift public realm enhancement – one which enacted a new space of encounter for residents and passersby. The furniture was removed by council gardeners when they pruned the trees.

HACKNEY WICKED started in 2008 as a grassroots festival including exhibitions, live music and open studios. Its spontaneous and largely unregulated occupation of the area’s public spaces – day and night – was a fertile ground for unpredictable sociabilities. Over time, partly due to increasing scrutiny from the authorities, Hackney WickED has evolved into a tightly organised event focusing on showcasing local artists. In some ways, the festival’s evolution is synecdochic of the area’s destiny as a whole, from home to illegal raves and burnt cars to ‘creative quarter’.

AFFORDABLE WICK. This shed, designed and built by Richard Brown, has been used as a campaign tool for affordability in the area – as well as an actual, roaming 3sq ft workspace available for residencies and hire. The cabin was made using found materials and relying on a rich network of local skills and money-less exchanges – a reflection of tactics frequently deployed by local practitioners. The movement of the cabin also has a collective dimension, in that pulling it involves a number of helping hands and, once, parked, it requires a willing partner for its electricity supply.

WICK ON WHEELS is a roaming production and recycling unit based in a repurposed milk float. It travels around the area, hosting events and hands on workshops using existing local materials, resources and skills.
THE MAKESHIFT CITY AS POLITICAL PROJECT

Shane Boothby

The ‘makeshift’ is a useful concept for understanding urban processes in which people take ownership or use of spaces through sanctioned or unsanctioned means, and create the kinds of infrastructure required to meet their needs (be they material or social). These practices exist against a background of austerity characterised by resource scarcity and state retrenchment, and in a state of constant precarity against larger forces such as urban development. The makeshift takes advantage of (or fills in) a gap, but may also show the will and ambition to go beyond the ‘cracks’ and achieve a degree of permanence. I see the ‘makeshift city’, one produced through collective energies, networks of mutual dependency and localized decision making rather than through omnipotent masterplanning and investment-heavy development, as part of a political project to de-commodify and reclaim parts of the urban environment for common benefit over profit-driven interests. To explore this in more detail it is necessary to highlight some of the barriers and issues that currently hinder the achievement of such a project.

TEMPORALITY, OWNERSHIP AND THE REAPPROPRIATION OF SURPLUS VALUE

A theme emerged across both Wick Session 19 (The Values of Temporary Use) and 20 (Co-Producing the Makeshift) in the form of the so-called ‘2-5 year rule’ under which interim use sites are frequently leased. Despite the beneficial outcome for those involved in such projects (for example a community garden) this predetermined temporality is fundamentally about protecting external interests. A short lease ensures controlled disruption. An interim use offers the added benefit to the would-be developer of creating some degree of ‘buzz’ about a place (or surplus value) that will eventually be capitalised upon through appeals to uniqueness, the oft-heard phrase ‘up and coming’ and most likely, rent prices that match these qualities (whether perceived or actual). The reappropriation of the products of collective energies, what people do to improve the space, and the recuperation of once non-hegemonic practices into a commodified form, are significant hindrances to realising the potential of makeshift practices. The fundamental challenge is taking what was previously an exchangeable asset out of the market and rendering it a more stable use value that can provide the same or similar opportunities over time (e.g. perpetual affordability). One way of ensuring a degree of permanence in the use of and the conditions in which a space exists is through ownership. This does not necessarily have to mean enclosure and privatization but can take a more collective form such as community land trusts or cooperatives. Other means, such as defining specific uses and protecting their provision, are also available. This is precisely what the conservation of ex-industrial buildings in Hackney Wick may achieve. Beyond preserving the physical structure themselves, it is about trying to protect the ‘ecology of affordability’ that has created such an efflorescence of activity around this part of the East End. The question is whether makeshift practices are in a position to gain the political or economic power required to achieve permanency. The makeshift, as we know, rather tends to be fragile, low budget and relies on ingenuity rather than resources.

PROTECTION FROM (AND NEGOTIATION WITH) LOCAL GOVERNMENT

In situations where ownership of a space is unrealistic (for financial or other reasons), local government is potentially another avenue towards protecting and nurturing makeshift practices. As the planning authority, local authorities have the power (if not the political will) to hold off deleterious developments - whose benefits are rarely enjoyed by all - and instead promote commoning practices. There are indeed many examples of makeshift projects that have entered into negotiations with the local government when trying to gain a degree of (sanctioned) permanence. Such negotiations often demand a recognisable (i.e. legally defined) form, which, from the point of view of the collectives involved in the co-production of the makeshift, may appear as walking into an already rigged game and rendering what was previously a fluid and flexible collectivity a mere repetition of previous
forms. A shift towards formalisation can indeed be detrimental, although it may also be beneficial (or necessary) in order to avoid destruction.

This is where what I see as the fundamental power of opposition-through-form (i.e. by organising in a particular non-hegemonic way) is challenged by the desire of others to understand, regulate and even domesticate that form. If the potential strength of makeshift practices is to be found in their non-hegemonic form and denial of the status quo then we must ask whether an engagement with outside forces that demand they become, for example, a neighbourhood forum so they can influence planning policy or a trust so they can hold assets, will lead to a dilution and smoothing of their non-conformist edge. At the same time, it is inevitable that any potentially oppositional or anti-capitalist form of organisation (such as workers cooperatives) will continue to exist within the confines of the system it seeks to uproot/oppose. At present, although makeshift practices offer an alternative against the rampant commodification of the urban environment and a more democratic model of decision making than representative democracy (although there are issues of scale that cannot be covered in this space), there is an extent to which larger, sympathetic forces seem to be required as a means to stave off the inexorable process of capital accumulation that risks to undo all progress made through interstitial urban intervention. As Adolfo Estalella highlighted, a project such as El Campo de Cebada has continued to exist partly because of the collaboration of public servants in the local council (rather than politicians). The collectives involved in this space are trying to establish the conditions inside the public administration that will allow them to continue, made overt in their use of the term ‘hacking’ – knowing who to talk to, which parts of the system may be vulnerable, which language to use, etc. This, in turn, is part of a wider desire to roll the pedagogical significance of these projects back into the administration of the city, i.e. how the makeshift city can become a learning device for those in positions of power.

This raises the question of whether these entanglements with local government represent a reformation or a replacement of previous forms. It is a complex situation, in which collectives seem to be arguing at the same time that the state is unnecessary in the management of certain areas of public life, and that it is needed to protect such management by ‘the people’ from profit-driven motives. Perhaps, rather than an either/or alternative, demanding the right to neighbourhood-level decision making and self-management of urban spaces suggests a reconfiguration of the role of the state as a guardian of these practices, rather than an invitation to its retrenchment and a denial of its obligations.

**MAKESHIFT PRACTICES AND PREFIGURATIVE POLITICS.**

Prefiguration is about building an alternative in the present, a different strategy to the more traditional goal of seizing the structures of power. Having seen and heard the benefits of peoples experience of the makeshift, to keep it temporary and confine it to the “cracks” doesn’t seem enough. The metaphor inevitably allows cracks to go both ways - they can either grow and spread until the ground is so unstable it bursts asunder, or they can be filled in, paved over, and business as usual resumed. Whether makeshift practices should remain part of a ‘termite’ approach to social change, where numerous oppositional actions seek to wither away the power (or legitimacy) of the state, or whether there is something to be gained from trying to influence mainstream urban policy remains to be seen. Projects such as El Campo de Cebada are powerful both in their autonomy and their capacity to affect citywide politics in conditions of state retrenchment. Their emancipatory potential is linked to the way they are co-produced, self-managed, and governed collectively and horizontally. The complex web of relations and dependencies they are enmeshed within show us some of the ways in which a project of de-commodification and re-commoning of urban space can be achieved, and the possibilities lying therein.

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PLAYING WITH THE POSSIBLE

Toby Austin Locke

The creative process of design has often been seen as anterior to the more mundane process of bringing the resultant designs into being. The orthodox figure of the modernist architect, or urban planner, has often been presented as existing in a peculiar, two-dimensional domain of perfection and exactingness, in which their vision is played out on paper often removed from the niggling difficulties and differences of everyday life. The notebooks and drawings of such architects can often appear to operate in a closed space and temporality populated not by people’s lives, feelings and passions, but by geometric patterns, precise measurements, straight lines and specialist knowledges. The space of this modernist architectural imagination appears to occupy a domain akin to that of Euclidian plane geometry, in which perfect forms that are not to be found anywhere in the messy, imperfect and empirical world of life are produced and interface with one another. The production of the city, in such a model, is to be acted out in the studio or office, often with a significant disconnect from the messy lived experience of the buildings and spaces to which these designs refer. Expert knowledge acts out the production of the urban prior, and often with little reference to, the lived experience of those who inhabit and engage with the resultant spaces.

In contrast, underpinning makeshift practices there appear to operate a series of realignments concerning the design and production of the city. The contingency and improvisational elements of the varied practices that are grouped under the heading of makeshift could be seen to represent a move away from the modernist model, where the creation of urban space relies upon preconceived design and its subsequent enactment. Where once an architect might have designed a perfect space, later to be brought into the profane world and occupied by an ‘end user,’ makeshift practices appear to confound any separation between design, construction and end-use. The continual intersections between the projected futures of design, the existent availability of materials and skills, and the ever-changing conditions of lived experience, act out a continual play with the possible, a continual back and forth that sees the production of space emerging as a forever incomplete process. In such a manner makeshift practices could be seen as analogous to the maps of medieval explorers who would etch out the land surrounding them as they trod their paths, rather than the bird’s eye cartographies of today’s satellites. They represent a gradual interplay with the possible, a game in which desires and realities continually interface with one another leading to a production of space that is always a little bit new, always a little bit different.

TO THE ABSOLUTE UTOPIAS OF MODERNIST ARCHITECTURE, MAKESHIFT PRACTICES OPPOSE THEIR EXPERIMENTAL UTOPIAS

To the absolute utopias of the modernist architectural imagination, makeshift practices oppose their experimental utopias. These are utopias that acknowledge the non-existence of perfection, that know they will not be enacted as conceived, that relish in the contingency and transiency of the play between imagined futures and material
pasts and presents. They are utopias that know they cannot, and do not aim to, be fully realised, but rather situate themselves in the games of possibility from which new forms of sociality can emerge, uncovering reality as a process of unceasing creation. As such, makeshift practices that seek to be transformational, in their experimentation with new approaches and new forms of sociality, no longer aim to operate by means of rupture. They do not seek to make a radical break with a past to be left behind through emergence into a new society. Rather, they acknowledge the position of the past within the present and within future possibilities, the role of the past as that which draws the boundaries of the present, and remains encased within the present, pushing upon its limits.

These experimental utopias, being by their very nature contingent, refuse to close themselves off from their surrounding realities. Where expert knowledges can often produce for themselves insulated and inward focused domains capable of disregarding the awkward intricacies of everyday life, the vernacular and contingent foundation of makeshift practices prevents any kind of closure that would see them separated from their place in the world. Embedded at the basis of these practices is an openness capable of producing collective pedagogies of life and action, pedagogies that allow us, in dialogue with our surroundings, to collaboratively and collectively reimagine what given spaces, and even urban space more generally, is there for, who it serves, and what it may become.

In such a way makeshift practices contribute to the undoing of oppositions between designer and end-user, and expert and nonexpert in a manner comparable to that by which Brechtian theatre sought to deconstruct the fourth wall and with it, dismantle the audience-performer split. In short, the practices do not simply aim at a reversal of binary power relations, but at mode of play that would see power liberated from its entrapment within linear oppositions. Just as Brecht sought to liberate the passive audience from their alienation, so to do many makeshift practices seek to liberate a passive and subjected urban domain from the impositions of abstract design and imposed spatiality.

This realignment, however, as with the practices themselves, does not play out as simply in reality as it might do on paper. We must remain cautious of presenting these experimental utopias as solutions, as the kind of utopian answers that plagued modernist thought. There are two issues at stake here which we must, for our current purposes, seek to separate if only to conjoin them once more. The first is the importance of acknowledging the tragic nature of transformational practices, and so too the makeshift. For as much as practices may seek to assert themselves as affirmative, active and alternative, so too can they become turned upon themselves, becoming negative, reactionary and supportive of precisely that which they sought to escape. Hence, the makeshift may be packaged up as an aesthetic principle that can simply be adopted for whatever purpose; a thin veil masking the unbridled machinery of capital. We might point to the refurbishment of Gourmet Burger Kitchen’s exterior using scaffold boards, or Boxpark Shoreditch’s freight container aesthetic, as examples of such co-optation. Here, the makeshift is reduced to a façade, a mark of identity, a marketing tactic. This makeshift turned upon itself surrenders the contingency that allowed it to enter into play with possibilities and saw the constitution of its experimental utopias.

This brings us to the second issue at stake, namely the contingency of the makeshift and its position as question, not answer. At the base of
MAKESHIFT PRACTICES, THEN, DEVELOP THE RIGHT TO THE CITY AS THE RIGHT TO ASK QUESTIONS THAT ARE NOT DETERMINED BY DOMINANT FORCES AND PREVAILING CONDITIONS

Makeshift practices as experimental utopias rest on an endless questioning, an endless constitution and expansion of problematic fields. Such practices operate as a form of research, as lines of inquiry that seek to develop self-determined questions to be asked of the very urban domain that they seek to transform. It is through such continual experimentation and interplay with possibilities and potentialities that makeshift practices begin to constitute the right to the city as a series of problematic fields, as spaces of inquiry that ask what a renewed and transformed urban life might look like and how it might emerge. Makeshift practices, then, develop the right to the city as the right to ask questions that are not determined by dominant forces and prevailing conditions, for without this right to determine problematic fields the right to the city loses its transformational content. That is, it loses the ability to play with the possible, and to make of such possibilities renewed forms of sociality and urban life.

The makeshift does not offer itself up to us as the solution to the shortcomings of the modernist city; it does not present itself in the form of a general policy that might be applied to a range of empirical cases; nor does it present itself as an element of a right to the city that might be owned, that might belong to individuals, or even collectives. For makeshift practices, the right to the city emerges alongside a right to pose questions, to embark upon lines of enquiry—both material and conceptual—that may begin to probe the possibilities for renewed urban life. The right to the city, as such, is not something we own—any of us. Nor can it be owned. The right to the city is not simply an addendum to international law, a footnote to the constitutions of democratic legislatures and supranational organisations. It is not a policy, and it cannot be given or even taken. It can only be asked. To make of the right to the city an answer that would eclipse its question surrenders the experimental basis of the utopias with which it plays, and so too their investigative nature.

The articulation of the right to the city as a solution, as a policy, as a right to be claimed, taken or given, whilst it may seem to give us a lot, in fact takes much from us. And most of all, it takes from us the more basic, more fundamental, right to problems that precedes transformational and experimental articulations of the right to the city. That is, it robs us of the autonomy to define problematic fields on our own terms, as active and affirmative domains of investigation, lines of inquiry that are determining, not determined. The right to the city as coherent object, as policy or item of identity or ownership can only lead us along a reactionary and negative path—one which presents false choices, one in which the possible destinations are already set, one in which the terms of the debate are not open but instead close upon us, stifling life and action. It is this articulation of the right to the city, and the makeshift, as policy or solution that present to us the sorrowful side of tragedy, the side that causes life to collapse under the pressures of prevailing conditions, leading it to fold in upon itself and surrender hopelessly to a dominant force. In opposition to this we can continually repose the question: how do we make of the right to the city, and so too of the makeshift, a problematic field that remains active and affirmative, that can present a tendency capable of offering us antidotes to the sorrowful side of the tragedies of the urban?

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R-UrBAN: a bottom-up strategy that explores the possibilities of enhancing the capacity of urban resilience by introducing a network of resident-run facilities. R-Urban initiates locally closed ecological cycles that will support the emergence of alternative models of living, producing and consuming.

R-Urban is supported by the EU Life+ Programme of environmental governance. The project partners are AAA, Paris (coordinator), the City of Colombes and public works, London. Wick on Wheels and Wick Sessions are coordinated by public works as part of R-Urban. To learn more visit: www.r-urban-wick.net or contact us on mail@r-urban-wick.net

TOOL LIBRARY
The R-Urban Tool library is slowly taking shape and we will have our first meetings very soon. The Tool Library will be the first in London and one of the first of its kind in the UK. It will:
- Stock, lend and maintain tools
- Pool tools, enabling makers to exchange tools and expertise directly between themselves
- Recirculate used tools which have become surplus in the construction industry
- Offer a venue to host talks and workshops wwaround making to share skills & knowledge

You can follow news at: www.r-urban-tools.net

ART MOVES
Wick on Wheels is taking part in the Art Moves exhibition on the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. The Art Moves exhibition showcases the very best of mobile architecture and design as part of Open House London weekend. Bringing together artists from across Europe to discuss their portable practices and explore how mobile art and cultural projects have contributed to communities and regeneration schemes across the world.

www.artmoves.org.uk

WICK SESSION NO.21
Wick Session No.21: Mobile Ecologies takes place as part of the Art Moves exhibition held in Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. Mobile Ecologies will bring together a diverse range speakers who initiated mobile projects. A series of short presentation will be followed by a discussion, highlighting the ecological ambitions behind the projects and explore the cultures and practices of ‘doing things mobile’.

www.r-urban-wick.net/events/mobile-ecologies

PLANK
We have designed PLANK, an easy to assemble furniture system using scaffolding boards and timber pallets - two readily available materials which can easily be re-used, often at no cost. PLANK tries to be economical with the material used and the labour invested in making the pieces.

It is inspired by Enzo Mari’s ‘Autoprogettazione’ principles developed in the 1970s. Mari wanted to produce ‘superior quality, functional furniture from ubiquitous materials in your own home’, conceived in reaction to the glut of mass produced furniture around at the time.

www.wickcuriosityshop.net/collection/p_ank

HACKNEY WICKED
R-Urban joined Hackney Wicked Festival and exhibited a cross section of R-urban activities and prototypes in the White Building which became a popular stop on the Hackney Wicked treasure hunt.

WICK ZINE:
Co-edited by: public works, Isaac Marrero-Guillamón
Graphic Design: Villalba.Lawson

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