OLIVER WAINWRIGHT: Are we good to go? Good evening everyone and welcome to the fifth edition of Rip It Up, Kieran Long’s lecture series. I’m afraid that this week we have some trouble makers for you, and that is the reason that Kieran has actually fled the country so I am in charge.

My name is Oliver Wainwright, I am building’s editor of BD Magazine and it a real pleasure to be here to introduce three of the most interesting, young, radical kind of spatial practitioners working in London at the moment. I can’t really call them architects because the ARB would probably sue them, but they are kind of well on the way to being architects.

So they are people that are kind of reinventing the way that architecture works and kind of challenging conventional notions of practice. People that have essentially made buildings without briefs, projects without clients and books without publishers; which are quite impressive achievements right out of school.

So they are reclaiming architecture as an oppositional practice, and a challenge to established roads of thinking. So we have Practice Architecture, Paloma and Lettice who are actually still on their way in true troublemaker fashion - they will probably arrive halfway through the presentation. Cineroleum, which are the guys that took over a a disused petrol station on Clerkenwell Road this summer. And This Is Not A Gateway, Trenton and Deepa, are going to introduce us to their new kind of model of open forum debate. So I will just go through quickly what these different people have done before they arrive.

Practice has an amazing achievement of attracting 30,000 to Peckham a few years ago, an achievement in itself when they built a temporary café on the roof of an abandoned car park for the Hannah Barry gallery, with a budget of £5,000 and an army of about two hundred volunteers. They succeeded, I think, in having sponsorship from Campari, and it became the place to be for London’s glitterati. Which is a controversial question in itself once a project like that gets appropriated and becomes bought into. Does that undermine its value? And those are some of the questions we will be asking them tonight.

Cineroleum equally started off as a kind of bottom-up project. It was incredibly successful; tickets sold out within four minutes of being released every weekend. There are 4,000 petrol stations lying derelict across the country and this is just one example of how they could be reimagined. But, they became so popular they appeared in Vogue and I think it’s actually this month’s issue you can see a lovely double-page spread. Haagen-Dazs wanted to hire them to build something, so they quickly became kind of commandeered by
much more commercial enterprises. Again, something that we will be challenging them about tonight.

So firstly we would like to kick off with Trenton and Deepa from This Is Not A Gateway. They started their organization about three years ago. It’s an annual festival which is a kind of challenge to the conventionally closed forums of conference circuits and regeneration events. They just finished the third This Is Not Gateway four-day festival which has the tagline ‘Independent, Critical, Free, Rigorous and Productive’ which is all things we all try and be here on a Thursday night. So without further ado I will hand over to Trenton and Deepa from This Is Not A Gateway.

[Applause]

TRENTON OLDFIELD: OK, good evening everybody. Can you hear me? I talk very, very softly so if you can’t hear please just say so because I have a soft voice.

Thank you firstly for inviting Deepa and I, we are both of us neither architects and neither have desire to be architects either. I am going to thank Kieran and Olly for this lecture series. The concept of a post-punk lecture series is very interesting. Some of you will know who follow our work one of our favourite songs we talk about is by Public Image Ltd, which is after the Sex Pistols and it’s called ‘This Is Not A Love Song’ which we will talk about later; about the ideas of ‘this is not’ a little bit.

As you heard previously from Oliver, the catch-phrase for our festival was ‘Independent, Critical, Free, Rigorous and Productive’ and that I think is, probably a reasonable summary about motivations and our ambitions with this work and also a response to what we saw was happening previously in our own professional and personal context.

All this stuff was happening… things were being homogenised, people were being sponsored by corporate sponsors, and there was a lack of independence as a result. There were events that were basically set up entirely to channel the ideas of corporate endeavours. And as many of them happened in the street, they were blurring a lot of what was, we thought, urbanism and culture and creativity etc. So we set up, somewhat as a response, somewhat as a kind of frustration and a real sort of anxiety, a real frustration. We were actually really quite pissed off about what was going on.

We thought we know there is a load of really interesting, very critical, very independent, very thoughtful work going on, how can we manage to pull this together? So I think it is interesting, the catch phrase for this ‘Rip It Up and Start Again’, which is referred to as a post-punk…the title of a post-punk book by Simon Reynolds. That’s my interpretation of the title anyway. For us it is a great place to start.

We have some difficulties with the name of the title of tonight’s talk, ‘The Troublemakers’, because we certainly don’t see ourselves as troublemakers. Being critical and independent doesn’t seem like causing trouble to me. I would have thought if you were working for corporate organizations etc. that would actually be the troublemakers, so maybe we’ll see that with the restaurant and
the cinema; both seem quite highly commercial endeavours. But, we might be wrong at that. So to pass over to Deepa.

[SLIDE]

DEEPA NAIK: We only have one image to show you and unfortunately you can’t really read it, but it’s available on our website. Basically it’s a series… maybe that’s a bit better? It’s a series of statistics, and we produced this in 2008 which was to launch out this festival.

It is called Keys to the City, and the image represents something of our motivations for establishing This Is Not A Gateway, which was a real anxiety about a post-critical condition particularly in relation to the built environment. We felt that knowledge about cities was increasingly being produced in silos and that there was a huge gap between those on the ground and those writing policies and making positions.

So, for example going to a discussion about architecture the room would be filled with urban planning students and architects for example. There was also a lot of celebratory rather than critical work with a focus on star architects, academics or artists. It seemed to us that there was a lot of waste. The community art projects that promised a lot could almost never deliver, resulting in many disenfranchised residents for example.

So, we started to compile research to understand whether our intuition and our observations were right; whether or not there was a disturbing trend in urbanism and particularly within urban forums. We realized that there is a lot of work being done on cities – research projects, conferences, exhibitions, publications. But, unfortunately we started to see that our thesis was correct, and moreover we were surprised by the scale of the problem. The vast majority of urban forums were inaccessible, they were very expensive, they were overwhelmingly male, very discipline-specific and in terms of ethnicity they didn’t represent the cities that we knew and worked in. The result of this was a complete isolation on both ends of the scale. So this sort of visualization represents the narrow group that make and shape space on cities.

I will just talk a little bit about one case study which is… I don’t know if it’s on here. But, there was basically the intercultural city, so it’s the first two boxes on the top and the bottom. The Intercultural Cities Conference, it brought together leading speakers from across the world to discuss interculturalism from the social, cultural, economic, spatial perspectives. It was very a timely and interesting topic and unique and important knowledge being shared relating to strategic and global shifts.

The problem is because the speakers only included the top level of professionals, there were no smaller charities, community groups or individuals represented. The conference was very expensive. The cost… so about over £200 pounds a day. So these people who belonged to charities or community groups or who are just residents, for example, were unable to attend, so the thinking was not challenged from the perspective of someone who was outside of the established circuit. So we found this very isolating, self-referential and replicating.
And lastly, the demographics of the speakers were not at all representative of what one would call ‘interculturalism.’ So you can see the small number of women speakers and of which there were no ethnic minorities. I know the term ‘ethnic minorities’ is problematic, but I hope within this context it is useful in understanding the constitution of the speakers.

So it seemed to us that the urban industry – which Trenton will talk more about – is contributing to the new inequalities as made apparent by Danny Dorling’s book ‘Injustice: Why Social Inequality Persists’. So you know, terms like elitism, exclusion, greed, prejudice and despair.

From our experience working on the ground we could see the two things were working in parallel. On the one hand, rapid urbanization and the increasing complexity of cities, and on the other hand rigid and insular forums of urban knowledge, they weren’t dovetailing and our assessments were destined to fail. So these are some of the motivations of what propelled us to start This Is Not A Gateway.

TRENTON OLDIE: So many people ask us what the name, This Is Not A Gateway, is about. Probably the easiest way to explain it is to read what we wrote recently in our book because we summarized it, I hope...

“One of our goals in forming an organization was to draw attention to, and attempt to rectify the injustices and inequalities resulting from much recent urban development, and consequently we looked for a name that would reflect this. By calling the organization This Is Not A Gateway we are endeavouring to address our concerns in a serious but humorous way.

We wanted to place a figurative flag of protest in, for example, the mud flaps of the Thames Gateway Project, a central government project supported almost universally by the urban industry to build tens of thousands of very low quality suburban homes across a flood plain to the east of London. We also wanted to raise a protest flag against the Thames for business people and bureaucrats to homogenise and create gateways in education.

With the Bologna Accord getting ready to roll out, our aim was to extend the potential spaces of education, increase opportunities of getting educated and encourage critical pedagogies outside the institution.

The name is also a self-reflective critique. We do not wish to establish a canon nor be seen as a gateway to certain knowledge or approaches. The name is a challenge to the knowing and unknowing attempts to enclose and depoliticize the process of conceiving, making and managing cities.

While obvious in the formal education system, attempts at establishing these enclosures are sharply illuminated when studying the public events of the urban industry: the conferences, the lectures, the festivals. The name stands in opposition to the concept imbedded in these ideas and lexicons that are the foundation of the urban industry.

It is an attempt to highlight the politics of cities and the politics of making cities and lampoon fascist slogan ‘There is no alternative.’ There is no beginning or end of the city, there is no place of entry or exit, there is no entrance that can be opened, there are no gateway texts, no gateway knowledges.
In choosing to recognize gateways we give others the ability to create boundaries, borders and limitations to our lives. In more cases than not, the barrier is first erected as a speculative and opportunistic manoeuvre. By accepting that a gateway exists, we are in effect handing over our agency. Acknowledging the rights for gates and for enclosures to exist, either in the physical or metaphorical sense is resigning oneself, submitting the person or ideas that erected the barriers. These fences, these gates, must be challenged.

Okay, I can go on a little bit… “Not unlike Rene Magritte’s 1928 series of painting, ‘The Treachery of Images’, and in particular ‘This Is Not A Pipe’, along with arguments in Foucault’s book of the same title, we wanted to problematize agreed meanings and realities, along with addressing Magritte, and other calls for critical pedagogy. The need to do so was urgent, as our experiences within cultural institutions, academia and urban regeneration revealed that many people were unwittingly, but in significant ways, legitimatizing aspects of new strains of neo-liberalism across cities and thus themselves ushering the fields of a state of de-politicization or post-criticality. It is the refusal to accept that space, place and cities could be de-politicized that inspired the name of the organization.”

DEEPA NAIK: So what we did… I sort of outlined what was happening in the more savage circuits, but we also knew from our work that there was compelling and rigorous work happening on the ground. So we set up as a not-for-profit in 2007. We have three areas of work; salons, the festival and publication. We act as facilitators. Our role is providing an infrastructure, a platform, for ideas. Our primary goal is to engender a thinking about urban space that is diverse, entangled, critical and complex and this runs through the core of all of our work.

In a few more years we hope to be redundant, because this thinking will be normalized. It is adopted by established forum we have highlighted, so one would never think to curate a series of talks about space, buildings, cities without thinking about whether any women or ethnic minorities or diverse people are engaged.

So our salon series; we started organizing a series of salons which were informal discussions with people who are invited from a range of backgrounds to unpick a very focused, urban question. With ten minute discussions… sorry, ten minute presentations with more time for discussions in the audience. Very informal, they are always free, always beer and bagels. And by having an interdisciplinary panel of speakers we were able to attract a much more broad range of participants, making a very rich and sometimes confusing discussion.

Our recent salon was in May which was called Refusing To Accept One’s Place: Resistance and Spatial Reform. So as you might know, there is an increase in poverty and deprivation in European cities and this is sometimes referred to as the return of the slums. The salon looked at the spatial manifestation of social exclusion. So we invited speakers including a community organizer from LA, a community organizer from the east end of London, artists, media activists, theorists and historians to come and participate.
Then we have our festivals. We just had our recent festival in October. So we felt that a big arena was needed to showcase work that was occurring on the ground and that didn’t have the visibility or credibility.

It was important for us that we don’t replicate the urban forums, back to front, that we didn’t create the same kind of binaries. We wanted to create an engagement between all levels, so we posted an open call for proposals. We don’t set a theme though for this year and next we are developing a strand, looking at central business districts.

We are interested in finding out what questions people are engaged in, working in, and this kind of bubbles up and we develop that further in our book. So we have no idea what shape the festival will take until the proposals start to come in, so we don’t know how many events there will be, what formats. As you can see – and this was in our first year – in the last two boxes [referring to slide], that the festival completely challenges the statistics of the established urban forums. If we have more time at the end, we can talk a little bit more about the central business ‘theme’ or ‘strand’ and we also have our program if you want to have a look to see more about this year’s festival.

Trenton read a bit from our book, and that is our next area of work. We capture the knowledge from the festival and make it available to wide readership. So, this is our attempt to penetrate the silos of urban discourse and to bring different communities together. The book includes the work from both the salons and the festival.

It takes us one year to produce a book after the festival, so the book that Trenton read from is kind of a culmination from the work of 2009. By placing it in a book, our ambition it to break through the more formal processes of knowledge and exchange so it can be properly referenced, for example. Books still remain the cornerstone of knowledge. Though you can now publish quite easily online, printed publications are still very important. New technologies, like print on demand and small-run printing, have allowed people like us to circulate ideas more easily. So our publishing or our in-print is called Myrdle Court Press and we also publish books by other urbanists investigating cities.

TRENTON OLDFIELD: How long do we have?

OLIVER WAINWRIGHT: Three or four minutes.

TRENTON OLDFIELD: Three of four minutes, okay. We wanted to conclude with this idea that we introduced at the beginning, I think, which is the concept of an urban industry and a post-critical condition of an urban industry.

Most people… I mean, what we are trying to say with that, if you are aware of Bourdieu’s thinking on habitats and the cultural industry in which… well certainly with Bourdieu, he is arguing that through these processes we are – in terms of the cultural industry through the media etc. – we are creating this position where we ourselves are involved with our passivity, … I mean his particular argument with that is in relation to capitalism; allowing through our passivity, allowing capitalism and its ability to run rampant over us.

So when we talk of the urban industry, we wanted to get away from this idea of architects, planners, etc. and professionals working in the built
environment and start to kind of frame it in Bourdieu’s ideas of the cultural industry. You start to say “Actually look. What are we doing as participants in what we say is an industry which is making huge inroads across the world? Be it in terms of deciding of what is a sophisticated city and what cities need in terms of infrastructure etc. etc. And how are we involved in that?”

Both of us have written or we write about it in the introduction of the second book, about our own personal experiences of that, of what it means and how can we make sure that this kind of post-critical condition that results from that, where we no longer challenge ourselves, where we are happy to do projects in China or the Middle East or, you know, or on the streets of London with money that is in the process of starting to enslave us – that’s kind of an extreme – but this is the end picture.

How have we got into the position to do that? And the book that was most useful to me and if anybody is reading, any lecturer or student etc. I highly recommend this book. It’s called ‘The Favoured Circle: Social Foundations of Architectural Distinction’ which is written by an Australian chap, believe it or not, and his experiences at the University of Sydney as a lecturer there, and the processes that he experienced of going… of how… His main target in this book is this kind of idea of the architectural genius, which also exists in kind of art; there is this one, creative, brilliant mind etc. But through this book he really manages to take on lots of Bourdieu’s ideas and highlights them through his own personal experience.

In terms of a conclusion, the challenge or what we would like to talk about tonight is about this urban industry and this post-critical condition. How have we got here? And how are we involved with it? And what can we do about it?

Thank you.

[Applause]

OLIVER WAINWRIGHT: Great, thank you very much to Trenton and Deepa from This Is Not A Gateway. I am very glad we went first with that one because there is so much to digest over the next two presentations. I am expecting everyone by the end of the next two sessions to digest some of that and to come up with some questions. I am going to be picking on you at random, in the same way that Kieran always does, so watch out.

You’ll be very pleased to hear that our next speakers have arrived and are sitting right in front of me. I think we have Lettice and Paloma, from Practice Architecture. They are an interdisciplinary practice of architects and I think a sculptor, who took over the rooftop of a Peckham car park last summer and the summer before. To convert it into a café, succeeding in attracting over 30,000 people over three months with a budget of only about £5,000 and an army of volunteers. They are reinventing ideas of practice. And without any further ado I will hand over to Paloma and Lettice from Practice Architecture.

PALOMA GORMLEY: Hello. Sorry we are a bit late. We are already living up to our troublemaking reputation. So we came to this project through Hannah Barry who is a friend of mine, and she was talking about this sculpture exhibition that she had been doing on the roof of a car park in Peckham. She said 'Next
So our brief was really loose and it was literally that: “I want a café or restaurant or something up here so that when people make the trip down to Peckham they can have somewhere to spend a bit more time, make a day trip of it.” So we then invited our friend, Frank, to come and do the food and he invited Michael. No, Michael did the food and Frank did the bar, and that was the team. It was us, the gallery, Frank and Michael.

LETTICE DRAKE: Something on the site... first slide, it’s the car park that is 135 metres wide by 32 metres wide. It is max about twenty cars in there at any point. The top two floors have been disused or closed off eight years before Hannah got in. So in terms of activating forgotten urban spaces, it was really Hannah that identified the potential of this.

But, it’s a bizarre place. You can see – when we went up there for the first time – this massive open deck but you can see the whole of London from … to Battersea Power Station. And so, weirdly, the design became about responding to the building and to the view. So unlike a lot of our training, it wasn’t responding to the streets and adjoining buildings and people that might pass. It is completely removed from that.

PALOMA: So we began to try and think about how this café would land on this roof, and it really kind of began with a box, and how this box related to the view, and how the box related to the site, and maybe the experience of kind of travelling up the car park.

It became clear to us that this end point, the highest point, also where you maximize on the view. It made sense.

So we began kind of developing this box and I drew this initial design. When you were standing up, the view would actually be obscured and it was only when you sat down to have a drink or whatever, that the view was revealed again. We came quite far from this in the end with this thing.

This is a ratchet trap and you normally see these on the side of a commercial vehicle. As soon as we had gotten this idea it came together with the box, initially, so we strapped the box down with these straps. We were really worried about wind; it’s really high up, it’s above all the surrounding buildings. We were terrified our thing was just going to take off over Peckham.

Then from this point we thought “Well, we can just remove the box” and then the whole structure, our structure and the car park, became completely integral and were working together. We kind of harnessed the structure or nature of the car park using as minimal means as we could.

LETTICE: But it was more than a structural game, obviously. In terms of creating the place we wanted to, we had this idea of communal dining to play with, and so we made long tables where people were forced to sit with strangers. The bar and the kitchen were pushed to the back... but were open for the diners to see. People who worked there could look across the view.
Yeah, so we are going to talk a bit more about the design. It was all made out of reclaimed scaffolding boards which are cheap and very available. So its three boards bolted together to make each set of columns. There are nine sets of columns and the ratchet straps are fifty metres long.

So that’s the kitchen and bar. That’s at night. That’s Frank and, yeah, this is… well you want to talk about this now…

**PALOMA:** This is just a corner in the design. And it came be really important, it came be people’s favourite place to be, because you could be there on your own… so we’re talking about this corner with this horrible rug on it. You could be there on your own, you could relax, you could almost fall asleep leaning against that wall. It was really comfortable with groups. That interested us, the success of that space as a really social place. Here is a picture illustrating that.

So people would use it in a whole multitude of ways. And when the café was most empty, this would always be full. From that corner, it developed into its own project.

This is called Bench One and it is a project that we did for a sculpture park in Roche Court, and the principles come very directly from that first snuggy area. It’s just raked bench seating, and then doing that again. It was the simplest form we could come up with using these scaffolding planks as a module.

And this is it being used for talks. They have quite a big education program at this place, so there is… apparently kids love it. There is a game – which we didn’t know existed – but it’s called ‘X-Factor’ and this is a perfect place for ‘X-Factor’ to happen.

**LETTICE:** Okay, so a big one, you know, an obvious thing that defines us from the standard practice is that we build our own buildings. That was really assumed when we started designing it. We wanted to build it. We’d worked on Exyst’s Lido in Southwark, we’d been exposed to the fact that this was possible.

So yeah, a lot of design was governed by us being able to do it. So we emailed all our friends and family and asked them to come. We were really overwhelmed by how many people turned up, and how many people’s friends turned up. Each year we have had about sixty people helping us out over the course of three weeks.

**PALOMA:** This is quite a momentous moment; this is the first post going into place. We had no real idea before it began of how actually all these things that we kind of designed would fit together when it came to be real. It took about a day, I think, of working out how to get bolts going straight through the wood to this other hole on this steel feed, and we managed it.
LETTICE: Yeah, I mean that was an exciting thing for us. We designed the details but we weren’t experienced in building and most of the people that came to help us were. So we designed it, but it was a real group thing working out how to overcome these problems as they came up. Factory lines started to appear.

This is chair-making day. We designed a chair and without much direction this production line set itself up. So it’s just interesting to see how things like that happen. Also, skills spread. People would turn up and wouldn’t know how to use a circular saw and without, again, much input from us, that knowledge would just be passed on.

This is the roof arriving, these are the steps. This is roof day. That is lot of people under a roof.

PALOMA: That’s what they’re doing.

LETTICE: That’s what they are trying to do.

PALOMA: So we became very familiar with timber, particularly scaffolding planks, as we had to become very familiar with cardboard at university. And then we met Henry, who is the third member of our practice. He grew up in the steel works, his parents owned the factory. He is the most kind of intuitive maker of things you will ever meet. He kind of opened us up to the world of metal and steel.

And we did this project in Peckham where there is a gallery/bar and we were asked to the whole thing, but we only ended up doing the façade. So we designed these two, giant steel sash windows as sort of doors. They are sash windows because they… I can’t find another example of steel-slash windows. Because everything is so heavy, everything had to be scaled up.

So instead of rope it was motorbike chain and the lead weights were these huge, one metre long, ridiculously heavy – you had to lift them with two people – things and the whole mechanisms is exposed on the inside so you can see how it all worked.

But anyway, the point of this really is to say that steel suddenly became this malleable material where it had been something completely rigid and that kind of experience… it changed the way that we have come to look at two-dimensional details.

You know…So much time at architecture school you would be drawing, you know, where the block of wood meets the bit of steel meets the glass, and suddenly those details have a meaning and they are three-dimensional and they are manageable things. You know what a piece of metal is and what its tolerances are.

Okay, sorry. Can we go back to Frank’s? We kind of subconsciously and maybe consciously embedded social ideas into Frank’s, how it was made, and kind of what it meant to us. It couldn’t ever really be a five-star restaurant. It was humble and there is not much comfort on that roof; there are no cushions, you pretty much get wet still when it rains.

This year the management, Frank and Michael, tried to do their best and make it as civilized as possible with amazing waiting staff and everything was
really well organized. There was lobster. But, it became clear to all of us that there was a kind of in balance beginning to happen, where the architecture was inhibiting the whole thing, Frank’s Café, from becoming more civilized.

I guess that is something that we have realized more recently; perhaps there was more of a kind of conscious or sub-consciousness about the place we wanted it to be. So Frank’s is so self-evidently connected with the people that made it. It is really handmade and it is such a contrast to the environments that we normally find ourselves in in cities. Where, you know, mistakes or anything that has evidently got the imprint of a hand or a person on it is covered up or hidden.

This is the opposite. I think that was quite a welcome relief to people who came to the café and maybe why they found it so charming. Its failure is the fact that halfway through a meal you might be passed a broom to push bulges of water that were filling up on the roof. It was rough and ready and it wasn’t finished all perfect in any way. And that seemed to draw people to it.

LETTICE: So where we are now is at the same client. Well, Paloma’s friend Hannah who asked us to the café. She has asked us to build her an art library in Peckham. It’s about two hundred metres away from the car park.

In terms of if this happens, in terms of what we are doing now, it is going to be interesting for us to see how this work will adapt to a project that isn’t permanent, has a much bigger budget, and a much longer build period to build. As much as possible the design, at least at the moment, is still being governed by detailing which means that we can make it... to see what happens when we will need professional help. So, that will be interesting.

PALOMA: These kinds of projects, the kinds of projects that the Cineroleum group is doing, what Exyst are doing, perhaps exist in their own category because they wouldn’t be possible if they hadn’t been done in this way, in this way meaning that the architect or whoever, the people who are doing the project are involved in every element of it. There is a collapse of specialization. They generally seem to be small budget and not commercially driven, and they have been in places whose long term future hasn’t yet been decided.

LETTICE: And in terms of the title of this talk, and us being ‘troublemakers’, we were thinking about it and trying to work out in what ways that does apply to us or doesn’t. Because when we were invited to this talk, we were asked to make claims for our work and that immediately felt quite difficult to do beyond saying “You can do this, you can build your own building.”

Also the lecture has been entitled ‘Targets’ and in the terms that This Is Not A Gateway have been talking about, we don’t know how much thinking there was behind it. This does challenge conventional practice, but that wasn’t a target within our project. We just wanted to build a building. So in terms of kind of relating back to what This Is Not A Gateway are thinking about, something we are interested in is... the work of Exyst and muf because they are combining this way of thinking with some kind of social agenda which is, I think, not present in what we are doing at the moment.
But we think that there is potential to see. What muf and Exyst are showing how the type of thinking might be going on... basically a social agenda can be combined with this way of working. But I think the potential of this is in the fact of having a low budget and a short time period. It basically reduces the risk and that means you can be more experimental because there aren't massive implications if it doesn't go that well.

PALOMA: The car park that we built the café on is owned by the Councils and they don’t tend to trust small organizations or individuals. Hannah managed to get around that by spending about four or five years building up a really close relationship with them. So she gained there trust and then took a massive risk in inviting us. I was in my third at school studying for my finals and Lettice was working full time. She’d hardly seen anything I had ever done, and we were designing this thing in Sketch Up models emailed between London and Cambridge.

But, we have been trying to think – having been asked to make some claims – about why this way of working and this kind of project might be important. We’re not completely comfortable saying any of this stuff and maybe I won’t be able to find so I don’t have to...

[Laughter]

Here we go. No... it must be this bit, okay. Councils work slowly and on a huge scale and it is very difficult for them to accommodate or create themselves the finer texture of what cities are. Perhaps this kind of project can influence the larger governing forces in deciding what a city is, and could be. And maybe make the council reassess approach and accommodate this kind of thing within it.

LETTICE: As an alternative to that, instead of waiting for councils to accommodate projects like this... I mean, this was pretty obedient, it is not very troublesome. We had Planning Permission, and Building Control check the building. But through the work that Finn Williams is doing here, he is looking at loopholes in planning. I think there could be quite a lot of potential for a lot of this kind of work to happen through exploiting those.

PALOMA: There is a hunger for this kind of project in contrast to what developers are doing and what the Council are doing, and it is something a bit more tangible, more basic, more connected to people, because it was obviously handmade by people.

There seem to be a few different parties that physically make the cities what they are. There are the developers, the Council and then people who are at home doing their home extensions like DIYers and people like us. And each of those parties works in a very different way on a very different scale with different impacts and agendas. But, perhaps this kind of thing is an important element in the balance.

[Applause]
OLIVER WAINWRIGHT: Thank you very much to Paloma and Lettice from Practice Architecture for that enlightening presentation. I am getting a bit worried because they are the second group that have denied the fact that they are troublemakers. And I’m starting to think that Kieran’s definition is slightly wrong.

But anyway, we will see what the final group have got to say. Lots of interesting questions raised there; the idea of a modern version of ‘patronage’ with Hannah Barry; what it means to work for free, with an army of volunteers; and also what it means to be an architect, which relates to something that has been heavily debated on our website this week with the idea of potentially kind of second-tier ARB registrations. That’s something to bring up at the end potentially in our discussions.

So without further ado I will pass on to the guys from the Cineroleum. This is Giles, Paloma and Alice.

GILES: Sorry, I have been censored. Hi everybody. Can anyone hear us?

PALOMA: Hi. So, as he said I am Paloma, this is Giles and Alice and we are here to talk about the Cineroleum project which was a petrol station which we turned into a cinema.

The Cineroleum was initiated by us and a group of our peers, many of whom are in the audience tonight. This project was started without a client, without a brief and without a site, just with the impetus to build something together and to be involved in every aspect of the process from conception to construction.

GILES: So this joint desire to make something left us in want of a site, and coincidental sightings of disused petrol stations by people in the group sparked an interest. Then we found out, as this slide suggests, it is part of a kind of national trend.

Not only that, but they are part of a scenario that we feel the contemporary city finds itself in; one of decreasing auto-mobility, the result of which is a rash of disused automobile infrastructural spaces, like the car park and like the petrol station. It is a rich vein that we felt we needed to engage with.

ALICE: So this is our site. We looked at about three or four different sites; there was one in Brixton, one in Bermondsey, and this one. And we tried to get in touch with all the people who owned them but this was the only one that was available to use at the time.

So, we presented a project to Simon Fox, of ... Developments, who are property developers who owns the site. He was very happy for the project to go ahead on a temporary basis. The site was originally going to be tied into a large block of flats but the project had been put on hold for another eight months plus, so it was going to be completely empty for that period.)
GILES: So three months and one hundred volunteers later a 120-seat not-for-profit cinema opened at this petrol station.

PALOMA: So after we found the site we had to establish a brief for ourselves. We wanted to build something which would open the site to the public realm, and turn this disused petrol station into an exciting location and event space.

We chose a typology which had suffered a parallel decline to the petrol station: the picture palace. Many of Britain’s picture palaces have been re-appropriated as bingo halls and churches and the cinema is moving increasingly to out of town multiplexes. We saw this disused petrol station as an opportunity to engage cinema right in the centre of the city.

So with the help of the Cinema Museum we began research into the history of picture palaces. We decided to use key iconographic elements of them in our petrol station, most significantly the illuminated sign, the flip up cinema seats in the raked auditorium, and the first room curtain which we wanted to hang around the petrol station canopy.

So just as the drive-ins of 1950s America brought cinema out from its enclosures, we wanted to expose elements of cinema, often enclosed behind the blank facades, and bring the experience of cinema to the street. This was the auditorium underneath the petrol station canopy.

ALICE: And this is our plan, so this is what we came up with. That bit was where the petrol station used to be and at the top was the old garage of the petrol station. It used to be a Somerfields. In the day time the curtain, which was hung around the edge of the roof, was hung up and the whole of the raked seating was revealed. So everyone could see, so walk past it and what it might turn into in the evening.

At night time, the curtain popped down, speedily, you saw the curtain, and you walked down the street, came in through the little mock velvet curtain we made, and walk past the curtain and then entered into the foyer, the entrance at the back part, top right corner (where number two is). There was a flashing neon sign above the curtain, flashing.

Then everyone would file into the foyer and collect their ticket from the ticket booth, number three. Number four is the bar where you could buy popcorn or ice cream or drinks. There was music playing and old-style popcorn, it was really great.

Everyone would hang out in the foyer for about fifteen minutes or something, waiting for the film to start. The back curtain would raise up and everyone would walk in, file in to the cinema, up into the raked seating, sit in their seats and start watching the film. Just at the back, that little box, that was the projector was.

GILES: And as the film ended, the curtain would raise on this cinematic vision of Clerkenwell Road. Okay, so inherently, a street is not a cinematic kind of experience. But we felt that we managed to contrive, from the way that we built the cinema, to create, and have this essentially filmic thing.
The rake enabled it to become a spectacle for the people sitting in the audience. The device of the curtain raising extends the street into the auditorium, mixing the experience of the reality of the street with the film inside.

This combination of reality and the film, seems to us like quite an opposition to the traditional experience of the multiplex. The experience takes the film out of the traditional theatre and re-contextualizes it in the place where it came from; the city. It gave an invitation to the people who sat there watching the film, to re-evaluate what they had just seen in terms of their context, their situation, the city itself.

PALOMA: So we brought cinema out of its environmentally controlled box and onto the street. What about the noise of Clerkenwell Road? The idea of controlling the sound through individual headphones was sort of alien to this project. The Cineroleum was about creating a collective atmosphere of cinema.

We thought it was vital that the audience hear the sound of the film project into the space and also be able respond together to it, be it shock or laughter. So, we chose a film called ‘Programme’ which would respond to the site, one dominated by spectacular visuals and loud soundtracks, perhaps most evidently done by Steven Spielberg where the protagonist is chased by possessed lorry.

For me, some of the most poignant moments of cinema happened when the sounds from the street synchronized with the scenes of the film. For example with Fritz Lang’s ‘M’ when sirens blared past during a silent chase scene. Ultimately it was an experiment; the sound from the road was an unknown variable. We hoped the audience would relate the experience to its context and accept the ambient noise.

ALICE: Okay, this is a major, major, major part of the project and probably one of the biggest factors why we started it in the first place. About building it altogether, basically. We wanted to set it up… We built the whole thing in three weeks and we wanted to set up so that anyone could come and help build on site.

All of the time which we were on site over a hundred people came to help. Either they… from coming up for half an hour and then leaving, or some people turned up right at the start, completely new to the project, and stayed and helped for the whole time.

So we wanted to try to set up an apparatus where people could learn how to make parts of the project quite easily. So for instance the cinema seats, Adam and Amy made made this amazing jig, massive, basically the size of this table... where you could pretty much make a whole cinema of seat. It was brilliant because we could set up this enormous production line where everyone could come and make a seat together.

The same ways which Palom and Lettice talked about, our choice of materials was all based on budget and what we could get for pretty much nothing. Our budget was zero.
So that is the cinema seats. Or people coming and helping to make the sign. Most of the materials were reclaimed from the site. Some of the shelving units were already in the garage foyer.

I’ll just touch on this briefly, but in the foyer was a wonderful room made of lots of different character traits, lots of parts put together to make this characterful room. All the foyer furniture had this marquetry on the top, which is made from donated Formica and it was all laser cut. Cinematic iconography and paraphernalia decorated the tops of the tables and all of these things were discovered from working with the cinema museum which was a fantastic resource, which massively helped our project.

The bases of the tables and chairs were all brought from a school in Mitcham called the …Primary School, who were just about to throw out all of their furniture so we got it for about £40.

Then this theme which is, I think, massively came off from Lettice and Paloma’s project, this want of making things and enjoyment of making. So we filmed throughout the whole project. So we made our own vacuum former, so we could make our own ceiling tiles to slide into the ceiling tile grid there, the ceiling grid in the garage.

It was brilliant because the whole thing, the whole way of working brought everyone together and everyone they could have a part in the project and contribute and it made for a wonderful atmosphere… and I am going on a bit.

GILES: We felt that, like Frank’s, the collective experience, the construction that Alice has told us all about, informed the atmosphere of the final project. There was a sense in which because it was so handmade, so many people came and involved themselves, anybody could come along to the final thing.

The final thing, this quite informal atmosphere, was however a highly designed one, that relates back to our research on the ideal picture palace. Our attribution of these elements, these kinds of pieces of cinema… thinking of the buttery smell of popcorn in the foyer, the seat flipping up as you leave to go to the bathroom, or the usherette handing around ice cream at the interval.

So in many respects, we were using these kind of highly significant elements to suggest a really rarefied experience in this really robust surrounding of a petrol station. The audience really was experiencing some of the glamour and the complexity of a nice cinema.

These icons which we found in every part of the evening, every part of the experience, right down to the sign that sets our stall out on Clerkenwell Road, so that anybody who is driving by or cycling by can get a sense that there is this odeon-style experience, this ideal cinema experience happening. And they can get a sense of that even if they travel by at speed.

ALICE: Okay, and so yeah… lots of… everything that was made in the project has some great story behind it and loads of people who contributed something to it sort of came about, but we don’t have enough time to go through all of them.

I am just going to talk about the curtain, which was probably the biggest bit, the largest bit of it. So the curtain was made out of Tyveck which is a roofing
underlay, industrial roofing underlay. It’s great because you can get it in bulk and really cheap and it was un-rippable, or meant to be un-ripable anyway, which is the point.

So we had this material and it was also bright silver which was great. We had the material and wanted to try and do something with it, so we contacted Ken Creasy’s who is a theatrical curtain maker in Elephant Castle. That is Chris on the top left hand corner who worked there and we met when we first went.

He was completely indispensible throughout the whole thing. He was brilliant and so generous. He gave us... he let us use his workshop space to test out these massive panels and different types of fabric, to see which ones would work. We found out quite quickly that tiebacks wasn’t going to work like the regular curtain, so we had to adapt it some way to turn it into some... to make it still work as a blind which would move up and down.

So then we did some mock ups on site and ended up making an enormous roman blind that ran around the outside... hung from the canopy around the cinema. This is our first panel going up... it’s pretty exciting.

So once we found out how we could make it... how to design it, then we had to start making it. The whole thing was enormous. We had to have... there is a whole series of how to make each panel. The first half, which was sewn... all in all I think we had 1.5km worth of material sewn through three domestic sowing machines.

That’s all we could get our hands on. So we had four or five people carrying the panels through with one person stuck on the sewing machine taking it through day and night. Just amazing how dedicated people were because a lot of it can’t have been that fun.

But, it was great. So that person was sewing. Then we had to eyelet it all, and there were over a thousand eyelets, and people would set about in groups all eyeletting together.

Then there was the knotting, and the knotting happened here to make these folds, hold them in place. Each knot had to be 20cm, exactly 20cm, apart because if they weren’t the whole thing would have gone lopsided. So people would often divide off into groups and work together on these tasks.

And then there was the rigging part, and that is where Flint’s came in.

Flint came in, who was the theatrical chandlers right next door to Ken Creasy’s and they gave up a whole weekend to come and help us hang all the curtains. And so I just wanted to mention them as well because... then all the curtains were up.

PALOMA: So this process of construction led to the final moment of the Cineroleum. Ten minutes before the end of each film, twelve members of our team would silently take their places around the perimeter of the curtain. As the film ended we would hoist the rope and raise the curtain, revealing the view of Clerkenwell Road to the audience seated under the petrol station canopy. The end.

[Applause]
OLIVER WAINWRIGHT: Once again, thank you to Alice, Paloma and Giles for that enthralling presentation. Now is the moment you have all been waiting for because it is your turn, I am afraid to say, of interrogating these poor people. So if we could have them somehow arranged at the front, perched on this table or maybe turn your chairs around.

I should just mention that as usual we have a star-studded audience and I will just mention a few names. We have Miraj on the front row who actually taught quite a lot of these people, so he is responsible for what we have just seen, for better or worse. Rowan Moore sitting in the front row, architect critic of the Observer and former director of the Architect’s Foundation. Writer and curator Beatrice Galilee sitting right here who is opening her own space very shortly. We have Eleanor Fawcett from Design for London who has been working a lot on temporary use projects, so I’m sure has got lots to say about this. Who else? Dann Jessen, lurking in the shadows, from East who I’m sure has got things to say and plenty of others.

I’d like to start by asking Trenton and Deepa to comment on some of the projects that we’ve just seen from Practice Architecture and the Cineroleum. If you don’t mind kicking off…

TRENTON OLDFIELD: Particular elements?

OLIVER WAINWRIGHT: Any kind of observation or question actually. I can start if you want, the first one.

TRENTON OLDFIELD: Okay. I guess the observation for me is I am fascinated with the interest of coming together, with people wanting to come together and do things together for free. This reminds me of a village, if you grow up in a village and you want to build a haystack or something. Maybe it is the experience of not having that anymore, people become interested in it, because in most cities in the world you kind of have to do that everyday. You wouldn’t even talk to anyone... so I’m interested in that. I don’t know, they are all beautiful, interesting projects. But for me particularly the thing of wanting to come together is interesting.

OLIVER WAINWRIGHT: That relates to a question that I have based on the two projects. It was unique to the way you both seem to work. This idea of kind of... almost like a Pied Piper. Somehow generating so much excitement amongst people that people desire to make and to build as a leisure activity, to give away their Sunday afternoon to screw a plank together.

How does that operate in practice? How do you control fifty volunteers and how does the design process work when you are a collective like the Cineroleum of fifty people are trying to design at the same time? What is the way in which you go about it?

GILES: We were talking about that. There was a really nice analogy we were just talking about before the talk, actually. We were talking about historical re-
enactment societies and how on the weekend everyone would get together and remake the civil war.

In a way we are kind of inviting people to come and remake the city or their own experiences. So whether its they come and remake a café or they come and remake a cinema, they get to participate in it in the same way that you might get to participate in the Battle of Hastings or whatever.

PALOMA G: Also, people love power tools.

[Laughter]

LETTICE: Yeah, I mean it was so overwhelming how people turned up every day. A lot of them were people we studied architecture with, but most of them were people that had no background in building, so yeah, it was amazing.

ALICE: And also in terms of how the design came about, from the start we had a lot of meetings, but a lot of it just wasn’t… it was done with the cinema museum which is an incredible resource. But a lot of it was just based on what we would get our hands on and what was available. It was just sort of more of a practical way of looking at things.

OLIVER WAINWRIGHT: Miraj, I am going to ask you to ask a question, or comment.

MIRAJ: Well, there are lots of things. I thought Trenton mentioned the partner spirit. Trenton you mentioned the punk spirit of being quite an interesting starting point. In a sense, it suggests that there is a kind of system and then we are all looking for ways to work outside of the system. But, there is an element… I was kind of interested in your idea of commerce or what constitutes commerce. For me it is always present.

I think what your projects, Practice Architecture and Cineroleum, is doing is finding a kind of niche within the system, that is kind of outside the system. It is kind of a game that the punks played, because they were working with almost facsimiles of a capitalist system, but changing it and making it their own.

Just to clarify the studio, we are kind of running a sort of, Theresa Hoskins and I were running a studio based on performance. In a sense, kind of, what the studio was asking, was what can we ourselves do to participate in the city, as bodies in the city.

I think, there is a lesson within the punk movement which was that if you follow your desire – because ultimately that’s where it came from, the desire to be a rock star – and these guys have a desire to build. You know? And through that desire somehow you kind of made it possible. I think the things that you had to deal with, the whole kind of how do you make a collective, in a sense that is kind of what you are doing as well, but through a sort of, from what I understand, a system of asking the question within a sort of what you call the fabric… the system of city building which involves the developers. In a way I want to kind of see your reaction more in terms of how you see these guys’ work in relation to what you guys are doing.
TRENTON OLDFIELD: I’d be interested in the other way, actually. That is probably clear.

DEEPA NAIK: Actually, just following on from that, this idea of commerce in your practices, do you see them as challenging or changing capitalist systems? Or is it reproducing them?

PALOMA S: Firstly, I mean ours isn’t a practice. I suppose coming back to Giles’ historical re-enactment analogy, this is very much something, in a sense, a hobby for us. I mean that in the sense that we were all working, we are Part One’s, all people who initiated the project. We were all working full time and we were drawn together by, as you said, this initial impetus to build something together.

So it has not been set up… it is not a practice. It is quite a loose, fluid group of people who are just involved because they want to be. In that sense it doesn’t really exist in a market or set up a challenge to architectural practice other than it was what we did, which was that we wanted to build and have an opportunity at the stage where we were at to be involved in every stage of the process.

FLOOR SPEAKER: Can I just ask?

OLIVER WAINWRIGHT: Yup, yup.

FLOOR SPEAKER: Very impressive, doing really engaging work I think. I am just really interested in the practical. That you are constantly talking about your deep interest in building, and in making, and when I see your projects I do like the way it is built, but I am really interested in what they think… how they discuss the city.

I have particular interest in that, and that relationship. You guys, This Is Not A Gateway, a project that you have been doing for several years and I am curious about how you who are talking to us about the making, whether that is just implicit for you. Do you make an effort to not talk about how it is a critique or a discussion about the urban condition… how natural does it come? You are just so interested in building and it just so happen to not be garden sheds or something dry like that.

[Laughter]

LETTICE: I think the reason that we have been reluctant to talk those things, about the way in which it is challenging things, is I don’t know how conscious those things were. Those are implications that we realized afterwards. There wasn’t that agenda, and so it would be wrong to say that was when we did it.

But through thinking about what we were going to say this week we started to… in thinking what we like about Frank’s and what other people seem to like about it. And when we designed it we designed somewhere we would like to hang out, and similarly with the Cineroleum I think. They generated a
space where them and their friends would like to go. And in both of them they are offering, through being made by us, a place that you don’t find in cities very much, which is where the making of it is evident.

Another thing I thought of is like with furniture design where they has been a high level of personal craftsmanship, that is always very expensive. But you come across something that is low budget but clearly made, and not professionally is a rare experience.

PALOMA G: We didn’t really start out with the same ambitions. The building bit of it only became significant once we were there building it. We suddenly kind of felt emancipated from paper and pen and Sketch Up models which is what we’d lived in for three years. And suddenly we were on a roof with materials making a building rather than dreaming one. That process became as, almost as significant as the outcome and the design itself.

OLIVER WAINWRIGHT: Rowan, Do you have a question?

ROWAN MOORE: Firstly I would like to say this idea of collaboration and building is really interesting because it is opposite to the way that building in this city is going, where it is more and more compartmentalized and sort of packaged up and everyone has a very defined task, and relationships are highly controlled across the disciplines.

I am interested to know, if you think as your process develops, if you can challenge that. The other thing I am interested is the way… what has happened to the pop-up phenomenon which is how incredibly quickly it has become… you did the café, you did the cinema, this summer there was another rooftop café in Stratford City by Carmody Groake, which was very nice but it was done on top of a car park again. It was a very nice building but it was basically PR for Westfield Shopping Malls, which was kind of like an alibi for making this enormous shopping mall in Stratford. And “ooh we’ve done a pop up restaurant, aren’t we nice?”

Yet, there will be a pop up Tesco’s soon, I mean… you know? … Someone like… did a pop up in Shoreditch.

So it’s kind of actually a microcosm of what happens with architects and what Trenton is talking about; architects are bourgeois and they are professional, and they are middle class and they work for people with money in the end, and work for people with people. It raises the question to answer, how you negotiate that?

I think on the whole I don’t really believe in communist architects and I don’t think you should have big capitalist whore architects either. It’s how you sort of situate yourself.

PALOMA G: We are really trying to work that out. We are in no way near getting to the answer. I think maybe we will find that we won’t have to overthink that at this point. What we are doing at the moment is justifiable and we love doing it, and for as long as that’s the case I think we can kind of keep going.

It’s felt really blind, the process, up to now. We haven’t had to make any big, political, conscious decisions. But, we don’t feel like we are doing a bad
thing. I guess we started address or see the implications of gentrification, regeneration, what our building’s doing. That has become fascinating being part of that and seeing it happen and wondering “What the hell do we do now?” But that is such a huge question, I don’t know if anyone has the answer to that one.

LETTICE: Yeah, just that we don’t... you know, it’s an amazing experience but... I don’t know, we’re interested in continual projects. As we become more conscious of what we’ve done, starting to put that consciousness into what we do in the future, and try to get closer to that answer, I think that is what we are interested in doing.

ALICE: Yeah, and I think also with both of these projects they... all of us are also pretty young as well, and we have only just started them. I don’t feel like we can make massive claims yet, or anything because there is only so much you can learn at once.

ROWAN MOORE: They are both fantastic, by the way and you can only do so much for a few thousand quid.

GILES: I think the way in which we see ourselves is quite neatly summarized by, on our side, who followed us. So, after the petrol station was taken... the cinema vacated from the petrol station, Hendricks gin dropped a railway carriage in there for a weekend in which they invited everybody who passed by with free gin and tonics, and they had chaps with giant whiskers driving vintage motor cars around the place.

Both of the projects, obviously, fall within the umbrella of Pop Up. But, I think that where we differ is our efforts to democratise both the process of making the pop up, and kind of thus allowing people to come and enjoy it. Like the Stratford Pop Up, it cost £120 for a dinner and there was an amazing waiting list. At least our aspiration was that anyone could come and enjoy a cinema experience in the middle of the city. It was a shame it had to be temporary. In a way, I think, we didn’t necessarily want to be Pop Up in that kinds of meaning that you’d have to Pop Down.

[Laughter]

OLIVER WAINWRIGHT: Just to play devil’s advocate for a second, if I may. It is all very well this kind of idea of democratic process but could you... some architects would argue that by operating for free and treating architecture as a hobby and doing it part time you are devaluing it as a skill and as a profession. What would your comeback to that be? How would you respond?

PALOMA G: That’s ridiculous.

OLIVER WAINWRIGHT: Sorry?
PALOMA G: Ridiculous. I think something I tried to say when I did some talking earlier was that these projects could not exist without this process, without this way of being made. They are a separate category and in that way they don’t go near standard practice. Maybe that is wrong, but from what I know of the way that we did Frank’s you couldn’t have had Carmody Groake doing that project; wouldn’t have been able to afford it, there would have been too much risk. Yeah.

ALICE: I’m not sure. I think that Exyst and Muf have both shown that it is possible to give haste to these low budget projects which… they are doing them on a very low budget. I think those models show it is possible for architects to be paid.

LETTICE: I think… when we set up to do Frank’s there wasn’t a thought of us being paid. It was an incredible opportunity and a really fun project for us to do. I don’t think that was wrong because the context of that was this arts scene way of people organizing exhibitions. We were all doing it for free, between friends, so it felt appropriate. It was only… yeah, that question is the only one that has kind of occurred to us recently.

PALOMA S: What was the question again?

OLIVER WAINWRIGHT: Well at the presentation a couple of weeks some of the architects in the audience argued that by working for free it’s a kind of slippery slope to the profession. That you are offering the same skills that a practice is, but you are doing it on your spare time, so some people consider that a kind of danger.

PALOMA S: Well I guess I would say I understand that, but we didn’t have a client. We weren’t working for anyone for free. The Cineroleum was different to Frank’s in that so far it has only been a one-off project, but we were our own client. It was what we chose to do. I sort of understand it as a point, but I don’t feel at this stage it’s relevant to where we are at, because we are not a practice and we are not working for free.

ANDREAS LANG: Can I just encourage you to call what you are doing a practice? I think you diminish what you do in some ways. Maybe it is not the form of an architectural office, but it is very much a practice you are suggesting and you are practicing.

I would not shy away from a bigger claim. In some ways I would also propose this as a prototype, much stronger than you do. There are also a lot of things I feel are quite critical about it, and that shouldn’t take away from the beauty of it and the passion with which you approached it.

Where I think these projects become critical. I love these projects, just to put it out there. It is also a tool for a developer to sustain a site for temporary use and you helping them imagine something which they in the long run can profit from. I mean, the Bacardi or whatever it is, it is a very direct example.
I think the way you have to address that, all these projects have to grow up in a way and address it in some way when they start to talk about ownership and a right to the city. That might bring it back to what Trenton is doing, where there is kind of a claim, and Deepa, I apologize. But your words were ringing in my ear. Where you see yourselves as cultural practitioners that reclaim the collective making of the city, much stronger. That ultimately will become a political act, whether you recognize it now or not. But, the idea of ownership and the right to the city is very much kind of latent in these projects and it is not really being discussed by you. Really, it is an encouragement to do it because I think you have succeeded on so many levels. Yeah, take more heart to it.

OLIVER WAINWRIGHT: And my job is to reveal the identity of the speakers. Andreas Lang I believe, from Public Works whose practice does very similar things.

ANDREAS LANG: That’s what I’m saying, I am all for encouragement.

OLIVER WAINWRIGHT: Could I possibly invite Eleanor Fawcett to comment on this, who has been working on the idea of use for the Olympic legacy transition phase and how this might kind of fit in as a broad strategy in development terms?

ELEANOR FAWCETT: Yeah, well you would have a job in a few years’ time. There is going to be a lot of empty land around Stratford. No, its interesting because I sort of… a lot of the comments and the questions that Dan and Andreas and Rowan already asked, are sort of echoing what I have been sitting here thinking. Which is I am sort of immediately asking profound questions about your projects and kind of reading into them, and sort of thinking about how these are applicable to this moment in the way that change is happening. There was a sort of moment where Thames Gateway has been officially declared dead. We’ve officially sort of admitted that most of what happened was very, very disappointing. You know?

There is a sort of sense that the failure of big development – I know about London – but generally, people are realising it is not good enough to deliver numbers if the places are actually rubbish places that nobody wants to live. There is no quality to them.

I was quite interested with what… when you were talking about the café in particular. And actually the Cineroleum as well, you were saying somehow people liked because it had this hand made feel, this really unusual thing.

Even though it was done cheaply and in really quite a rough and ready way, it had this quality that people felt was missing from the city and that kind of resonated with some of the much, you know, the bigger pronouncements coming out of central government and people trying to understand where did we go wrong.

I am trying to think to myself ‘Okay, we’ve got two completely opposite ends of the spectrum here.’ We’ve got you guys doing kind of beautiful projects and then as Andreas is saying, you are kind of presenting them to us in a very simple, very pure way saying you just love to build and you just to do it.
And you obviously got a huge amount out of it, all of you, which is great to hear. They are very optimistic projects. But I started thinking “how do we bring… what’s the process to try and bring that sense and that achievement?” Your own comments are that people just say they love it because it had this intangible quality.

How do we get that to infect the mega projects which are still happening? There are going to be 8,000 new homes built on the Olympic site, the same number built all around. The Thames Gateway might be dead, but London’s population is growing. I wonder whether part of that is to do with… you the comment about Muf and Exyst and their work. I’ve kind of worked quite a lot with both of them. I guess what they do more explicitly than what you have said is that they reach out to the surrounding communities and they design the projects in such a way that success for that project is to have 10,000 school children visit it over summer or to run an apprenticeship programme for local youths who dropped out of school.

What I am thinking is, echoing Andreas really, is whether it is you guys that articulate these lessons or whether it is for other people in the room to articulate it. I think these projects show how easily you can make something happen which can completely change the way that people view an area or a community or view their environment. Particularly view their ability to affect that environment. So this disenfranchisement that is so commonly seen across areas that are changing rapidly, in East London particularly where I know best.

You get these communities particularly around the Olympic site for example, they no longer care about where they live. They just feel like they are left behind by the process of change. I would encourage you, echoing what other people have said, to be bolder about what could these projects achieve.

I mean for Peckham for example, that’s a pretty tough area. If you did it again, could you design it in such a way that it had a permanent legacy that might change the way communities operated within the area? So it feels like you could push those so much further and they could really be role models for how to do development successfully in the future, and how not to have another great failure of hundreds of millions of pounds, creating these rubbish places that no one wants to live in.

You guys, This Is Not A Gateway, you are trying to find a way. There are two opposite ends of the spectrum: people who have money and power and people who know how to make good places in a critical sense.

So to turn it into a question…having delivered these projects, do you have any thoughts about how you might do things next time you do it? What have you learned from what you done so far that you might think could have a longer legacy? You said you don’t want to see projects ‘pop down’. Do you have any sort of thoughts on how you might do things differently in the future?

ALICE: Well there is a possible project which we might be doing in Hackney Wick at the moment which we are just looking at. We are just starting, but it’s underneath this massive flyover just by a canal, and at the moment we are thinking, still deciding exactly what we are going to be doing there. But, we are thinking of setting up just by the Olympic site and we are thinking of potentially
setting up a boatyard to make a sort of transport service, pedlo service, on the river, canal.

But that is one idea. But, I think what we wanted to do more if we do carry on doing more projects, if we do more with the next project, it would be one which didn’t just also ship a whole load of… because I think the tendency with both these projects, even though they are so great and there are great values behind the way they are built. When they are actually up and running they tend to ship quite a niche group of people to the place. It would be really great if that didn’t happen, and if it was more that you make a great place where whoever lives around it, its theirs. That’s I think, definitely for all of us, for the next project that would be more of the agenda.

PALOMA G: Yeah, we have been quite troubled by the effect of Frank’s and what it might do to the area, what is happening already. That’s what I was trying to say earlier. Kind of address how we might begin engaging in that with our projects. I don’t know if we’ve got the solution yet.

Definitely with the library we want to make sure that there is an outreach program for that and maybe involve local schools in the construction. We are not sure how it is going to work yet, but we are definitely thinking about it. My friend put it really well the other night - this worry about gentrification – every time you do something kind of interesting and arty that kind of gets an area in The Guardian. What is one step forward for a generation perhaps is … you have to offset that by going and shooting someone to balance out the reputation.

OLIVER WAINWRIGHT: This is the final lecture in the series, so an interesting way to end.

ALICE: Yeah, I don’t know. But in terms of the difference between the Cineroleum and Frank’s, the fact that this is architects generating their own brief and potentially going on in Hackney Wick to have a more social agenda of engaging people, I don’t know what that says on a broader scales, like thesis models. Does that mean that architects also have to be… I don’t know. Or is enlightened clients what we need? Because with the library, in terms of an outreach program, that is just basically saying you need great clients. So I don’t know. Yeah, it’s interesting.

OLIVER WAINWRIGHT: We’ve got another comment from Rowan.

ROWAN MOORE: I was interested in Thames, that the late Thames Gateway came up. That is really pertinent because what was wrong with the Thames Gateway was the name, because it was a name that didn’t really mean anything. What is a gateway? How can you call an area forty miles long a gateway? A gateway to what?

In fact, most of the Thames Gateway is not a gateway. Typical condition, the gateway is at the end of something and you have all these roads and dead ends. So just those two words kind of contained the failure of the whole fifteen-year multimillion pound project, because it was completely indifferent to what was actually there.
So therefore, you’ve got these sort of generic, crummy solutions whereas what is nice about these projects is they are completely responsive to the situation, to the place and constraints and to the people involved and so on. Also, they are seeing value in things that are considered valueless like the top of a car park and a disused gas station which again, was a total failure of the Thames Gateway enterprise; it just saw everything as rubbish to be erased. So again, it’s not really a question, it’s a comment. That is what is interesting about the situation. It is giving value to the officially valueless.

**OLIVER WAINWRIGHT:** Can I try and say my question just now? Do you think it’s dangerous… is it possible to plan these kinds of activities? Should we be worried that the voice of Design for London is talking about temporary use of development? Does that propose something for the TINAG guys to respond to?

**TRENTON OLDFIELD:** I wouldn’t worry about planning it, with the Conservatives in power it is going to happen anyways because with the ‘big society’ this is going to be the way of life. Not even bourgeois cinemas with a fence excluding some people. But people coming together because of the poverty that cities are going to exist in.

So I wouldn’t worry about these temporary things, about how can we make more of them. It is going to happen unless something changes in the government. People are going to have to come together. This is what they want.

I don’t know if anybody, I keep talking about this documentary that the BBC did about a rubbish dump in Nigeria, where they… somehow this documentary lionised this rubbish dump. Because we talked about some of it being wonderful, these kinds of projects, because everybody recycled everything that came onto this rubbish dump. There was no waste, every piece of material was used. People had their own courts on this rubbish heap, they were completely self-sustainable, etc. etc.

I am not sure if I am going to get this through to this because I think we are kind of in a different place, but what the result of the ‘Big Society’ is going to be these projects where people are going to be completely alone. There is going to be no society. There are going to be people that can come together and make these things, so there are going to be people right at top that are going to be completely separated from the reality of what is happening on the ground.

Complete separation, what is going on is a complete separation between those that have, and those that might have had something, and those that don’t. So I wouldn’t worry about these projects happening in the future because unless the government changes it is an inevitable situation. So maybe expect more of them rather than think of how can we do them.

**OLIVER WAINWRIGHT:** Coming from Sara Muzio whose own project, the Southwark Lido was instrumental in regenerating a site a couple of years ago.
SARA: I think there have been lots of interesting points going round and congratulations to all of you on your projects. I think there is a question about value and a question about the future of these types of projects.

As Rowan was saying, the Pop Up thing has been, or is starting to be, or has already been turned into something that can be completely exclusive. Very much used for the benefit of a few. It is kind of taking the language, the architectural language or the aesthetic language of these projects to various different ends.

I think this is really the key now, for this type of work, to decide to find out, to evolve. What side of this divide is it going to be on? Is it going to be on the side of the divide where, if you see what is going at the moment with the funding cuts in arts and culture, with the funding cuts in education, what we are being told is that these things have no value or that they have to pay for their own value. Whereas projects like this show they have an extraordinary value and often they have much more value than projects which are super funded and that fail spectacularly.

So I think it’s really important, I think this is a really important time to reflect on these issues and figure out really in whose service are these projects going to happen, for what ends and how can they be democratic? How can they be imbedded in the environments that they are in rather than just benefiting a transitory community which is very much a niche market.

I think this is the fundamental question really, for this kind of work now. It’s not at all a criticism to your work, I think your work is fantastic. But, I think that if this type of work is to really achieve something in the current climate, it has to have that edge to it, it has to have that intention. Otherwise, it is a difficult time for all of us.

OLIVER WAINWRIGHT: How do you respond to that challenge?

PALOMA S: Well I would sort of like to say... also picking up on what Trenton said about the element of exclusivity and “can’t we see that barrier in the foreground?” I think it was a lot more fluid than that. Yes, the cinema cost money, it cost £5 per ticket, we covered our costs.

We thought that it would make it available to people as an experience that heard about and wanted it. But more than that, I think just this image says it. It wasn’t just about being on the inside, it was very much something I hope you could take from being on the outside too. You are very much allowed to walk over a barrier, but also while the audience got this view of Clerkenwell Road, similarly plenty of passers-by got this slightly surreal view onto them; this audience in an auditorium under a petrol station canopy.

So while this, as a project which happened on the street, it meant that you could be part of it while not necessarily being the person who was sitting in the cinema seat. And I think, I hope, that that was a strength of it and that it was visually democratic because elements of it were available to everyone.
GILES: I think that tentatively one way of getting beyond this is to create places, so places like Frank’s, like the cinema. This is what Alice was talking about, what we are trying to do next is to make a place for making. So where we kind of create a place where all the things that we think are democratic and are good about this project. About having those people who come actually… it is not institutionalised, because that kind of suggests a bigger organization, but is given a small piece of city, a bit of land, to kind of do what we think is great about this project.

What both us and Alice and Paloma and Lettice really loved... when we say what we really love is making and getting everyone involved, I think potentially the next step is to actually get everyone involved. So it could be an educational outreach program where you could get thousands of school children to come and learn how to make things. So maybe the next step is to kind of widen it, widen that idea of making that we are all so naively fixed on, maybe.

DANN JESSEN: I don’t think that is so naïve and I think tremendously refreshing that you actually come from this idea of making, instead of all of this constantly engaging directly, and good intentions. You actually want to do this as a group for yourself and it is a gift to these particular situations that you intervene in and with, and people are allowed to take quite different things from that.

And whether that means in a few years’ time you continue doing these things because you want to, that there is a pattern happening which you can make more of, then that is great and that will become very exciting. But I think you should not get too anxious about contextualising this in terms of current development, seeing this, that and the other, when you are so driven by your passion for making things. Which is a completely new and refreshing thing in London in terms of urban… the way that urban change is happening. So I would just somehow ignore us for a little bit, and keep going.

[Laughter]

[Applause]

FLOOR SPEAKER: Can I just have one...? One thing that really bugs me about it is that in a way, your manifesto for the next ten years, I would hope that you negotiate the spaces differently, that it is really not the place of the developer. It is not just a site here, space dedicated, like the LDA is doing currently... but you really negotiate the ownership much more and it becomes much more part of your argument about the city.

I actually enjoyed those moments best where you became citizens in the city, active citizens in the city rather than when you talk like architects, where it became quite formal and architect lingo in it.

I really encourage you to become much more political and reclaim these places as collective ownership. I mean, the idea of the commons is being discussed so much lately and is coming up again. Can you turn something like this into a common? A 21st century common?
ALICE: I have never been able to say that properly, but it was actually right. When you said that we were more citizens coming at the projects rather than coming from the slightly “We will provide you with this...” even though I never got to that position. But it is so great working like that because you would complete... everyone was at a level par, and it just filtered through the whole project. How all the different groups who did contribute.

I keep on listening them but there is Flint’s and Cinema Museum and Ken Creasy’s, they were all so crucial to how the whole project came about and through conversations with them. It just wouldn’t have happened. So it was as much about conversations and you know, being citizens, rather than as an architect, which is just massively crucial to the project.

OLIVER WAINWRIGHT: There is a question over there? Yeah?

SAM POTTS: I really love your projects and am in complete awe them. Some friends of my set up a Redundant Architect Recreation Association which is very similar on your passions, it is about making things, it’s the number one kind of reason they do it.

As you say, you want to build a place, make stuff. That’s something that we try to do on a fairly small scale which is existing right now, not so far from where your site might be, it’s in Clapton, just up the canal in fact.

But I would just also like to reiterate what someone said earlier. There was a question of who you are working for, who you are in service to, whether it’s the people in power or people in need.

I think the beauty of what you are doing is that you’re not in service to either. It is all very well being in service to the people in need, but with that comes so many responsibilities around that. So much, technical things you have to work to and all sorts of bureaucracy that comes with it. I think to work for your own passions is a lot more liberating and true. Also eventually it means, not a lot more, but sort of like the third choice that we have available to us, which I think is very original.

LETTICE: Yeah, I don’t know if I feel the same way. I think after I finished Frank’s, after we finished Frank’s, we both felt a real desire for the next project to engage with social and political issues more than this has. We felt that it was... we were frustrated by Frank’s and felt hungry for some of that.

SAM POTTS: I think it is social and political what you are doing.

LETTICE: Yeah, but as you said it is not in service to the needy. But what you also said is how incredibly difficult that is do and challenging that is to do. We attempted a project afterwards which was to move into Peckham Rye station. There is a huge, old billiards hall which is empty there, to create some kind of community café. We eventually ran out of steam with that because it was so difficult working out how to engage a local community.

PALOMA G: That wasn’t our own.
LETTICE: That wasn’t our own. So in a sense we failed with that, but that is something we are interested in doing. I don’t know, I think just a passion for doing it for me isn’t enough to keep just making pop up cafes.

SAM POTTS: One thing about passion is that it spreads. I think that is where you end up engaging with people from all over.

LETTICE: Yeah, I’m not devaluing that passion and that, I have been so excited by this and I am not saying it is a bad thing in any way.

OLIVER WAINWRIGHT: We have to wind this up in the next ten minutes, so can I take three or four more questions? There was one over there we will start with.

TOBY: Toby from... I was just coming back to this ‘troublemaker’ idea, it’s troubling me. You think you aren’t the troublemakers, but in a way people like Kieran or people like us who are working on a site in this city, trying to make regeneration work it is a real trouble. To think about these projects that are amazing, fun and disappear afterwards and don’t really have that legacy and that is troubling us, that you don’t seem to be too politically motivated or you don’t really want to work for too much, for at the moment at least, with local community groups.

Is the fun coming from the... inspired by making things or are you just young people that are going nurture and evolve more into where perhaps Liza and people like Muf and Exyst are at the moment? It would be interesting to see where you think you are going with this. Or if you are bothered

OLIVER WAINWRIGHT: We have a secret member of Cineroleum who would like to respond.

FLOOR SPEAKER: One thing that hasn’t been mentioned that we are working on at the moment is transporting this cinema setup. We are working with Freemont Studio in Hackney Wick to find a warehouse to put it up in. And the idea behind that project is it was all very well and good, creating loads of energy behind the short film program and around the future film program there, and also the kind of aspect of being homemade was fantastic.

But, if that could go further and particularly inspire young filmmakers and filmmaking groups across the whole of London to get in touch with us, we want to be engaged with that space and those that have access to the public imagination.

What we are actually trying to do is install the cinema permanently for a year and develop a much steadier, maybe much less often, but a much steadier commissioned program, still using the fact of it being homemade, and the fact of it being built and being engaged with and using the same ethic of anyone being able to come, and to use it. But we are trying to move towards sustainability on this particular project. It has been, at least partly, about finding ways to use the energy for more sustainability.

- 31 –  

www.ripitupandstartagain.org
OLIVER WAINWRIGHT: And that question at the back.

FLOOR SPEAKER: I have two questions.

[Laughter]

FLOOR SPEAKER: First one is would you plan these projects even if you weren’t architecturally educated? The reason why I ask is I can see the immediate attraction of making something. You are stuck in front of a computer for three to five or ten years and you want to make something and its beautiful that you do, I immediately see that. If that’s… if it’s your course, leaning to that way, then I will applaud your course for making you frustrated like that.

The second thing is, interestingly enough, both projects work to provide social entrepreneurship. You sold tickets, foods are being bought and you recouped your cost and that’s sort of a business model.

Is it possible to make it a business model that could sustain itself? Or do you think this kind of project should be freely available to people, funded by the public? At this moment, where the funding is coming from, how could we make this happen? It is very important to understanding, or having to sustain your project. I am very interested to hear that.

GILES: I think a project like the cinema does have the potential if one wanted to, you know, turn it into something that sustains itself. I think that is what Amica is trying to say, but I don’t think it necessarily means that it necessarily has to be, you know… Obviously it has to be self-funding, it has to keep itself going, and so I think on one level it could, I’m sure, be a business model, and I’m sure you could get it to fund itself and run as we have shown it can. But, I think there is another sustainable level which is kind of low key with minimal costs and that isn’t this, but is a more social version of it.

ALICE: I think also just to follow on this, we haven’t actually properly gone through the calculations of it yet to see if it could properly sustain itself. When it was up and running we didn’t have to pay for any workers or anything because we were all doing it. So obviously that would be a completely… to tie it into a full-time thing, I guess we just haven’t really calculated it yet.

LETTICE: Yeah. It comes back to the question of architects being unpaid, and I don’t know if it is a business model that would work. As soon as you took everyone’s salaries… this was done for all us alongside full time jobs, part time jobs for some of us. I wonder whether it… did you get public funding for the Lido?

SARA: The Lido was funded but the payment is kind of a per diem payment for the duration of the construction and public opening. But there really isn’t very much in the way of fee for the eight months planning that goes on before a project. The sustainability issue is a really big issue.
OLIVER WAINWRIGHT: Was there one final question?

FLOOR SPEAKER: Just a question for This Is A Gateway team.

DEEPA: This Is Not A Gateway.

[Laughter]

FLOOR SPEAKER: We’ve heard a lot from the Cineroleum and Frank’s Café team. You seem quite pessimistic about the scope of these projects to influence our ways of thinking about the city or as a claim on the city. I would like to ask you quite an open-ended question about what kind of mode of architecture you think personally you subscribe to, or you believe would change… what kind of architecture you think would have an impact?

TRENTON OLDFIELD: I don’t really have an opinion on these projects at all.

FLOOR SPEAKER: It doesn’t have to be these projects in particular. I mean, what kind of projects do you think have had, in your view…?

FLOOR SPEAKER: I was wondering something similar, I was wondering how would you want to harness this energy and this enthusiasm? How would you channel it?

TRENTON OLDFIELD: I’m curious why we are being asked to comment on their projects and they are not being asked to comment on the theoretical approach that could be proposed in their projects. I find it curious that somehow there is a missing… they are three separate things.

FLOOR SPEAKER: So I am asking you, you seem to be pessimistic about the kind of… this kind of Pop Up idea of architecture. I was wondering if there was any…

TRENTON OLDFIELD: I haven’t been critical of Pop Up

FLOOR SPEAKER: No…

[Laughter]

TRENTON OLDFIELD: I haven’t…did you listen to the presentation? I haven’t said anything about Pop Up architecture..

[Talking over one another]

TRENTON OLDFIELD: We were talking about the post criticality, which is a lack of people taking politics, taking a political position. People thinking about things that they’ve built. We’ve said nothing about architecture at all.
Our presentation was purely, entirely about the kind of, what we see, as the kind of segments that come together that result in projects that have no politics. That, for us, is what we thought we were invited here to do. Not to come and do… it feels a bit like a crit, student crit.

OLIVER WAINWRIGHT: Well the guy who invited you is conveniently absent, so I’m afraid we can’t answer that question. Does anyone else have a final, kind of happy comment or question on today’s proceedings?

PALOMA S: I would like to say, we sort of said about sitting slightly uncomfortable with the word ‘Pop Up’, but I would have thought that testament to the fact that it’s not just temporary or Pop Up is that a couple months after both these projects were shut, we are continuing to discuss them here tonight.

I hope whatever their legacies are, it is beyond those sort of physical objects but it is about the situations which they set up, and the questions that they raise about experiences of the city.

[Applause]

OLIVER WAINWRIGHT: So you have taken quite a battering from lots of different angles. Thanks very much to all of our participants for the final talk of Rip It Up. Next week Kieran is back to ‘Start Again’, so who knows what that will involve. Thanks a lot for coming.

[Applause]

[End of recorded material]