KIERAN LONG: Welcome everybody. Hello and welcome to Rip it Up and Start Again number five. It’s our fifth lecture in the series and you have thinned out a bit as an audience, but it’s kind of more intimate this way. I’m really pleased to see so many of you still here; I know many of you are on trips and so on. Can I have a show of hands, who was here last week?

Yeah, you’re good, you’re the hard core, you are gonna be here with me and with all of us the whole time. I’m really pleased to see you.

What I thought I would do, slightly for the benefit of our speakers and also for your benefit again, was to just recap where we are, where have we got to in this series to put in some context this evening’s thing about Belfast. And of course the reason we have chosen Belfast is it’s the third of our kind of fumbling towards, our archetypal ‘what’s happened in Britain’s orthodox architecture and urban design in the last ten or 15 years’. And it manifests itself in places like Belfast, or particularly in Belfast, in interesting ways as it did in Liverpool and as it did in the Thames Gateway. And so these three have been about trying to tell that story. What’s been going on recently? Where do we find ourselves? And looking critically at that.

But perhaps it’s worth reminding ourselves further back in time, what this series has been about. Who was here for Peter’s? Peter Carl, the first week? Lots of you, you really are the hard core! I love you people.

So Peter was all about telling us exhorting us not to reduce the city to concepts, not to make the city too easy to design, and those concepts we have been through before, I’m not going to go through it again. But that kind of idea, and I think that has been picked up in different ways.

The week after we had Owen Hatherley, who really…what stayed in my mind about that is two things: one of course is his anger about the deadening affect of Blairite non ideology on urban planning in our cities of the last 15 years. And that kind of anger, that observation that nobody is talking about this…the kind of value of his testimony is something that we took away from that.

And then we got into this kind of little triplet, first with Mark talking about the Thames Gateway, a very personal and very beautiful and very eloquent description of that place as a place, in all its richness, as Peter might say. But also what happens in large scale strategic planning problems in this country. How infrastructure and green space have a momentum of their own and how
everything else seems not to. How his legacy is one of successful projects but very few successful plans.

Then last week we had Paul Domela from Liverpool Biennial who kind of shifted gear again, a much more suggestive kind of lecture; less standing and delivering, which was great. And how many of you, did anyone go to Liverpool Biennial in the last week as a result? No? I hope some of you get to go before the end, or at least look up some of the many names.

He told us so much about artists I had never heard of, probably you guys have never heard of, all names worth following up. But his kind of elegant descriptions of places also ask questions I think of regeneration orthodoxy in interesting ways. Very particular observations like the street of houses in Anfield that was being demolished because they were too cheap. People could live there debt free, and in order that people could live there with £200,000 worth of debt they were being demolished and rebuilt by property developers. The strangeness of that came across in Paul’s lecture.

And also, brilliant observations like how the National Trust runs Paul and John’s house with Chartered Homes, but Ringo’s is going to be demolished. These kind of strange open ended observations that he was making. And then of course the amazing interventions of his artists, and how an arts institution like a Biennial can play a role in questioning what happens in a city.

Now Belfast has lots of things that don’t seem to be that unique in terms of what’s happened in the last years, which is of course one of the reasons we are interested in it. I remember when I was the editor of The AJ we published Victoria Square, a kind of outdoor mall, of a pretty typical kind, you know let’s say The Bullring generation of malls, visited on Belfast. But sort of made claims for itself as some kind of piece of city. That’s my, in terms of publishing stuff from Belfast I must confess, that’s about it in the last couple of years. And it probably should have been…I think BD has a monopoly on Hackett Hall McKnight’s work because they won their prize.

But in Belfast, it was always likely that the political and ethical void that we’ve observed in some mainstream architecture of the last decade or so would show up particularly clearly. Because of course Belfast is still a divided city. Still a city that wears its scars on its sleeve twelve years after the Good Friday Agreement was supposed to have brought all of that to an end.

This question of ‘what a city is for’ will be, I’m sure, animated by the example of Belfast. The reason for choosing Belfast was because of the work last year of Fran and Michael and Lara’s unit, and that continues this year. And they are here, and will be reacting to and asking the first questions, making some relationships between their work and our presenters.

And we have got two presenters tonight, we have David Brett and he has asked to introduce himself so I will let him do that. But very excited to have David here. He is a writer of books. Some books that you may have seen. One that we publish a review of in the AJ a couple of years ago called “Towards an Architecture: Ulster, a Manifesto for a Regional Architecture for Northern Ireland” which was really ambitious. It was co-authored by David and Alan Jones. And it was a really ambitious and I think unique in Britain attempt to kind of frame a manifesto for a regional architecture.
There are lots of people interested in that idea but not many people try to say what that might be. And of course there are other books by David, the one I’m familiar with, “The Plain Style Protestant Theology in the History of Design” and another, “Rethinking Decoration: Pleasure and Ideology in the Visual Arts”. And there are more here which I think David might mention.

And after we have Mark Hackett of Hackett Hall McKnight and the Forum for Alternative Belfast, who I will introduce after. But if you could please welcome David to the stage I’ll let you take it away.

[Applause]

DAVID BRETT: It suddenly seems like we are a very full room. Can you see everybody at the back there? You can? Ok that’s fine.

Thank you for inviting me, I am quite scared, I haven’t done this for some time and there is something rather intimidating about a room full of architects and architectural students because I always have the impression that they ought to know everything.

Of course they don’t, but it does seem to me that you can’t be an architect without knowing a great deal and you can’t get involved in the business of architecture without having very considerable demands put on your poor little brain and that’s great!

Now Kieran said I was going to introduce myself, well I will do because I don’t want to be introduced as an academic. I have been working in art colleges and universities for the past 20 years or so, but in fact my first occupation was as a scene builder in the theatre, I worked a lot in theatre and film, and I have also been a postman, and a building site worker!

You learn more about architecture working on a building site than anywhere else because you see what a mess what everything is. Nobody gets their plans co-ordinated, people drill holes in the wrong walls, and it’s wonderful. It’s a very object lesson in management. And then I am also principally a writer, I have written plays for film, plays and film scripts and radio dramas of various sorts and a couple of novels and some books that are particularly relevant to us here.

Quite accidentally as you might say, there is a rather nice book which I contributed to called “The Cities of Belfast” and it’s by Nicholas Allen and Aaron Kelly and I could give people notes on that. There is my own little book here, we’ve got “A Book Around the Irish Sea” which is not a book about Scotland, England, Wales or Ireland, it’s about the Irish Sea, as a zone where people meet and interact with one another. It’s almost like a sort of view of the land from the sea.

And I thought this was well worth thinking about because we don’t see the British Isles as a whole. Even the very notion of course of the British Isles is a rather foreign notion for people on the other side of the border of us, and we have to be careful about using that phrase. That in itself is interesting.

And then this little book I did with Alan Jones, ‘Towards an Architecture: Ulster’, sounds incredibly pompous. It’s not a manifesto, I am annoyed he should describe it like that, it’s not a manifesto, its just a sort of musing on the
problems of what makes a regional style. Or the phrase I found myself using, “what makes place architecture?” As opposed to unplaced.

And at that point of course, one meets up with what other people have been thinking about. And I found that in all my scratching around in libraries a book by Marc Auge, ‘Non Places’, translated by John Howe, 1995. There is a good little essay on the relationship of places to buildings and buildings to places, and the degree to which buildings define places and places define buildings.

It’s rather interesting that lots of places that we know and recognise in a city such as London are related to buildings. They are called after the buildings that were there or are still there, or were once there: White City, Crystal Palace. Where is Crystal Palace? It isn’t there any more but we still call it Crystal Palace.

That’s a quite an interesting little book which has also formed part of my thinking here, and I have also been reading Ciaran Benson’s book on ‘The Cultural Psychology of Self’. A really interesting book, it’s got nothing to do with architecture but he talks at some length and discusses in some detail about the idea of a locational function of culture, which seems to me to be a very architectural or planning kind of idea.

And I have also been reading David Harvey’s Condition of The Postmodern. Well I suppose everybody has read that. Hands up who hasn’t?!

And Daniel Miller’s ‘Material Culture and Mass Consumption’ which I don’t think is well known, but I came across this about ten years ago and I think it’s an extremely interesting book.

Well those were some of the reading I was doing while I was thinking about this topic, and I have also been asked to write about them. The editors of ‘Cities of Belfast’, why they came to me I don’t know, but they said would I like to write about the City of Belfast? So I did. And I wrote a little essay, which I think sums up the sort of thinking I am trying to develop with you.

This is my actual little essay, its called ‘Geographies of Sites and Settlements’ and I think what I would like to do briefly is just to look at the actual site of a city and what it imposes upon anything which is done there.

Site as it were, is the nature of the culture of architecture in cities. It’s something we don’t have much control over, perhaps none at all. But anyway, can we just imagine a map of Ireland?

[DAVID BRETT’S WHITEBOARD SKETCH]

Belfast is the top right hand corner, looking over to Scotland…and it presents itself geographically something like that. Actually, that is a curious little peninsular there, and the Tower of Larne is there…and there is Carrickfergus there…and it’s an interesting town with a really marvellous old castle and that was once the Norman Capital of Ulster.

And then Belfast is a kind of a conurbation, it kind of wanders around like this, there is no very definite shape or size, and it gets extended out along ribbon developments going out this way and out over here. And it has some quite interesting geographical features, which I would maintain have considerable bearing on the history of the town.
The town goes up in response to geographical features and the geography goes something like this. You have the Eastern shore, sorry the North Western shore, it really consists of a range of fairly substantial hills like this...they go on for a long way there. And these are quite big steep hills. They are as big and steep as anything in Bradford, which is my other home city which is a fairly vertiginous place.

I don’t know if any of you have been there, but the outskirts of Bradford are 1500 feet above sea level and the bottom of Bradford is about 200 feet above sea level and its almost like that here. Divis Mountain here is 1300 feet, Cave Hill here is about 1000. And Cave Hill particularly, there are cliffs off Cave Hill, there are little cliffs there and little cliffs here and these are real cliffs you know. Its like Edinburgh, it’s as good a site from that point of view as Edinburgh.

And this side was also a range of lower and softer hills like this, which are also quite high and windy but up on the top of here, there is a suburb called Four Winds, which is fairly suitable.

There on the top nearly 1000 feet above sea level there are houses built to the specifications of Essex or somewhere, where the average wind speed is three times the norms of Chelmsford. And the rain is incessant and it’s a really rough climate on these hills and nobody tries to live up here. Nobody would ever try to live up there, except for a sheep farmer and they are not too enthusiastic either.

But these hills are in fact populated because it’s good farming land, whereas this side it’s sour, this side is basalt, a huge slab of black basalt which some very long time ago flowed down from the same volcanos that produced the Giant’s Causeway and the Isle of Mull at Stafford’s Cave and all these huge geological movements of Western Scotland. This is geologically very much part of Western Scotland whereas down here it’s very different.

And this is quite odd, this basalt lies on top of chalk which is quite odd actually for this part of the world, it’s an unusual combination but it has all sorts of interesting connotations.

The result is there is absolutely no good building stone. Building stone in Northern Ireland is pretty hard to find. It’s pretty hard to find good building stone, so pretty well the whole building of Northern Ireland is brick. Although the older ones are made out of this basalt and we’ll have a look at this shortly too.

Anyway, this is the general pattern. Now there are population consequences to this and by the way, this is a very broad and very deep valley and it wasn’t cut out by a river, it was cut out by a glacier coming down the Firth of Clyde. A huge glacier that finally ended up somewhere in the middle of Northern Ireland and dug out Loch May.

But as a result all the way up here and I imagine under water too, there are old moraines and glacial traces which produce thick boulder clay and a kind of useless kind of sludge which local builders call ‘Sleetch’. It’s a lovely word isn’t it, sleetch? And this is producing real problems for anybody who wants to build high in Belfast because after you have dug down the foundations at about 30 feet you hit sleetch which is semi liquid concrete and is completely useless.
And the only way to do it is to put piles right down, 150 feet in some cases down until they hit the bedrock at the bottom.

You may have seen a very substantial probably quite good building called the Oval Tower up here that is 29 storeys high. It’s going to be the highest building in Ireland and the holes they had to dig for something solid were amazing, and I mean amazing. Now as a result, pretty well all this area is all mud flats and gravel banks and no good ground at all. So what’s happened over here is people have laid their concrete in big slabs and they have been putting sheds of various sorts there, starting with the big warehouses of the Victorian era and now we will show you one or two.

[SLIDE 2]

And this is the city seen from about there somewhere, looking across like this. And it has a fairly typical texture of an industrial city that might almost be Salford, it might be Paisley, it might well be anywhere like that. A dense concatenation of brick terraces with one or two large monumental forms in it.

Some of these brick terraces are really quite good and if you look at one or two they are quite fine little bits of building. And recently, we have seen them being renewed and the way in which they are being reused I think is interesting.

Anyway, we look out over a city like that and we can see the hills in the distance, actually I think we will be there. So this is the motorway coming out of town on its way to Dublin.

The motorway does a really interesting thing, it comes in from over here somewhere and it goes right through the middle of town to the very edge and then it splits and one end goes off up there and one end goes there. But this, the motorway drives right through the centre of this rather dense compact texture, urban texture, and nothing grows around it. It just cuts the city in two in a very dramatic way.

And what it’s effectively done, that’s what you call West Belfast and that’s East Belfast and what its done is made it impossible to walk across town. And this is a kind of thing which Mark here has been very interested about; the sheer difficulty of getting around the town on a human scale way.

This is of course also by way of being a political issue too because as we probably all know, West Belfast is typically very strongly Republican and Catholic and East Belfast is most noticeably Loyalist and anti Republican. And in between there is a series of interesting zones that have grown up and I live in one of these. I had a little ghetto for cameramen and professors!

But there are several of these little ghettos, because tucked in here between Protestant North Belfast, which is there, and Catholic West Belfast is now little Poland! There are four or five streets there which are Polish. That’s what they are, they have Polish streets signs and it’s really striking that the base of the sectarian ghetto continues to be reproducing and continues to reproduce itself. And of course notoriously there is a big line which cuts the town here which is sometimes called a Peace Wall.

How you can have a Peace Wall is another rather interesting, rather odd oxymoronic notion but it’s supposed to keep people apart and in fact it does. But it is rather extraordinary, it goes on for I don’t know how many miles, Mark
will probably tell us more about that, but it effectively means that you can’t walk that way either. So if you can’t walk this way the whole place is being split up.

This has of course origins which of course are older I think than any of the present particular troubles and they come from the very actual way in which the city has grown, industrially and economically.

The largest area of flat land is this, the East side of the river, East Belfast. The ground fairly steadily slopes down gently and it’s quite easy to cope with. On this side you have got steep hills going up to the tops here, some are pretty steep, they very effectively enclose, that part of town.

Now if you had been taking this view in 1800 and perhaps standing there and looking back this way, you would have seen nothing as dense as this of course, but you would have seen a whole series of villages developing down this bank here and those are still there in one form or another.

One of them was actually called The Village which is quite interesting; it’s not much of a village. I don’t know how you could describe it, it’s a large area. This is part of The Village here really, yes. Well, no, well yes, yes it is, The Village, those houses there. And there are several more, there is Andersonstown which is up here, and there is Twinbrook and Polebrass and a whole series of what were in the 19th century something rather like favela’s in South America. Very low quality of housing, built up the sides of the hill side.

The industry on this side was very largely linen and textiles generally, that’s to say rather low skill levels, mass industrial employment and the housing that went with it. Whereas on this side, the main industries were ship building and engineering, mostly but not exclusively high skilled.

And producing on the whole, a rather better class of architecture. Although they are all very mixed up of course. And this side is extensively Protestants and this side is extensively Catholic. So it was a very ingenious system in operation in the 19th century which prevented Catholics from getting jobs in the ship building industries.

I did some research on an entirely different subject into the origins of students at the College of Arts. The College of Arts in Belfast was a big place and it began in the 1870’s as part of a general movement towards technical education in all cities of Britain. And I looked and couldn’t find many obviously Catholic names in the registers. Absolutely nowhere was it mentioned why this should be so, but it was a fact. There were lots of Hunter’s and Dixon’s and those sorts of names but there weren’t a lot of O’Leary’s.

That’s one of the rather interesting things about doing this search in a place that is very divided; you can trace what’s going on by looking at people’s surveys. It’s not infallible but it’s often a very good guide. And of course it was much the same way when you looked at the governors of the College of Arts; they were all without one exception very Protestant names.

So there was a whole. Oh, the point of the College of Art was to provide skilled design technicians, skilled design craftsmen of different sorts for the fitting-out trades. Because Belfast was unlike most of the big ship building cities of Britain. It not only built ships, it also fitted them out. It had not only horizontal integration; it also had vertical integration of its skills. So that Holland and Wolf and one or two other big firms didn’t just make the hulls of ships and then send them off to someone else to fit out, that was the norm, but
they actually did everything themselves. Down to making the carpets, which of course was a tremendous producer of skilled labour and a tremendous demand for skilled labour. And all that goes with that in terms of high wages, skilled crafts and social differentiations.

I live in a street which is a perfect example of this. On the other side of the street there are these truly magnificent late 19th century mansions in a huge terrace and my goodness aren’t they good! They are like the Italian Palazzi; there have marble columns in them for God’s sake! On my side of the street, a good deal more modest. I believe it was like the captains on that side, and the crew on my side. But then going down another couple of streets, the houses get progressively smaller and the whole area is in fact differentiated by this. In fact it even goes down to the nature of the brick that was being used.

In common with most of the brick cities of Britain, the bricks were made from the clay that was dug out as the foundations were being prepared. And you fired them on the spot. This is very common for London; London is also a brick city. But it’s also true of Belfast. And of course, quite a lot of it was pretty ramshackle brick making. So that the back of our house is made up of a brick which is about the consistency of tea biscuits. If you rub it if it’s wet it starts to come apart on your fingers. Go out to the front of the house, and there is quality brick that has been put on the front of the house and some very nice terracotta details, all very stylish and the brick at the front of the house is as good as ever it was. But we can’t forget the phrase, Queen Anne front, Mary-Anne back.

This is such a common thing that we get everywhere but it’s quite nice to see it very deliberately displayed, a kind of hierarchy in the quality of the materials. Brick of course is not a placed material and I wonder if we could just have another slide, another picture.

[SLIDE 03]
It’s a similar view of the details we got before; this is up close, the typical brick terraces. Some of them are good little houses. They remain quite durable, they are quite well built, you can see the hills on the background, that’s these hills here [REFERING TO SKETCH] and the sharp peak on the right hand end, that’s Cave Hill there with a 400 foot cliff on it. I mean these are big cliffs, 400 feet of crumbling basalt.

And then along there, and you see there is almost nobody living up the slopes here because these tops are over 1000 feet above sea level and its really cold up there in the winter. And you could quite often be sitting in the sun down here looking up, and you’ll find snow on the top there, its quite striking. It’s rather like Edinburgh in that respect. There are very steep temperature gradients.

So the texture of the city down this side on the Catholic West Bank of the Lagan is not as continuous as it is on this side because it’s broken up by these steep hillsides. And although you can’t see them very well here, there are a whole lot of streams coming down like this. And these produce water power for the textile mills. There is nothing like that on this side, if you wanted to get a good big fire, you had to have coal here.
There is a whole secret history again about this which is the whole nation of Northern Ireland took oak. In the 17th century Ulster was the last great reserve of oak in Europe and everything depended on oak in the 16th and 17th century, it was necessary for ships, it was necessary for architecture, even more importantly, it was essential for barrels and fish boxes to store food for the winter. And the huge oak forests of Northern Ireland which would have once covered all those hills there, were cut down in a very quick time. And if they hadn’t done that, the 17th century Britain would probably have come to a halt because it was like oil, it was oil and steel combined.

So all these Catholic villages here, largely separated by streams and there’s the River Lagan flowing along the bottom, which is quite a sizable river, you can’t walk across it or you can’t even swim it, so its quite a substantial river. The urban texture on this side is rather broken up into separate distinct areas. Actually you can see one of them there, and another there, and there is another there. And even now, more so now, because the motorway has been built you just can’t get from one to another easily. Irrespective of sectarian divisions which a few years ago were pretty seriously nasty, I mean you could get shot for walking along the wrong side of the road. And people were, down the end of the street from where we were. It was a bad place to live in that respect.

The town was cut up into different sections and the motorway really put the cap on this. Now there is a whole swathe through the middle of town, which is seriously under developed and seriously under used. There are huge empty sites, which is a very strange thing to have in this day and age. Large empty sites, probably Mark you will have something to say about that? Yeah? He is nodding! Because its one of the really substantial things about Belfast. And so you have got to imagine a place that’s difficult to get around in anyway, and then lay on top of that, sectarian animosity of a fairly extreme kind for 20 years or so. But it’s still there. It’s just as hard to get around Belfast now as it ever used to be. I think he is nodding again!

It’s a really tricky place to get around. And if you are a moderately shy and sensitive person like myself I wouldn’t like to walk through some of these streets. I feel often as though I am in an American city where you really do have to keep your eyes open, what are these people really like on the other end of the street? I mean it was said of our house in its little enclave, that it was Volvo’s at that end and Kalashnikov’s at the other end of the street. Well, that’s what the taxi driver said to me and it was true! Not only that, but my friend was living in a very stylish little enclave up in North Belfast, and the railings outside of peoples were made from cut offs from hand made sten guns welded into a frame. Which is a bit weird! [Laughs]. So this little town is quite tricky to get about.

Now what architects, planners, housing mangers do in this situation, is extremely difficult and one important cause of all this ill feeling of course, is very poor housing conditions. Which pretty much everybody endured but there is no doubt that the Catholic population got it worse, because they have very little say in the actual running of the city.

There were one or two attempts at modernisation. There was a huge big complex known as Divis Flats, which seems to be a pretty bad attempt of trying to make a non sectarian pseudo sub-modernist solution to this problem with a
thing that was a lot like Park Hill in Sheffield or Quarry Hill Flats in Leeds. By the photographs it doesn’t look too bad but it was a total failure as a place to live. Why it should’ve been, I don’t quite know, I think it was because of management, people were stuck in there. And of course it became very easily controlled by people. The whole intention of concentrating the population like that, is to make people controllable.

But controllable by whom? And Divis Flats in particular and several others of the other big ‘people concentrators’ that went up at the same time became the fiefdoms of the various paramilitary organisation bosses, gangsters, call them what you like. There are a fair amount of pure gangsters in all this. So when these quite reasonable and quite ordinary streets were knocked down and turned into big blocks, they became controllable spaces, or if you like defendable spaces. Now what I have now got, I want to look at some street plans. I’ll come back to that in a moment…forward, forward, forward, there!

[SLIDE 08]

One of the few really serious pieces of work which the British Government, the national government put into this was to take control of housing out of the hands of Belfast City Council. Belfast City Council was widely considered to be responsible for this housing debacle and I think it was. I think it was a very shameful period of British city history. And they created a body called the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, a rather Rooseveltian kind of New Deal. The people who were running it were what you might call Fabian Socialists. That certainly true of Charlie Brett, no relation of mine; but he was the man who was chairman and he was very much a man of that intellectual tradition.

And they had also been reading lots of American sociologists by Alison … Alison is actually British isn’t she? Anyway, they were books on the idea of defensible space, which were read very widely in the 1970’s when people were looking for alternatives to tower blocks and huge people condensers. And it was particularly attractive for Belfast because people didn’t want to move, they wanted to keep on living in the same place. This is what happens when you have a politically divided city, people don’t move. It’s astonishing how little Northern Irish families move. They might move twice in their lives but they are more likely to move four times in Britain, in mainland Britain.

There’s all kinds of interesting consequences flow from that, I mean Belfast is a wonderful mine of art nouveau fireplaces because nobody has ever renewed them. And there are whole gangs of people who steal these fire places from knocked down houses. But this is what Short Strand looked like before the housing sector came along, and this is what it looked like when the housing sector got to work. Because they were working to a brief whereby they had to completely renew the housing stock with something much better built, and much more egalitarian and much more easy in every way and yet they had to keep the same people together again because people didn’t want to be separated.

Short Strand in particular is a little Catholic area right in the middle of town which was a hairy place to be in 1970. Anyway, this is the solution. They
enclosed the whole place, because these are actually quite high walls going round it, you can’t pass through the area any more. In fact you can’t get in at that end and drive through blasting at people with a machine gun, which people did, because you would come to a dead end. That would be a … [laugh]. Well, I mean how can we talk about this kind of thing? I mean we laugh, I have to laugh but actually it isn’t funny because here are some people and some were trying to kill one another.

So one solution was to make no way through and to replace this grid of throughways by a complicated rather picturesque maze-like plan of little closes and cul-de-sacs. Can we have another slide please? Forward yes.

[SLIDE 09]
These are hanging by the little closes and cul-de-sacs, these are executive houses from Short Strand. Actually, it’s just a couple of streets away. These are rather attractive and they do seem to have worked very well, because here 20 or 30 years later there is no vandalism, no serious vandalism going on. There is no graffiti. Everybody knows who is living next to them and people feel secure here and they are attractive places.

The houses themselves, particularly this lot are extremely well built, I mean top quality craftsmanship, some of it. There are other housing executive estates which are nothing like so good but these set a kind of standard and some of the housing associations and cooperative movements that have grown up are inheriting a very good tradition of domestic small scale houses to build.

It’s the same basic kind of house, three up three down, which we saw in those terraces but it’s of a very different plan and circulation pattern and a very different life experience, space experience.

But there is of course a negative side to this because a defensible space is also a containable space and there is a long running discussion whether or not places like Short Strand had been built in this way so that it was quite easy to contain the people of Short Strand by parking a police Land Rover in the street and no one could come in or out.

Well, I put this to the housing executive in an interview and they didn’t take kindly to this suggestion and I don’t suppose it had actually occurred to them because they were at a Fabian socialist tradition of thinking about social management, which didn’t really expect people to behave so badly. They really didn’t expect it and they came up with a solution which actually enabled the police and the army, all the paramilitaries, to close-off these estates and therefore to also make them in a sense, little fortresses. And there was a period where short strand was a little fortress. Well, people like me couldn’t go there. I wouldn’t have wanted to. But there were difficult situations which evolved in several places whereby the ostensibly intelligent use of public space for civic betterness was actually reversed on itself because the topology, the geography of these enclaves could be turned inside out in this way.

KIERAN LONG: That’s 45 minutes, just so you know.

DAVID BRETT: I have just been told I have talked for long enough!
KIERAN LONG: No no, carry on! I just wanted...

DAVID BRETT: Well people do seem to be paying some attention there!

KIERAN LONG: I just wanted you to know...

DAVID BRETT: Well they might not be, they might be all asleep! I shan’t go on too long, but the point I am trying make here is that actually the deep underlying structure of a town like Belfast, and its peculiar particular geographical and geological structure helped to move the city towards this kind of a problem.

Can we just go back to that original map, the very first, the one, which says map.

[SLIDE 01]

This is something I want to draw your attention to because the world in which buildings are put up is not just a physical world, its a conceptual world of places, named places, legal entities, legal persons and it’s worth looking at some of the names on this map here. We have got Lurganville, Ballyknock, Lisadian, Aghnatrisk, Inisloughlin, but there is nothing there; these are just empty fields according to the map. What is this? What is Lurganville? There is nothing there.

But what we are looking at here are the remains of a much older system of land management. We are looking at the concept of a tram land which is a particular kind of organisation of land that grows out of Irish and Scottish heritage. It may have existed previously in England and Wales but there is not really much sign of it anymore. And it’s a rather curious notion because it isn’t really a place in the way that we think, there is no centre to Lurganville, just fields. But if I send a letter to somebody in Lurganville it will get there because the post office believes in these bodies. They are very old and very sensible ways of organising land because prior to modern times there was no enclosure in Ireland.

An enclosure of land which sets up the present organisation of land law was a product of the privatisations of the 17th century. Most of the settlers of Northern Ireland were the Scots from Ayrshire who were heavily into closed land. And their way of dominating the local population was to build fences and walls and hedges and say no, you can’t cross my hedge and what’s more if you do, I’ll shoot you! And it’s still quite like that; there are no rights of way. In Ireland generally and in Northern Ireland certainly not. There are none at all, you actually can’t go for a walk in the countryside without having a word with the farmer first. And he may not be willing to see you even then. And there are all kinds of designated footpaths, the Ulster Way which walks all around Ulster and you come to it and it says “No Ulster Way here” or “Bog Off!“ These kinds of messages, because they are against it.

And the other thing of course that this is like, this kind of a map, it’s like North America. Because the same thing applies in North America. There are not rights of way in any way in which we think of them in Britain. When I lived in
Yorkshire, a long time ago, every field had a stile that connected with a stile in the next field. And anyone could walk through, and every now and again people would do a mass walk just to make sure everyone knew about them.

And this was a really important principle. And there is still of course more recently a Right to Roam. These don’t exist in Ireland because the concept of land ownership and land control is radically different. And the kind of landscape we have got here is not a landscape created by indigenous people, it’s a landscape created by settlers, all determined to hang on to their plot of land come what may.

And so if you look back further and further into these concepts, you come across a very deep deep geology of human society at these points, “What is it to own land?” And in the climate system, we have got the taming of the islanders in 1700 or wherever you want to draw the line, you could go anywhere. Land was owned by the clan communally in some form. I mean it was never quite as simple as this.

Also of course there are no proper measurements, so a Kilkenny mile had not much to do with a Cork mile, they wouldn’t connect up at all. It is still like that in some parts of the world. I have been told Norway is very difficult, if you go from Oslo miles are about the length of our mile, but if you out to… a mile is about five miles, it’s as odd as that. That was very much what’s happened in Ireland, the bringing of Ireland under sort of British rule which was happening in the 17th century, was amongst other things has been made united not only land law, but land measurements, the key thinking about land space.

Space was being redefined; it was if you like metric space rather than existential space. But that point I think we may be meeting up with that remarkable book by Heidegger upon ‘the Origin of the Work of Arts’ is that right? He is nodding; he seems to think I am right. I wouldn’t like to argue with that too closely, but the difference between existential space, which we experience, and metric space which we measure seems to be rather crucial to any consideration of architecture and planning and cities.

And if you don’t get that right, somehow or another you get these holes that arise between boundaries and ownership. I think I can’t say anything more sensible, so that’s all! I don’t know if I am talking sense now, sorry, I think I am losing it a bit!

KIERAN LONG: I think you are but we can get you up again when Mark has finished to answer some questions if you like?

DAVID BRETT: Yeah, is that any use to you Mark?

MARK HACKETT: Yes, I am really taking on a different direction.

DAVID BRETT: Well that’s great!

MARK HACKETT: This is a great sort of geological mapping.

KIERAN LONG: Well let’s thank David. Thank you David
KIERAN LONG: And now it’s over to Mark. Mark Hackett from Hackett Hall McKnight architects who many of you may be aware of, they are multi award winning, they won Young Architect of the Year Award two years ago now but also Mark is the co founder of the Forum An Alternative Belfast and I’ll just let him carry on.

slide 01
MARK HACKETT: So, Forum an Alterative Belfast was really something I set up with about 10 other people, almost in frustration of the nature of being an architect in Belfast and practising as an architect in Northern Ireland. Is that ok sound wise at the back yeah?

So thank you David for a very different view of Belfast which I think has been enlightening to me, even living there for 20 years. I am going to come at it a different way and this is a mish mash of a number of talks I normally do to non architectures, lay people, politicians. And in a way what For an Alternative Belfast is trying to do is really what universities and university architecture and planning departments should have been doing throughout the Troubles but didn’t in a way.

I think the universities and architecture departments certainly that I was educated at in Queen’s put their head in the sand in terms of thinking about what was happening in the city that they were meant to be training architects to try and build in. And the other thing is that… I lost my train of thought there.

Slide 02
So Belfast is a city that’s lost 200,000 people since 1960. 35% in 35 years is another way of looking at it. And I would say this is a structured loss to all of the surrounding towns. People were forced out in three ways, they chose to leave because it was a place they didn’t want to live there in the 70’s and 80’s and this was generally the more affluent class who moved out of Belfast to the surrounding towns.

Then there was a kind of, I would take a slightly different view on the Housing Executive, I think what they did in that process of making cul-de-sacs was they reduced the terrace population of say 100% down to 40%, so you could only rebuild 40% of the population in that typology of housing and they did it en mass. So those people were effectively forced out to other housing estates in surrounding towns. And the surrounding small towns, quite far from Belfast, 30 or 40 kilometres, ended up having more sectarian problems because people were decanted out of Belfast and shared those acute sectarian tensions that had always been part of Belfast really.

And then I think the final loss is the people who were actually forced out, there was in the early part of the Troubles a few nights where 2000 people were burnt out on August 1969 so there was a sort of enforced movement of people as well.

In the early part of the Troubles, that enforcement was deemed to be one of the largest movements of people in Western Europe before the former
Yugoslavia and the other aspect is that I think the other thing is the governance in Northern Ireland, in 1972 the Direct Rule was applied, probably long overdue, it should have been really done in 1969.

But with Direct Rule came the stripping of powers from the local government so local towns and areas did not have real power except bins, baths and bogs and burial grounds. So you had this kind of regional governance, you had the department for roads, for housing, the housing executive; they did housing all over Northern Ireland.

You had various different departments which were Northern Ireland wide and they were run by a few Direct Rule ministers for 30 or 40 years. That has been inherited by a kind of coalition government system where you have got the diametrically opposed Sin Fein, the DUP, now in a kind of coalition, running the same departments and what it means is that you don’t have any town or village in Northern Ireland that has control of its own destiny.

So there is no plan for Belfast, there is no city architect for Belfast, there never has been. And that sort of fragmented government does mean a different sort of fragmented space I think.

So that’s a different view of Belfast with its core and its neighbourhoods and about 12 arterial routes that exist in the city and those are the neighbourhoods. And really I did those maps to start to...you know we had been in the process of starting to map peace walls which...I’m quite sure it’s an activity that you’re working in Belfast you’ll do with great enjoyment. It’s our greatest tourist industry.

But I would say that there is much more to Belfast than peace walls. But that was actually not peace walls, that was peace walls plus roads infrastructure plus strategic use of industrial zones to act as buffers between different communities so actually only about 10% of the lines on that map are peace lines as we would formally know them. And there are 40 peace lines in Belfast.

So I think what you see is infrastructure that is government led, lets face it, dividing the city and you can see that its much more divided in the West than it is in the South and in the East actually a lot of the lines are Victorian divisions which were industry embedded in areas of houses, and you cant get through industrial zones as a walker or a cyclist. So these are actually barriers to the walking and cycling movement I should say. You can drive between any area of Belfast and that’s really what happens. It is a very car dependant city. And very American in that sense.

Slide 06

So the disconnected city was really created by infrastructure and in the 1970’s and in a sense even though this road, the Westlink, it cuts right through the city and the inner ring road, so they built two parallel roads. They built an inner relief road around the city core and they built a sort of regional motorway through West Belfast and North Belfast and they built them very close together and what you can see happening is a sort of creation of islands.

And of course you know, it’s a bit like, I remember reading about the Russian army being annihilated by the Fins when they came on the road from Russia to Finland, and the Fins would come and just come and just break them up into little…and the weather did the rest really.
And that’s what happens here, essentially when you break the urban continuous fabric into little zones surrounded by impassable roads I think those areas degrade further and further as neighbourhoods which have changed vastly over time. And that’s that area, the photograph of that area.

This is the road space taken up by the 70’s and 80’s road building. But I think key to understand is that this road was planned in the mid, probably early 1960’s. Most of the land owners who owned the terraces, because the terraces weren’t generally owned by the people who lived in them in the working class areas, they were owned in groups of five and 10 by private landlords. And those landlords weren’t fixing the housing up from the 60’s and the housing conditions in Northern Ireland were some of the worst in Britain, and they have been historically.

They haven’t been renewed at any point since the 30’s or the 50’s. There was a real neglect in the way that housing had been thought about. And the final nail was really those road plans because as soon as a landlord knew that they were going to get their land vested to build a road, they knew they were going to get bought over, the five or 10 houses, so they didn’t care about the tenants who lived in them.

So by the time they came to knock these areas down at the start of the Troubles, they really were rat infested, they really were pretty poor places. And you had the Troubles on top. And the one thing that hasn’t been discussed in Northern Ireland is actually the impact of these plans and what was happening in the city on the start of the Troubles because leaving aside the Bogside, the Battle of the Bogside, which was about the 12th, 13th or 14th of August 1969, which was the real start of the Troubles in a sense, a number of things had been going on.

The start of the Troubles moved from the Battle of the Bogside to Belfast on the 15th and 16th of August in ‘69 and it was precisely in these areas on the left hand side of the map that had actually been blighted and had various other social tensions to do with housing petitions. So I think that’s something I haven’t really read very much about, it’s something that is very hard to research but it’s something that needs to be researched.

Slide 9

This is a photograph of that plan from Ron Wiener’s book and it shows the intended motorway around Belfast, its sort of the heart of the city, with a heart around it in that sense. It’s just incredible that they were thinking of putting this through. And you can see underneath on the West map how, despite the social divisions of the city, it was utterly connected as all cities were in those days really. And that is a book I would recommend to anyone, Ron Wiener’s 1975 book, the Rape and Plunder of the Shankill.

The City of Quartz, who is the author of the City of Quartz? Mike Davis. Mike Davis was living in Belfast at the time and actually married to a woman in Belfast and had two kids, we only found out about this later. But I am a little bit dyslexic and I couldn’t spell Ron Wiener’s name so I googled him and found out he was still here and he had a website. So we invited him over a number of years ago and that was really one of the things that sparked Forum for an Alternative Belfast.

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www.ripitupandstartagain.org
We invited him over to do a talk, it was an amazing event in a sense, this man who had written a book and lived on the Shankill Road for two years and this was the sort of key text in anthropology at the time, where he was studying urban anthropology and living in the Shankill and looking at the community action to stop the destruction of the Shankill Road.

And it was largely successful, the destruction of the Shankill Road stopped half way up and you can see that when you visit Belfast today. You can see that the lower Shankill is annihilated and the upper Shankill still has shops and terraced streets, which were rebuilt actually on an open terrace grid not cul-de-sacs because at the time they found that they wanted more open streets. And I think it was really coming out of that.

So he was influenced very much by Ron Wiener at the time. So another thing that we, in terms of researching and in terms of reference in a sense is Jan Gehl’s work obviously on useable walkable streets in Copenhagen. And that methodology and way of thinking of the act of front to ground level, the number of doors, the number of shops, if people are familiar with that work. Because its so diametrically opposite to what’s happening in central Belfast, the walking experience in Belfast is bad for many reasons which we will soon see, but it’s a small city that’s not walkable. And even new developments like this, you can see the ground floor is full of metal shutters for car parking, sub stations, there is one Iceland shop round the corner and this is 200 metres right from the busiest streets to the city centre.

Slide 13

This is one of the new apartment blocks, but because it’s facing the inner ring road at a busy junction, it’s just a building that doesn’t work in that sense of repairing this sort of fracture.

So this is the Northern aspect of the inner ring road. And you can see how they knocked a lot of the buildings down to increase the size of the road. Changed into streets and so on, but they never had the economy to rebuild those streets. And this was another area where they never managed to get the road through, and they are still trying, the road engineers are trying to drive a six or eight lane road through this area. You can see the housing executive housing here.

DAVID BRETT: Those are the houses on my photograph.

MARK HACKETT: Yes, that’s the cul-de-sac you were showing, because that’s one of the better ones. I’ll show you some worse ones. But you can see how they turned their back on a future road. The sites have been cleared for over 30 or 40 years but because everybody knows a road is liable to go through there and there is no way of making a coherent city. So that’s sat like that for almost 50 years.

And this is something that just reminds people who live in Belfast what it used to be like.

Slide 17
And that’s a photograph with that red dot of North Street looking North, so turn these maps sideways and you’ll see the connection with David’s maps here, where we have been looking at it in a different way, rather than an individual cul-de-sac, what we have noticed when we were walking around areas of Belfast when I was doing some research years ago, was almost a distortion of the fabric.

So what was happening in areas that had strong grids of streets and industry like this and North Belfast, were becoming like this.

And you can sort of see the degree, I will go back and forward a few times here. You can see what’s happening and there is only one peace line in the middle, but I am not telling you where it is. [FLICKING BETWEEN SLIDES]

But that’s within communities you are getting that.

SLIDE 23
And that’s the lower Shankill, the part that Ron Wiener was looking at. 1500 housing units in that area, you can see the track of the road and the road widen, and what’s happened. Actually I have skipped a stage because there was a 70’s block built of four story maisonettes that has been knocked down called Unity Flats. And the yellow were the only buildings that remain from that.

And I should assert that this isn’t bomb damage, I think people often look at these maps and think “Its Belfast, they must be bombs.” But I think it’s pretty clear what is really happening.

So you are getting cul-de-sac streets with very fine North Belfast terraced houses, they were really grand terraces at the back of the photograph, and a cul-de-sac which no way connects to that street. And then the worker, one working class street right at the city centre and the apartment block I showed you before.

SLIDE 26
But this is the other side of the cul-de-sac, the ones built in the 70’s and 80’s. They sometimes have very high walls on the inside. This is in North Belfast and Tigers Bay. And very defensive parking, and you actually enter the back of the house instead of the front. So the houses that were built were back to front. There is a peace line on the left.

This is Bombay Street that was burnt completely in one night, rebuilt by a community association without planning permission. And then rebuilt 20 or 30 years later and they call them kissing roads. What is going on here? These are a set of streets that used to connect and somebody has decided to put a cul-de-sac and have another road here. It’s bizarre.

And that’s the Short Strand actually. And that is some text from another lecture. So there was a 60% community population loss in low density suburban housing. And I think the idea that its low density suburban housing is a typology, but this was the one photograph with greenery it in. It’s not mostly like that. And the sort of housing that is being built now in Belfast that we are trying to rally against is the sort of developer housing where, this is the Crumlin Road which is a defacto peace line in the city right up the middle of the road, all the streets are cut off. At the top of Crumlin Road is where the Holy Cross spirit
school was about five or 10 years ago. And that’s the sort of housing that really isn’t fit to live in.

Slide 30
And it’s interesting to talk about the early Housing Executive. Housing was a massive leap in terms of the construction but I think a real problem in terms of the typology. But what we are finding is house plans like this, and one of the keys things to note here is 3.050 is a living room for a two bedroom house and they have now defined in the UK and Ireland 3.3 as a minimum for a living room, but Northern Ireland only recently defined an improvement to its living room with their 3 meters. So we are a foot less living room space as a minimum requirement, and actually I have seen a lot where 2.9 is a living room.

What’s happened is they are putting in disabled toilets and all the modern regulations and all of the modern regulations, but they are not changing the overall area so these houses are to kind of recreate a kind of slum where teenage kids, how are they ever all going to live in that living room which is about three meters wide.

I mean Belfast has also become in the Wild West years a sort of free market par excellence because any investment was good investment. It was a city that had no confidence about itself and planners were willing to accept anything, so you have buildings like this with just enormous party walls, deck access again which is what those flats were.

And this flat again, thrown up with no idea what’s going on behind it. This block in particular has a ground floor car park and it’s 50 meters from the central library. And then Laganside which was the governments flagship for regenerating the river, and that’s what it looks like, I’m amongst architects, I don’t really need to comment do I?!

KIERAN LONG: Feel free though…!

MARK HACKETT: What can you say?! But they are so proud of it, they really are so proud of it. Laganside is the area around one side of the concert hall, just at the curve of the river; you can sort of see the disjointed blocks.

And again, the idea of building offices for new businesses and some yuppie apartments, there isn’t a single shop or bar planned in the whole area, so the ground floor is car parks and office.

Slide 34
So this is the notion of looking at a vacant city and vacant areas of the city centre, it’s about five year old this map. Playing around, realising how do you quantify that? And it’s actually the size of the entire Victoria core that took about 100 years to build.

And when we first launched we were asked particular questions by the people in government which we said “well we cant answer that accurately”. So we will run a summer school to actually map the city. So we gathered around 50 students, and I run these summer schools every year, so I will definitely forward the details to you next year, we want to make it more international.
And we studied the central area of the city and produced this map and we ended up calling it ‘The Missing City Map’ and it was a very simple exercise which nobody in the city have ever done, which to me would be the starting point 15 years ago with the Peace Process to say, “What’s the state of the city? Well let’s map the vacant sites so we know what we have got.”

And that’s the map showing it in a different way, and the formal green spaces that are left in the city. There is a lot of green space in the city but those are the only ones that work actually.

And we talked earlier about how infrastructure and green space seems to take over in a non structured way but not quality spaces that you can actually use.

But that was an assessment of the areas of housing that were so bad in their typology, that we would have to think about knocking them down in 10 years, 15 years again. And if you sort of add it together it really shows you a particular picture of the centre city as I call it. Because these are all living neighbourhoods, but the sort of better parts of the city are just beyond this map.

This represents as well the 20 minutes walking distance to the city centre. So it’s a part of the city if you lived in, you wouldn’t need a car at all.

And that’s the area of terraced housing left, and if you look at the grain of the city you can see the centre pretty clearly. The figure ground maps in red are two planned schemes Titanic Quarter and Sirocco Works, and then that’s the only area of housing left in that whole central zone. It’s quite staggering, the amount of money and resources spend building cul-de-sacs was just incredible.

Slide 41

And this is what would happen if we had Venice in the Lough, same scale of our city map. So you can see the city map highlighted at the bottom.

So Venice considers itself as a dying city and it has 59,000 people which in Italian law means they are not a city anymore, 60,000 is what defines a city. That area of Belfast has 32 thousand.

Slide 42

This is a peace wall built with a shopping centre. So this is Castle Court Shopping Centre was built in the 80’s, late 80’s. In fact I remember I used to walk past it when I used to walk to Art College, which is just up at the top of the picture.

And its sort of famous for its facade which was originally Neo Victorian because it was around that time when Prince Charles was making sure everything was Neo Victorian but actually the Minister, Richard Neaden, said “Well no, we don’t want to do that. We want to show a bright modern image for Northern Ireland” and so he made them do it in a kind of stuck on glass and mesh sort of language, but that was only the front. But I remember it being built, and it was a concrete frame with blocks and windows this side and it was covered in mirrored glass. So if you ever go to Belfast and see that building I
can assure you its bomb proof, and it was blown up three times when they tried to build it.

And what it did was it had a car park at the back, I’ll show you a few slides later so you can see the effect on the grain, but what we are looking at here is a yard on the side. This is Berry Street being cut off. Berry Street is one of the oldest streets in the city and they did a goods yard which you can see in red.

And that’s a very old map of the city showing how the river used to come from the west into Castle Place, down into the High Street which used to have a canal running up the middle and ships used to come in half way there. That was the structure of Belfast.

And then they built a parallel street, one of which is Berry Street, leading into Smithfield Square which you can see on to Castle Court, and you can see how the yard has cut that off.

Slide 44
And what its really created is, its only after a while of looking at this, we were really trying to solve some problems with some streets that were vacant, and an arcade that was burnt out, and a square that they made in the 80’s, that wasn’t really a square round the cathedral at the top.

So the blue dots represent spaces which you can’t walk past, they are not safe, especially at night. Two little alley ways in the middle of the picture. But the black line really indicates that making a left turn is impossible at night over that distance, so that must be about 500 meters.

So again, it makes Royal Avenue, I should explain of course, City Hall is at the bottom, this is the new shopping centre recently built, the red line represents a kind of desire line, between two independent shopping and art activity, galleries, artist’s workshops, mall shops, the kind of real Belfast in a sense.

These are the big opposites, like a Battenberg cake pattern, the big commercial modern shopping idea. And it’s quite interesting how it all comes together in this part. But this street is widened and is called Royal Avenue, you can see the original street there, Hercules Street and it became Royal Avenue for Queen Victoria’s visit at the end of the 19th century.

So it is really the main street in Belfast and the main shopping street and actually what’s happened is over a period of time they have built a peace wall. And this was a government sponsored scheme I should point out. And the little alley ways has one of the oldest bars, Kelly’s Cellars, so those two alley ways are quite inhibiting.

But actually what it is as well is that’s West Belfast and there is a door, I don’t know if I have really got it marked. There is a door to the side which is really the West Belfast entrance to the shopping centre and the door at the front, the little indent from All Avenue is a regional street with two curved elevations. And that is a main entrance of the Castle Court from the kind of neutral space of Royal Avenue which Catholic and Protestant shop together. But what you actually find until relatively recently, and I think still lingers, research shows that attitudes were half way down that shopping mall,
Protestant people felt that they were getting into Catholic West Belfast, inside supposedly neutral shopping centre.

So at the front you have Debenhams and Gap and at the back you would get different little shops that weren’t not so neutral. And it has a West Belfast door and it has a Shankill Door as well for the Shankill Road. So even in the shopping centre which was much vaunted, it was effectively building in division in the shopping centre.

Slide 47
And I won’t linger on this but this is the sort of master planning we have been getting in the city where the red line just goes round the yard and doesn’t even look at the peace wall that’s sitting, staring at the government departments that’s meant to be looking at this area of the city. This is the report, they draw the red line, the study area avoids the problem. So what were suggesting was a low cost interim solution where you build from the fabric, you build a yard which is smaller, and try to make this little connection through from the square.

I should really mention that they were trying to regenerate a place called Bank’s Square and that’s Berry Street in the distance with a blank brick wall, the service yard and so on so we were suggesting some notion of grading that wall and putting stalls on Berry Street and reopening it, making the yard smaller and covering the yard with active frontage. But that’s the West Belfast door which again is very underplayed at the minute; it’s just a single story mouth in this brick box.

Slide 49
And nearby on Garfield Street, some of the nearby activity we have been doing is singing, would you believe? Five of us got together and did a barber’s shop quartet in this barber’s shop The Tivoli. It’s a third generation barber’s shop in Belfast. The guy’s grandfather opened it in 1923 in this building.

This building sits, Garfield Street sits 50 meters from the front door of Castle Court, which was a massive injection of money in 1989 and this street is still lingering.

So this is owned by a developer who is being helped by one of the government departments, it’s the best land in the whole area to do a massive retail regeneration scheme. So we have been campaigning to say “look this fine looking listed Victorian building, you can fix it up now, you don’t have to wait for the main scheme.”

And you know, what does it say for probably the only third generation business left in Belfast? So on Culture Night last year we got together and we sang in the barbers shop and we composed our own songs, which was a very successful event.

And it’s really about remaking the connection between these two quarters so we are really talking about how you micro repair these streets as walkable routes. And then Bank Square is this area in the middle. This is the yard, this is the street and this is the diagonal route across Bank Square.
And the arcade is another story about Belfast; it was burnt down by arson, just as the planning application was going in for a large retail store. So that’s the building and one of the little flyers that we gave out on the night.

Slide 54
So a lot of our focus is talking about reconnecting the neighbourhoods beyond into the city centre. Thinking about the things that are happening.

At the top is the jail and the courthouse which are two buildings given over to the people of Northern Ireland. The former Crumlin Road jail and the courthouse, the yellow at the top is a new university, which is going to be planned for the top of the city in the next number of years around the art college.

And the yellow at the bottom is the route from Queen’s University, the one part of the city that works. And that one yellow line is the one line where you can walk into the city centre in a normal sense you know?

And the left is a connection from West Belfast and four new bridges which we think need to be fixed.

And this is a junction of the Westlink. Divis Flats on the left, you can see the tower block just about, the Divis complex used to be on the left here, but its now been replaced with housing. But you can see the degree of fracture that that road made. And this is one of the first PFI’s in Belfast. I think David you wrote an article about that?

DAVID BRETT: I did yes. The building was constructed around a job lot of window frames.

MARK HACKETT: Yeah, it really does look like they got the windows first and then they worked out...

DAVID BRETT: It’s a disgrace!

MARK HACKETT: And it’s a technical college you know?!

[Laughes]

MARK HACKETT: It’s something else. This building is so bad even the taxi drivers complain about it! That’s what its like to cross, would you believe there isn’t a single pedestrian crossing? There was no green man there for 30 years, which doesn’t even confirm to the disability act of 2006. So you have to kind of guess when you can cross on to these islands.

And there is a map of it as a starting point. You can see some terraces have survived here; I showed you a photograph of those before.

Slide 58
And this was a proposal we had worked into a bit more detail from the original idea and when we showed this at our launch actually, one of our government agencies did actually sponsor us to look at this as a study, and
that’s one of the ways we are actually continuing, we have been paid to look at this as a consultant and that funds all of our activity.

So looking at the vacant land that they never knew existed, you can see what we are doing here. We are essentially tightening all the radiuses but leaving the same number of lanes, and as an idea it seemed to work but actually now after a year we have worked it up in more detail.

This is an early slide, putting in nice old buildings so that it wouldn’t shock them you know?

But you can see the link on the right there, it’s a real shocker. Just to show people what could happen if structured tree planting and a set of buildings were put in. So we have worked this up in more detail, we have had to work around two underground rivers, a pumping station and a Northern Ireland sub station which has a main route through the green space.

So it was actually quite a good thing, we wanted to keep this green space on the top left because it has quite mature trees. So the buildings are really in the fragments where we can find space to build and we can’t afford to move services, that’s the other key thing. There isn’t enough economic value in this area to justify moving really any services to we are liberating this land and its such an obvious thing for an architect, but nobody had ever thought of doing this.

That’s one of the things that we ended up doing one weekend when we were bored for the launch and it got picked on as an idea. So the idea is to canvas the approach so you are entering a kind of civilised pavement.

The red sites pay for all the pavements and all the trees and really a year ago this was a zero sum game, we were saying the red sites are all publically owned, you are not using them for anything. In fact they are an absolute liability; they are putting bonfires in this one for instance. Cars are crashing into the backs of these houses, joy riders; there are still a few joy riders. And then the rest of the tree planting.

So looking at how you give a sort of delivery in an area of low confidence and this is something we have been using to sort of convince people that actually, the only way to achieve this was the design idea.

And we are talking to people who really don’t care about design you have to remember. Especially road engineers, because we have had some help from the road engineers now to facilitate the technical aspect of this project.

So this is a real project we are taking forward and we are now talking to the West Belfast Partnership Board who are going to become a design champion to deliver it. And the idea is that we design all the buildings in detail, get it through the very substantial technical hurdles that there are going to be in planning, that no private developer would take as a risk in this case, especially on the Falls Road.

And then the sites become packages once they are through planning permission so at least they are worth something. But to get even more commercial confidence the community is going to seed a number of key businesses who want to stay in that area, because as David says, people don’t want to move. They don’t want to move their businesses from Catholic West Belfast. But this offers them a way of having a more civic arterial route.
DAVID BRETT: Yes it does. Very much so.

MARK HACKETT: So the ground floor of this would all be active use and the...

KIERAN LONG: Sorry, I just want to move on to some questions quite soon.

Slide 68

MARK HACKETT: Yeah, we are not that far from the end. So that’s blue on the left. The idea is we are sort of suggesting now to the local government that if they did that on the South, the East and more importantly in the North. There is a scheme we are looking at in the Shankill and we are looking at some tower blocks in the North as well, so we are staring to look quite extensively at all these areas in a fair amount of detail.

So we have run summer school in the Northern area this year and really what we are saying is for the next upturn if this is mostly publically owned land has got through planning with a kind of design lead, packages up, we would be ready for the next upturn, because Belfast has had a lot of development, its just been unstructured.

And this was the theme of the summer school last year, in a fractured society where you have got the new university, you have got road service, you have got private developer who owns a piece of land in North Belfast. You have got a number of communities, essentially on opposite sides, but they have common interests. So this image was really saying if you have got common interest and nobody is really going to help us if we don’t help ourselves in Belfast, that we have got to try and find a collective way of trying to rebuild the city.

So this is the Northern part of the city which you can see pretty clearly in the figure ground map what’s been happening. But remembering that there was a clear structure there.

And that’s what replaced it with the road, building in the North of the city. An interchange between the Westlink and the M1 to the M2 and down to the M3. It’s unreal really. And you can see the little islands of commercial buildings that are left, gradually degraded as the land has been taken over by blight. And that’s really what happens in a vacuum of planning I think. And they want to build a new university down in the bottom left.

These are two really fine buildings and the river’s just here, this is a wider view.

And that’s the current road plan, so not content with building that road, they want to do more. They actually want to connect the Westlink seamlessly with the other road. And they are committed to do this because if you remember the slide from Ron Wiener’s book, this is actually it. They never managed to build the interchange; they built a kind of poor man’s version of it under the motorway.

And they ended up with traffic junctions at all the ends so the traffic snarls up. So the road service really want to build this road and we are coming to the point of view of, “well ok build your road.” But looking at the sort of
structure of Belfast, the other interesting thing is the commercial area and the shopping area that work. You can see the South to North walking routes and where the lines stop in a sense, that’s where the ability to walk stops.

And you can see it peters out at Castle Court, the large block on the left and even the new shopping centre, you can see how its actually cut off vital South to North, which is one of the reasons North Belfast doesn’t work I think, is the lack of walking routes and how they disappear.

And if we want to repair this one route up to this new fairly major regeneration project and potential in North Belfast, these two listed buildings by Lanyon who is one of the key 19th century architects and who did Queen’s University as well.

You can see its going to be quite difficult but this is the one chance that we might have. And those streets we talked about earlier are vital if you want to make that one street work, you have got to have the base of it working and connected. A bit like an artery.

Slide 78

That’s the jail and the courthouse as it is and as it was.

And this is the plan that we worked on in the summer school. You can see the interchange, you can see the Girdwood Barracks the former army barracks behind the jail and the new university making some new avenues. But really seeing how the urban green can be essentially forced through under these roads and around these roads and we have looked at that in quite a lot of detail of how that can be done.

But we came to the notion that for the communities and the various organisations around, the idea that what they could get together about was to lobby road service to say one thing. “If you want to build your interchange we can sit and fight you with environmental actions and probably lose for two years.” Or we can say, “ok build your road junction,” most of which is about burying the road in one option rather than flyovers, but lets have these six roads repaired as streets, calmed and repaired because the regional traffic has been taken off the street. And that becomes an achievable win.

KIERAN LONG: We really need to get some questions before we run out of time.

MARK HACKETT: Yeah, that’s it. So that’s one of the buildings, this is really it. This is a representation of how the buildings could be forced around the junction and how spaces could be made. It was just a quick sketch to show the potential of that.

And then, that’s Belfast on the same scale as Berlin, I think more recently I have been reading an article about critical reconstruction. And in a sense that’s what we are trying to do in Belfast.

This is a look at how, this is not a nostalgia for old routes and streets, terraced houses, its actually saying what’s important is the proper connections. But that’s the same scale. That’s so acute I can’t read it.

The final 20 seconds I think. I had a little video clip at the end but it doesn’t seem to be working. Ok, that’s it.
[Round of applause]

KIERAN LONG: Thank you! I am not going to try and sum some of those up, I am going to get straight to some questions because I want to have 15 minutes of discussion now. And what I wanted to do first is invite the guys at the front here who have been working in Belfast, first of all to tell us just in a couple of minutes why you chose Belfast to work in, and then maybe give a reaction to what you have head. Is that ok? Maybe Michael and Sam, and Lara, or whoever wants to start. Maybe talk that way.

MICHAEL CORR: If I could just use this map a second? I am from about here, somewhere I think. Lara you are from about here? And Fran has got family who is sort of based around that sort of area.

So I think we all have a strong connection with Belfast and Northern Ireland and that was one of the reasons we wanted to have a Belfast unit. Just very quickly I think one of the other reasons is important to mention is having a Belfast unit that is from London Met is quite interesting. Because there is a kind of innocence and naivety that comes with that, of taking a lot of students from various parts of the world into that situation.

And in a way its quite nice not to be laden with all the pressures and the problems that are there with that initial look. I really, I’ve got just a very quick story, I heard a nice little story the other day by David Grandorge and he was saying about some school children that had to name a rabbit, and the children were, this was in the 70’s, late 70’s or 80’s in Belfast. And they were looking around and they came up with the name Ira for the rabbit. And the teacher was like ah that’s lovely, that’s really a lovely idea, where did you get the name from? And it’s because they had seen IRA across lots of the walls. But I think there is something naive and innocent about that, and I think there is something very powerful about it and that’s one of the reasons why we hold the unit. What about you guys?

LARA GIBSON: I think my interest came from growing up in East Belfast, this section. And I spent all my childhood there and it wasn’t until I left when I was 18 that I really started to realise that I was from a very bizarre place because I could draw a map, or a line across Northern Ireland where I had or hadn’t been and spend most of my childhood and it basically goes something like this across the island.

And there are a number of reasons why that was that way and some of them legitimate to do with safety, et cetera but I was fed up with people telling me or asking me, “what was it like to grow up in a place where there are lots of bombs?” And I was saying “well that isn’t where I grew up; I grew up in a very different place.”

But bringing students as Michael said back over there to really investigate what those bomb places were like has been fantastic and I have to say it was about six years ago when I first walked the peace walls, even though I grew up there all my life. And I think that it echoes some of the things that have been said tonight, that it is a very divided country in lots of different ways. Yes,
you can’t get to many places without driving and I think that’s a really sad thing and certainly the work that Mark has been showing is really trying to address some of those issues.

But I think one of the things that the students really picked up on when we were in Belfast was there are an incredibly complex set of problems, and how do you as an architect start to address those problems and start to change something for the good? And a lot of the students picked up on the very very simple things that they felt would make a difference to the people who lived in around West Belfast.

One of the ways was by looking to the hills that David has given us such a rich history of, because you can see these hills from all around the city. It’s an amazing backdrop to whatever you build here. But that wasn’t really being embraced so some of the students proposed routes and new links through the city that brought you up on the hills, so you could look back on the city for a different view from maybe what you are used to seeing on the ground.

Another few projects looked at how a lot of Belfast people love to appropriate their houses and the facades, and they wanted to give that back to the residents, but they also wanted to improve the housing and the space standards that was also touched upon, because that is a real issue. And there were a few other things, but these were mainly just picking up from the very simple things that we think would make a difference.

KIERAN LONG: Fran could I ask you to join us too and maybe I’ll get some questions from the audience. We have got Brendan here and Patrick who I would like to ask and then even Mark. But before I do, who here has been to Belfast out of the students? Is that because you were in that unit or because you have just been?

Who is not in the unit and has been to Belfast? Can I ask, can one of you say something first? Has anybody got a thought or a point from their experience of a city?

FLOOR SPEAKER: Er, I have got a question about hills and a question about connectivity. In other contested cities high ground is incredibly sought after and can be marked, I am thinking of Jerusalem or Mostar, but it seems that here it seems there is a different condition that its more of a shared typography. Or maybe possibly a housing plane and with connectivity the question is, in a city like this under such duress at times, is some division actually needed? I mean, street typology, I am preaching to the converted but are there some boundaries needed?

KIERAN LONG: Two interesting questions, David, I wonder if you might consider the first one and reflect a bit further?

DAVID BRETT: I wasn’t sure what the question was?

KIERAN LONG: Well there is a question about hills, and what I am interested about what you were implying, is that there are places in the world that have hills with things on top of them that are somehow monumental or
meaningful, but I was wondering whether you might, if I have got what you said correctly, for you, they are a sort of background of the city but they will never be the city?

DAVID BRETT: Yes that’s true.

KIERAN LONG: I was wondering if you might reflect a bit more.

DAVID BRETT: A difference of 800 feet is a difference of probably five degrees Fahrenheit, which is an enormous difference to make and the temperature gradients in North West Ireland and North West Britain generally is as steep as Patagonia.

In my other life I was a serious mountaineer so I know about these things! And you just can’t imagine living on the tops of those hills. The original buildings that are to be found, the few old farms are actually very interesting, the way they are built to line up with the South West wind and the way they are dug into the ground, I mean it’s a rather extreme climate up there because they are hard to imagine them being made into a pleasure ground.

LARA GIBSON: But they are stunning to walk up and to look back at the city, and I think that is something that Belfast could start to invest in a little bit more. Because David has mentioned there is Cave Hill which you can go and climb and you have always been able to climb that I think, but the Black Mountains you haven’t been able to climb until recently because they were used by the MOD for training. So its only been in the last few years that the National Trust have opened them up and started a few walks around it. So in many ways even the mountains were divided, but that’s now changing thank goodness.

DAVID BRETT: So the top of the Divis has an elaborate television radar, local army radio station up there and it was a militarised ground for as long as I have been there until what, six years ago?

KIERAN LONG: I might come back to the one about housing typology in a second; can I take a couple more quick questions?

FLOOR SPEAKER: Yeah, it’s a question for…?

KIERAN LONG: Mark?

FLOOR SPEAKER: Yeah, I was really fascinated about what you were saying about that big junction and about how you are tying to convince people who didn’t deal with design and who were trying to create a value in these forgotten spaces and I was wondering how, or if, that slide that you had that had community written on it, whether you could go back to that and elaborate. Because I was wondering how you get it to financially stack up to people? Do you have to take a lot of risk? How do you say good design is valuable but trust me I’m an architect or, I mean do you have to put lots of figures on to it?
MARK HACKETT: Yeah well we are putting the figures onto it. I think the issue is one is an area that is territorial, so it’s the Lower Falls Road which is seen as Republican. But it's getting into an area of the city that might be seen as more neutral, i.e. the centre. So it has that stigma in a sense but you could get a certain amount of local businesses or people from a Catholic background who would fill that area.

But you are not going to get the normal development that happens in a city centre which strikes me as more financial than neutral in that sense. But I would say it’s probably not really neutral, not in a religious sense.

You know the design confidence is a thing coming from looking at Laganside, if you look at Laganside, they spent an enormous amount of public money putting in great paving, building a weir, changing the quays, doing all the infrastructure. Then they allow a number of developers to build some of the worst buildings in Belfast. And they didn’t observe any control what so ever.

So it meant if somebody wanted to build a reasonable part of fabric, they weren’t being supported by all the other Hilton Hotels and BT Tower and various other buildings that were built that wouldn’t support a certain neighbourhood. So actually the notion of design, I don’t really mean necessarily aesthetics, but more the simple functionality of good ground floor uses, understanding where stair cores go and making liveable units. We sort of know this is the way you can make a building; it’s a no brainer way to make a building that works. But actually it’s very hard to get that building built in Belfast you know, you wouldn’t believe how bad some of the things are.

KIERAN LONG: I wonder if there is a territory here that might bear on some of our other conversations in our other lectures which I think David I think you talked about towards the end of your lecture, the difference between metric and existential space, somewhere between what you are talking about and this kind of geological time and memory and so on.

And I wondered if Fran and Michael I could ask you for a quick thought on that because you’re working here, you are from here but you have been listening to both and whether you have a thought on this kind of world of pragmatism, this world of what it means, what space means in Northern Ireland?

FRAN BALAAM: I thought that David’s comment was really interesting about this idea of the way you experience space and the way you measure space and the way we are working this year.

We are working in a slightly different way so we are working in West Belfast again but we are working within a live project and we are doing a sort of a framework which is very much to do with measuring out areas yet we are kind of coming in the sense of trying to actually suggest how space is experienced there and how you can possibly measure things in a different way. Whereas there, I think they are looking at it in quite a pragmatic sense of what can we do in this space and what does it mean in terms of connecting to other areas and what can we say it means?
MICHAEL CORR: Its quite important at the minute because this thing that we are looking at at the minute is called a Gaeltacht Quarter and its this new thing where they are having this language quarter of Belfast, and even as soon as you say quarter, it starts to have this boundary to it...

KIERAN LONG: So it’s a linguistically defined area of the city?

MICHAEL CORR: Absolutely yeah, this shop, these people speak Irish, this shop they don’t so lets draw up a line. This is the Gaeltacht Quarter which is a very sort of dangerous situation to be in and I thought it was really lovely, first of all the way David drew the map and the way he talked about it, because it seemed to kind of, it was about experience and it was about something else rather than these kind of very defined edges and I think this is exactly the way we want to work with the students.

KIERAN LONG: And David, some of your work has been about this question of identity, you were just touching on that, and I wondered whether you might reflect a bit for us?

DAVID BRETT: This makes me feel rather nervous. I don’t…what is the question you are asking?

KIERAN LONG: I was wondering if you might reflect on this question of, a little more on where you ended your lecture, that the idea of something which isn’t metric space, what you described as existential space. It isn’t just experience but is something else, I wonder if you might just push this a bit further.

DAVID BRETT: Well I don’t quite know how to push it further at the moment. It’s a notion that is buzzing around in my head like a sort of bluebottle and it comes near and then it just goes off again! But I think I am on to something here because other people have written about this of course, Heidegger is a big example.

But my PhD supervisor is Ken Frampton who is also in this kind of discussion, there are a lot of people thinking about this now, and I am trying to find the way to get it absolutely simple but that’s very hard. I actually can’t answer the question that you want me to answer.

KIERAN LONG: We have somebody from the PhD group at London Met here and also a unit too, Patrick Lynch, I am also in the PhD group beginning to start to think about some of this stuff. Patrick, you don’t have to gloss Heidegger for us, but I wonder if you would like to react to this issue and to the two presentations?

PATRICK LYNCH: Erm...

KIERAN LONG: Loud, to them.
PATRICK LYNCH: He is one of the best writers in English at the moment alive, I think. He is also one of the wittiest speakers. They are seriously good architects and they seem like they are pretty good teachers.

You can’t take conflicts out of life and good walls make good neighbours the poet Robert Frost said. Arguably, that good roads make good neighbours. The key text that I think you are searching for is Joseph Rykwert’s ‘The Idea of a Town’, which maps everything from aboriginal song lines on walking, to the use of space in India, to what he calls road engineering masquerading as town planning.

And he starts with the Roman town and describes how our modern understanding of the Romans as rapacious, militaristic, which is certainly half the story. I think what you are talking about though is a universal condition of our time. My end philosophy by Dalibor Vesely has been referenced by Ken Frampton, the man who put him on to Paul McKerr’s essay, ‘Local Culture and Local Civilization’, which is about post colonial cities.

DAVID BRETT: Very important piece of writing.

PATRICK LYNCH: Yes, hardly known, student of Sartre existential thinker. We are working on a project on Victoria Street, Engineers Row, Barking; they built a fucking roundabout around a medieval Abbey. The planners have no shame and no sense of what they have done to the world. It’s just about efficiency.

This is a contemporary problem. We worked on the River Fleet last year with students which is a canonised river that turned into railway infrastructure and we are doing a project this year in Oporto. Dalibor’s big point was this isn’t just a protestant problem of technology and efficiency, its Heidigger that probably leads you to think that its actually in light of the modern mind.

Oporto has roads and rail infrastructure which cuts off the cathedral from the train station and created a ghetto, ... meant that the working class population were completely ghettoized and controllable by infrastructure, run down; they are trying to turn it into tourism as a way to solve that problem.

Like Shoreditch that was also cut off by one way traffic, like Oporto it’s a contemporary model for this happening all over the world.

Conflict won’t go away, the one way to deal with it is, there is a very brilliant social historian at Cambridge called Peter Burke, I don’t know if you know about him, but the one thing he pointed out was the only public space built in Great Britain since the reformation was Trafalgar Square. Trafalgar Square stands where Nelson to stop the... and anybody who doesn’t want to agree with industrial changes happening...

KIERAN LONG: They can’t hear you at the back...

PATRICK LYNCH: The second public space built is Horse Guards Parade which is built next to it in order to stop public life happening in Trafalgar Square. If you contrast that with the football game that happens on the Ponte di Rialto between fishermen from Careggio and the marine navy sailors from
the... area of Venice, as many men as you can get on the bridge as possible, one ball and whoever wins gets the ball back to their side of the island.

The Palio in Sienna is a similar thing. Courses are interesting because they do enable people to define themselves locally. The other one is a game of football that happens in the Santa Croce area of Venice...

It seems to me that Protestant collectivity is about building private property, Shaker barn. Catholic collectivity is about building cathedrals, we don’t do either of those things now.

What Mark’s talking about I think is more contemporary urban thinking which has to do with pragmatism as creativity, which I think is where we are now, we are in a post post modern situation, we are in a post ideological situation, where roads are being forced through because they are about efficiency. All of those things are aesthetic and moral, pretending to be ethical values but I don’t think they are.

In ‘Being and Time’, Heidigger talked about the difference between metric space and existential space, an example of this is how in traditional cultures you can describe something as being ‘a pipe smoke away’, people understand that in terms of situation, habit and use.

When we are talking about walking, are we talking about walking a parish? Walking in a pilgrimage? Or are we talking about a [unintelligible], an alienated human in the 19th century.

FLOOR SPEAKER: Sorry, can you stand at the front and talk because we can’t hear you?

PATRICK LYNCH: I have finished now I’m afraid.

KIERAN LONG: I was going to probably make you finish.

PATRICK LYNCH: The last thing I think you are getting at with your description of your geology of human society, there is a fantastic essay by the American artist Robert Smithson called ‘The Archaeology of the Mind’ and the other one is ‘The Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey’ where he talks about imagining in the future someone looking back at road engineering. It’s the kind of landscape which Philip Roth talks about in his early novels where the Jewish community get completely fucked by road engineering and goes from New Jersey by train. They don’t use trains, they all use cars and the areas between the railway and town is basically shattered, all the windows are broken in the factories.

And all of that is over now I think as a paradigm for the human species because we are running out of resources and we have to think about what we do have as a resource and luckily what you have is a sort of plan.

KIERAN LONG: I am going to stop you but thank you. I think we need to have perhaps a reading list email at the end of this but genuinely I mean it, we should have that and share it amongst ourselves.

Quicker than that, Brendan and Mark I wonder if I could get some thoughts and reactions. We have got Brendan here, a really good architect, you
might know his work and Mark Brearley, who some of you saw speak a couple of weeks ago. Brendan first really, in a couple of minutes, a reaction or thoughts?

BRENDAN: I know Mark very well because we met in Glasgow in the Mackintosh. I didn’t know much about David Brett at all but I must say I found his talk fascinating.

But the fact is I left Northern Ireland half a century ago because I couldn’t stand the bigotry of the place. And in a way, Mark’s work strikes me as the sort of work that needed to be done and you know, if it eventually it is being done, Group 91 in Dublin set about trying to deal with the ravages of commercial sort of development, and Mark is addressing that also in his reading of the political situation, so I mean I think its fantastic work that he is doing and I am glad that somebody is doing it.

KIERAN LONG: Great, thank you. Mark can I have a quick thought from you in the same context?

MARK BREARLEY: It’s the same kind of thoughts and a month ago I would have been thinking I wonder if we can nick this person to come and work in London but now…

KIERAN LONG: Now you need a job off them! [Laughter]

MARK BREARLEY: Now can I come and work in Belfast?! I thought your explanation and observations on Belfast were inspiring and wonderful and the way you were unpacking the place. And I just think what you are doing Mark is superb and I was thinking “I wonder if there are people doing this in other cities in this country?” Maybe there are but I don’t know about them. I think it’s fantastic what you are doing and the main point is you should carry on doing it!

DAVID BRETT: I think actually the kind of impetus that’s driving Mark and his colleagues along is shared by quite a lot of architects and concerned people, I feel sure it is. I hope it is, I feel like you about it.

KIERAN LONG: Thank you, I don’t want to go on for much longer so maybe I’ll wrap it up there. Its been quite a long evening. I could carry on with these guys for ages, because they have just been amazing and so generous to come all the way from Belfast here to speak to us tonight, so can we please thank David Brett and Mark Hackett.

[Round of applause]

KIERAN LONG: We can continue in the pub. But also I want to tell you about next week which is going to be amazing and very different because we have got lots of young people.

We have got two people called Paloma and one called Lettice and we have got Trenton and Deepa from This is Not a Gateway and we have got amazing young people doing incredible things in London and we will send you
an invite. So I am really looking forward to that so come next week and thank you for coming tonight.

[End of recorded material]