

SMALL CHANGE

an epilogue of the exhibition
by **Sevie Tsampalla**

ARTISTS

Jane Lawson, Noor Nuyten,
Lauren O'Grady, Claire Weetman

COLLECTIVES

Buddleia / public works,
Network Nomadic Architecture,
Plus-tôt Te laat, Quartier Midi,
Spectacle / Silwood Video Group

AirSpace Gallery,
Stoke-on-Trent 8.11 - 7.12 2013

airspacegallery

small change

an exhibition about change in real and
imagined cities

curated by **Sevie Tsampalla**

participating artists:

**Jane Lawson, Noor Nuyten, Lauren
O'Grady, Claire Weetman**

contributions by collectives:

**Buddleia / public works, Network
Nomadic Architecture, Plus-tôt Te laat,
Quartier Midi, Spectacle**

in response to *Small Change* by Nabeel Hamdi

AirSpace Gallery Stoke-on-Trent

8 November - 7 December 2013

Private View

Friday 8 November 6pm-9pm

Opening hours Thu-Sat 11am-5pm and
Tue-Wed by appointment

www.airspacegallery.org



NOTE TO THE READER

This book is realised in the framework of the group exhibition *small change*, presented at AirSpace Gallery, Stoke on-Trent in November-December 2013. An epilogue of the exhibition, it collects the curator's reflections on selected works and projects, as well as texts by invited authors.

The book can be read online, downloaded, forwarded or printed.
Design by Chatzis fotios, chatzifotios@hotmail.com

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Sevie Tsampalla

INTRODUCING SMALL CHANGE

small change was a group exhibition that focused on change and the city. It featured existing and new work by four artists: Jane Lawson (UK), Noor Nuyten (NL), Lauren O’Grady (UK) and Claire Weetman (UK). Alongside the artists, the following collectives were invited to contribute with audiovisual material from projects set in diverse urban contexts: Buddleia / public works (UK), Network Nomadic Architecture (GR), Plus-tôt Te laat, Quartier Midi (BE) and Spectacle / Silwood Video Group (UK).

The exhibition was a response to the book *Small Change* by architect and urban planner Nabeel Hamdi and its main idea that small-scale actions have the power to bring about positive change in urban communities. Outlining the principles of good practice when it comes to placemaking, *Small Change* is about a community-based approach to urban planning, which starts with listening to real needs and observing the intelligence of places and people. (Hamdi 2004, 17) Learning from the informal ways that locals organise themselves, using own resources and improvising solutions, small interventions that have immediate effects and strategic potential, can lead to meaningful and long-lasting changes.

“Building a bus stop in a slum leads to a community growing around it.” (Hamdi 2004, 73)

Drawing from the book’s key concepts, the exhibition examined change and placemaking through the lens of art and collective action. The urban planner of *Small Change* – the book, was in some ways replaced by the artist in small change – the exhibition. Looking at the city both as we experience it and as we re - imagine it, the exhibition asked: Where do art and placemaking meet in contexts of real urban changes? Can change be located in the sphere of the urban imaginary?

“Imagine first, reason later.” (Hamdi 2004, xxvi)

From the idealised depictions in renaissance paintings to the modernist urban utopias, art has always been drawn in exercises of re-imagining the city. Contemporary artists engage with urban life in ways that cross boundaries between art, activism and community building. Reclaiming public space and working together with communities, artists act as placemakers and catalyse collective action. Operating on local scales and low budgets, their interventions mirror the inventiveness of the informal cities that Hamdi talks about. As much as it is about objectives and action, change can begin with improvisation and imagination. (Hamdi 2004, 133)

The act of balancing between (utopian) visions and real urban challenges was taken as a starting point for the exhibition, but not in order to seek consensus. The premise was rather, that both the ‘hard’ city of real data and the ‘soft’ city of emotions are constituent elements in the processes of placemaking. Beyond the big numbers of growth and development, the narrative of urban change can also be told through people’s voices and visions of the places they inhabit. Placemaking is often built on such tensions.

“The city as we imagine it, the soft city of illusion, myth, aspiration, nightmare, is as real, maybe more real, than the hard city one can locate in maps and statistics, in monographs on urban sociology and demography and architecture”. (Raban 1974, 2)

The abovementioned concepts run through the curatorial proposition. The exhibition attempted to connect diverse individual and collective practices that research the experience of the city, its representations and possible re-imaginings. This publication partly documents the diversity of the show.

From the subtle altering of measuring devices (Noor Nuyten) to a socioeconomic re-organisation (Jane Lawson) and from changes of movement in public space (Claire Weetman) to imaginative spatial narratives (Lauren O'Grady), various approaches to space and scales of change were brought together. The 'hard' and 'soft' elements often appeared interwoven in the artists' works. Without necessarily rejecting their 'technical' properties, scale models, signs, mind maps and measure tapes are re-appropriated in ways that suggest it is possible to think differently about our city making tools and, by extension our relation to urban space. Sharing an interest in the representation of change, the works might start with simple observations or modifications, but soon depart from the actual to arrive at a space of potentials.

The collectives' contributions opened the exhibition further to the space of potentials, but this time locating it in real urban sites. The research in order to identify initiatives close to the principles of Small Change included cities that relate to the curator's personal trajectory, together with an emphasis on contexts of past or recent redevelopment, regeneration (Silwood estate, Brussels, Cheetham Hill) or social emergency (Athens). Three criteria based on the book defined the selection: enablement, togetherness and effort. The emphasis was on the relational aspect and the processes used, and not necessarily on definite results. In contrast to the book's examples, most of them are not about providing practical solutions, but are tactical, articulated through "arts of doing", like walking (Nomadic Architecture), cooking, and gardening (Buddleia / public works). Tactics are simple acts that can challenge or disturb the institutional strategies that define the city and life in it. (de Certeau 1984, 35) All of them are collaborative, with multi-authored outcomes (e.g. video's, texts and posters of P'TTL, Quartier-Midi and Spectacle) and, through partnerships, they build densely interconnected networks that help communities to form. (Hamdi 2004, 68) Mobilising multiple agents (artists, residents, local organisations), they enable them to respond to changes or work towards positive change. (Santos 2012, 7)

Creating interfaces between planning, art and activism, the projects included in the show participate in a broader framework of practices that engage with public space and placemaking. Despite the divergence of practices, two characteristics seem to be prevalent among them: 'they push transformative social change and they consider the production of space as a collective, dynamic and political enterprise'. (Santos 2012, 7) The change that they aspire to targets not just their immediate environment, but feeds the debate about what is public space, and where the interaction between the top down and the bottom up happens.

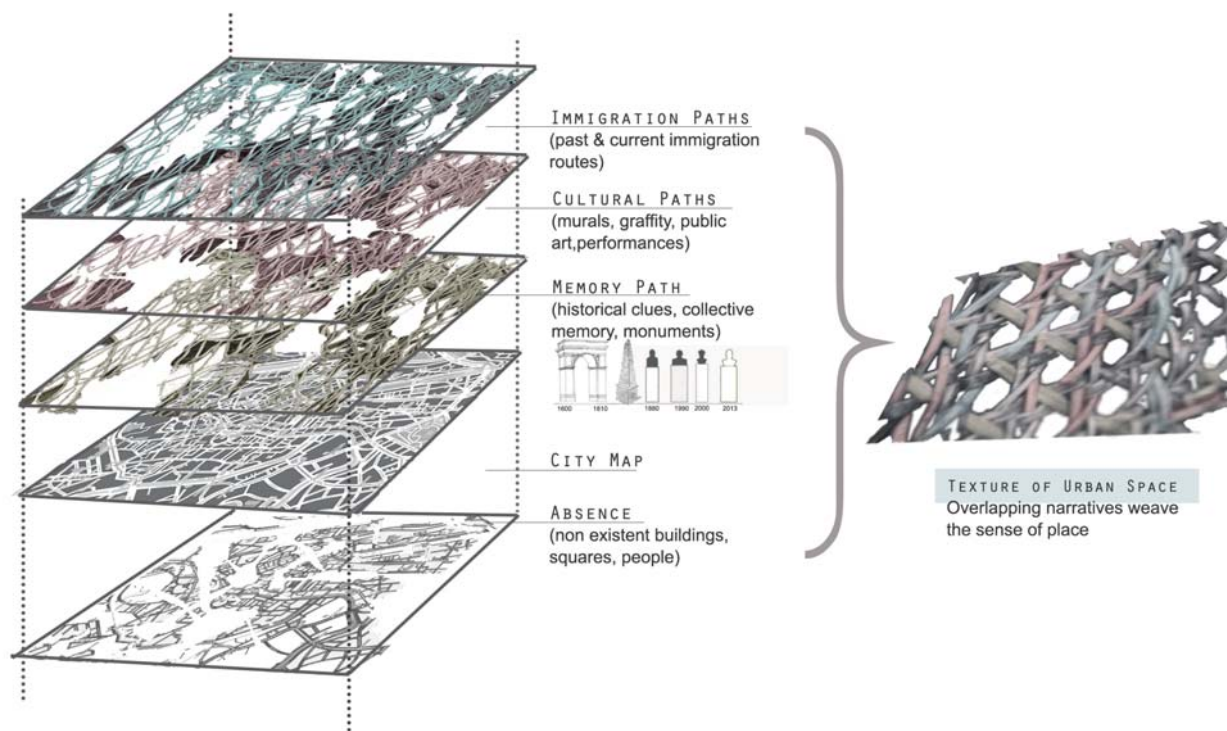
Change involves a projection in the future, implying an effort to make something different or better. In the exhibition change was articulated in both spatial and social terms, echoing their interrelation as constructing elements in the production of urban space. By now, we have come to understand that (public) space is not just the backdrop of change, but where change happens. (Soja in Lindner 2006, xvii) Cities are unthinkable without change. The way we experience them in the present and project expectations on them in the future, however, continues to be informed by past / historically dominant modes of thinking, very often based on notions of development, growth, large scale projects. The dialectic between lived, conceived and perceived space respectively, (Lefebvre quoted by Soja in Lindner 2006, xvii) was echoed in the exhibition. The works and projects included address all three spaces 'vertically'. Through imaginative appropriations and participatory processes, they activate potentiality in the small local urban contexts, and the collective urban imaginary, constantly re-thinking and re-making cities – real and imagined.



Installation view.

THE INVISIBLE CITY

by Maximi Papathanasiou



City Layering. Drawing by Maximi Papathanasiou.

The texture of urban space

Upon close examination the solidity of the material world – perceptually formed by the outer layer of its geometry – dissolves by revealing that every place is bounded by threads. A living town, even an abandoned district, is woven with the strands of people and events that have crossed it through time. When we touch a piece of fabric the experience tells us much about the weave of the fabric, whether it is sturdy or delicate etc., Likewise people's sense of place reveals a great deal about the structure of place. (Adams 2001)

Personal geographies of a city

Cresswell (2004) offers a definition for the difference between space and place, noting that it is this layering of meaning that turns spaces into places. Place experience is not binary, a simple matter of knowing or not knowing. Knowledge arises from actions and thus place-experiences present innumerable shades of differentiation depending on what one is doing in a place.



Men and Map. Drawing by Maximi Papathanasiou.

Emotional experience shapes spatial realities

The ongoing writing and rewriting of the urban space's realm have rendered the city into a palimpsest: a layered parchment consisting of countless fragments of stories; tangible (patina, array of structural components, etc.) or intangible (cartographic grids and remembrances), which none of them can be read in isolation or completeness. The image of the cityscapes are constantly shifting as we continue to walk through them... Perhaps it is this cinematographic storyline that ultimately creates our feeling of a place. The image of the cityscape is constantly shifting as we continue walking through it...and perhaps it is this cinematographic story line created by the knitting of visual frames, sounds and feelings, that ultimately builds the invisible sense of a place.

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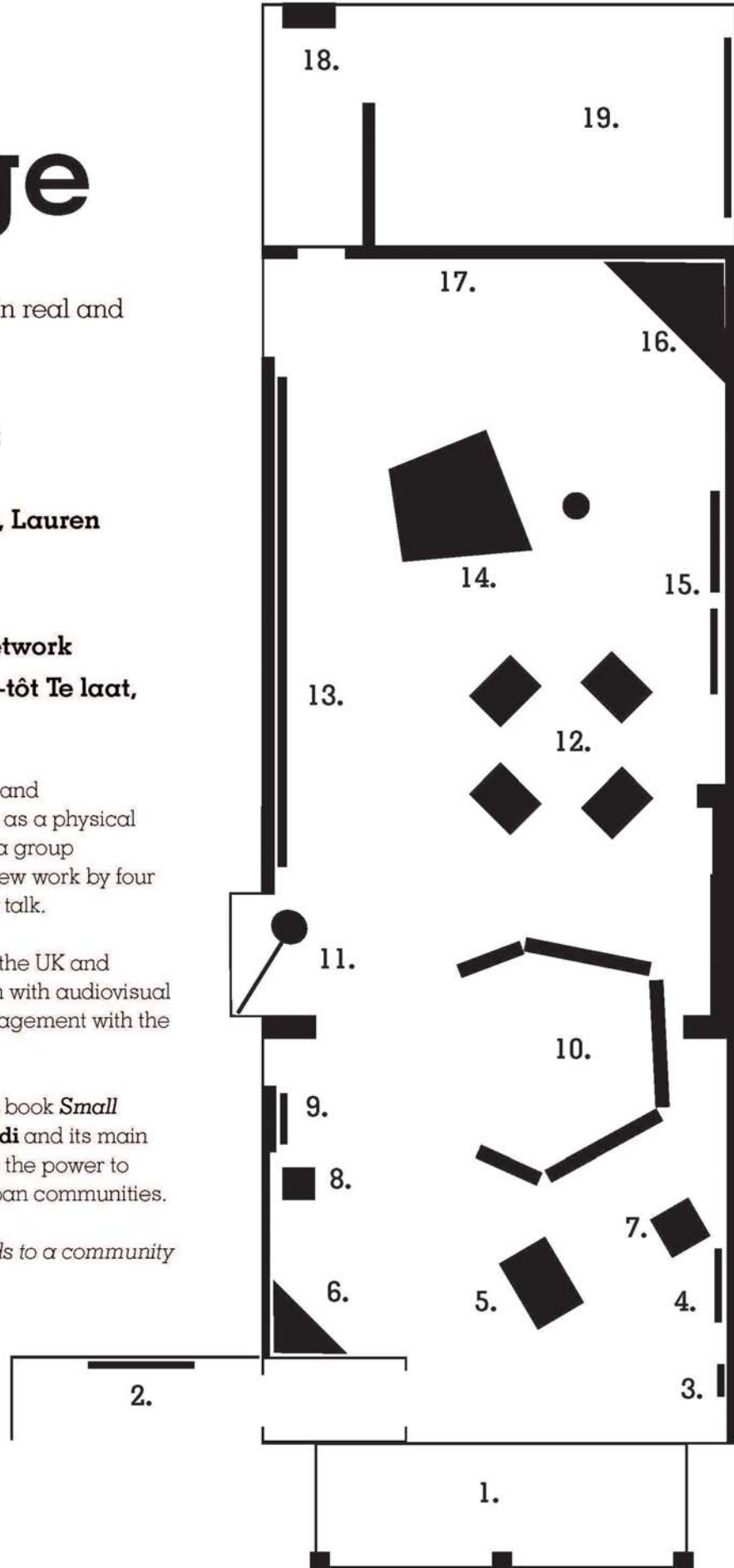
Quartier Midi , Spectacle

small change focuses on change and
placemaking in the city, seen both as a physical
and imagined entity. It comprises a group
exhibition featuring existing and new work by four
artists, a public intervention and a talk.

Alongside artists, collectives from the UK and
beyond contribute to the exhibition with audiovisual
material that documents their engagement with the
public realm.

The exhibition is a response to the book *Small
Change* by architect **Nabeel Hamdi** and its main
idea that small-scale actions have the power to
bring about positive change in urban communities.

*"Building a bus stop in a slum leads to a community
growing around it."*



1. Lauren O'Grady

This is a reconstruction. All of it is a reconstruction. 2013

Timber, bobbins, ply, dowel, copper, brass, air drying clay, plaster, perspex, acrylic paint, varnish, dimensions: variable

2. Noor Nuyten

Exhibition in your hand II. 2013

Numberplate +31616820082

Please call the number if you wish to visit the exhibition that takes place in your hand.

Courtesy: Upstream Gallery Amsterdam

3. Noor Nuyten

A Handfull Skyline. 2013

Playing cards

Courtesy: Upstream Gallery Amsterdam

4. Jane Lawson

MM4: Possibility. 2013

Watercolour, acrylic, pencil on paper, 79x54 cm

5. Noor Nuyten

Two Meters, 2009

5,5x2x1 cm, 4x2x1 cm

Courtesy: Upstream Gallery Amsterdam

6. Lauren O'Grady

Other Possible Locations, Motorway Bridge. 2012

Plywood, perspex, vinyl, cork, card, clay, plaster, various model making materials, 95x105x50cm

7. Network Nomadic Architecture

They forced us out of here: Walking the routes of the displaced. June 1st, 2013

Video of the action, 40mins

8. Plus-tôt Te laat / Spectacle

Cité Administrative. 2006

Video, 14 mins

Surviving Participation Fatigue: Erased Social

Geography We Used to Protest, Now we participate. 2002

Video, 18 min

9. Plus-tôt Te laat / Quartier Midi

Posters, 21x29.7cm & 15x30 cm

10. public works / Buddleia

The DIY common temporary café. 2013

Wood, willow tree branches, stove, fanzines, products from the DIY common

11. Noor Nuyten

Measuring Space. 2010

Flexible steel rule, helium, balloon, 152 cm

Courtesy: Upstream Gallery Amsterdam

12. Claire Weetman

Watermark, An Intervention in four directions, 2012

Four channel video installation, 12:10 mins

13. Jane Lawson

Global Financial System Timeline (working document). 2012

Inkjet print on lining paper, 500x56 cm

14. Lauren O'Grady

Other Possible Locations, Crossroads, 2012

Plywood, plaster, various model making materials, 55x120x110cm

15. Jane Lawson

MM1: Study for a Possible Future No. 1. 2013

Watercolour, acrylic, pencil on paper, 108x79 cm

M2: Decision-making. 2013

Watercolour, acrylic, pencil on paper, 79x54 cm

MM3: Money and Wealth. 2013

Watercolour, acrylic, pencil on paper, 79x54 cm

16. Lauren O'Grady

Other Possible Locations, Water Tower. 2012

Plywood, perspex, vinyl, plaster, clay, card, paint, various model making materials
100x105x90

17. Claire Weetman

Chatham road (Eventually everyone had moved), 2010

Hand drawn stop motion animation, 3:46 mins

18. Claire Weetman

Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?. 2012/13

Wood, collage, cut photographs, pins 43x36 cm

19. Spectacle / Silwood Video Group

A selection of video's from Silwood Video Group Vol 1 and Vol. 3. 2001

Work in progress. 13:49

Moving on 1:43

Time to move on 1:45

My walk home 3:36

Watercolours 2:34

BUDDLEIA / PUBLIC WORKS : THE DIY COMMON

The DIY Common is a project that is being developed by public works in Cheetham Hill, North Manchester since 2013. The project takes place in Cheetham park. Dating from 1886, this Victorian park, commonly known as Elizabeth Street Park, was once the epicentre of a vibrant community around it. After the slum-clearances in the area, it became a bit neglected. Torange Khonsari of public works has been working together with residents of the area and Buddleia, an agency that was set up in 2010 by independent curator Kerenza McClarnan, to inject new life, both natural and social, in the park.



public works. The DIY common temporary café. 2013. Installation view at Buddleia's Unit 25, Cheetham Hill.

The first steps have seen a dye and herb garden being added to the park. Residents of the area have been participating in workshops of planting, making natural dyes and cooking with plants gathered from the park. Products from these activities are served in a café, whose mobile structure was designed specifically for the project. In the framework of the DIY Common, there are plans to collaborate with local schools and agents in order to restore the park's viewing shelter which also provides a shelter to the café structure. Although itself not listed, the shelter mirrors the architecture of a listed bandstand that sits opposite it. The process is an exercise, that will eventually lead to the residents managing the café and the park themselves. This joint effort between public works and residents transforms the park into a productive landscape, maximising its potential as a natural resource. At the same time, it helps oral histories to resurface and together with new shared

experiences, to form a solid soil for the park's future. Together with its users, the project looks to restore not only the park's physical, but also intangible heritage, extending the possibilities of commoning from the rights to land use to the rights of deciding together and collectively designing the city.

Q&A with Torange Khonsari from public works, in December 2013

ST: What made you choose this way of intervening in the park, i.e. creating a temporary café and a dye garden? How do you approach the local community and what kind of challenges are there in the process of working with people?

TK: I am really interested in finding out how one can over time establish commitment of long term engagement with communities. I believe this takes a very long time and for it to be successful you need to STAY in a place. For me the platform to establish such commitment over time is Hosting and hospitality. I like to host people to get involved in very basic activities and through the informal act of making or doing social relations form. What I enjoy with the park is that activities that have their basis on the land and what is produced by nature and land have been part of human history for thousands of years all around the world. E.g. making dyes from flowers, cooking, willow weaving, making earth ware etc. This not only means that people can relate to it as it is familiar and has been part of human history but also every ethnicity can relate to it. Every part of the world have similar traditions when it comes to production that comes from the land but of course the techniques or aesthetics or particular food etc. maybe different but in essence they are the same.

ST: Your DIY café made me think of what Nabeel Hamdi says about design combined with emergence. I am paraphrasing: 'A designed structure which leaves room for something to emerge'. In your case, the physical structure of the café and the community around the park or the strengthening of the existing community. Secondly, in the book *Small Change*, practice is often about acting spontaneously, improvising and building in small increments. Do you see an affinity with the way you work? How much room do you leave for spontaneous or improvised solutions?

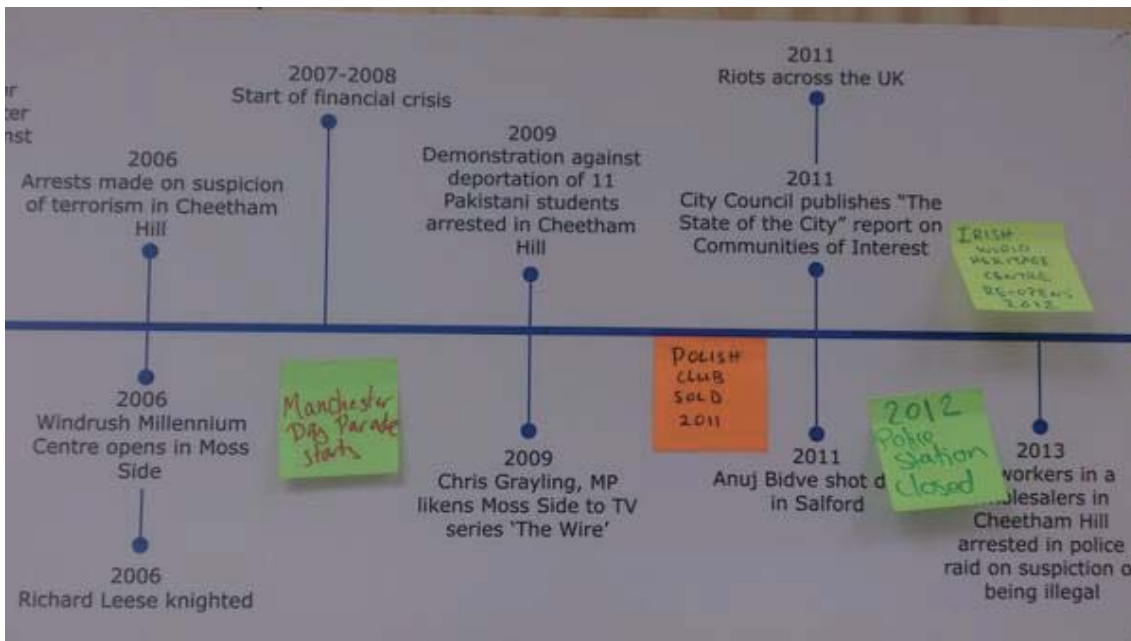
TK: Everything I do is spontaneous and improvised, as this is the only way you can deal with social projects. They never go as you plan them. It is not about what you as an artist expect; and that element of surprise is very strong and allows very innovative projects to develop. However, having said that, you have to have a clear program or project to which people can react to. I find engagement is never successful and becomes more dis-empowering, when you are too open or too flexible. It is good to have a structure/program and then allow people to subvert it or disrupt it.

ST: What are the objectives for the DIY common in the near future? What kind of change do you want to see in the area?

TK: DIY Common will continue for the next year or so and we see where it spills into and how it develops taking the ideas of productive landscape that can support community activities and social clubs. We at public works are mainly doing long term projects now. DIY common is part of my PHD and in partnership with Buddleia and Kerenza McClarnan we will push it as a project, I hope. It may move to other sites in Cheetham Hill, but the project will continue.

RESEARCH ABOUT CHANGING LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN CHEETHAM HILL

By Bethan Harries



@EthnicityUK in #CheethamHill #localresearch Come down to Unit 25 and talk to us about the neighbourhood pic.twitter.com/bJmR9gQvG



CODE / Manchester University at Buddleia, Unit 25, Cheetham Hill. Photo: Bethan Harries.

JANE LAWSON: AUTONOMY AND STRUCTURE, POSSIBILITIES, ACUPUNCTURE POINTS NOT BLUEPRINTS

Jane Lawson creates work about processes and systems. Based on a belief that art is able to affect change, she develops critical approaches to dominant economic and social narratives. The political values that inform her practice are paired with a fascination with materials and visual searches that are explored in parallel to the subject matter.

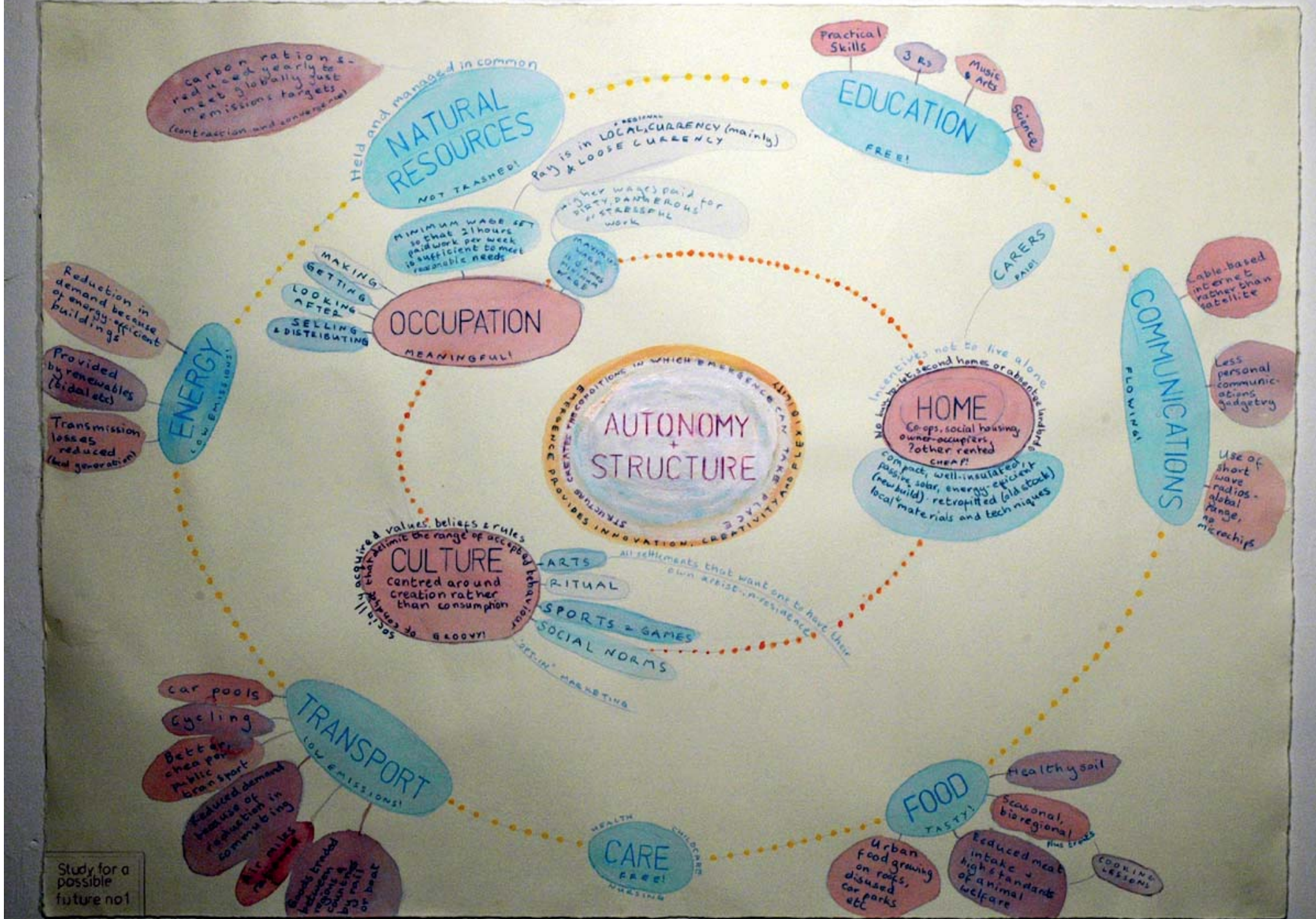
The mind maps realised for small change, are part of the artist's ongoing investigation on alternative forms of social organisation, and aligned with Nabeel Hamdi's seminal principles of a participatory, citizen-led change. Varying in density, they visualise content through different layouts, ranging from the typical branching or radial-like ones, to more organically choreographed networks. Concepts are placed in elliptical nodes of pastel or bright shades drawn in watercolour, acrylic and pencil on paper. Art, activism and politics are brought together in this series of documents that are interrelated through recurring visual patterns and underlying key values.

The artist's working method includes research into existing models, as well as a bold and idiosyncratic revision of them. Her propositions include radical reforms in big domains, such as employment, housing, education, culture, and environment. Their consolidation in a visual whole amplifies the radicalness at first instance: it is overwhelming to see all these ideas gathered together and envision their implementation on a global scale. On closer inspection, though, one sees that the big ideas coexist with small, practical suggestions. The work is a study in grassroots democracy and a call to action, but without propagandising an idealised world. In Lawson's vision harmony is reached through an "attunement of opposite tensions" (Kaplan quoted in Hamdi 2004, 138) that resembles Chantal Mouffe's agonistic model of democracy, based on conflict rather than consensus. (Mouffe interviewed by Miessen, Miessen 2010, 109)

A set of measures outlined in the mind maps, such as minimum and maximum incomes, local currencies and reasonable usage of natural resources, are discussed in the frame of the steady-state or degrowth economic proposals. Questioning the conventional development indicators of productivity and consumption, such tools oppose a limitless economic expansion which results in environmental risks and social inequalities. (Santos 2012, 6)

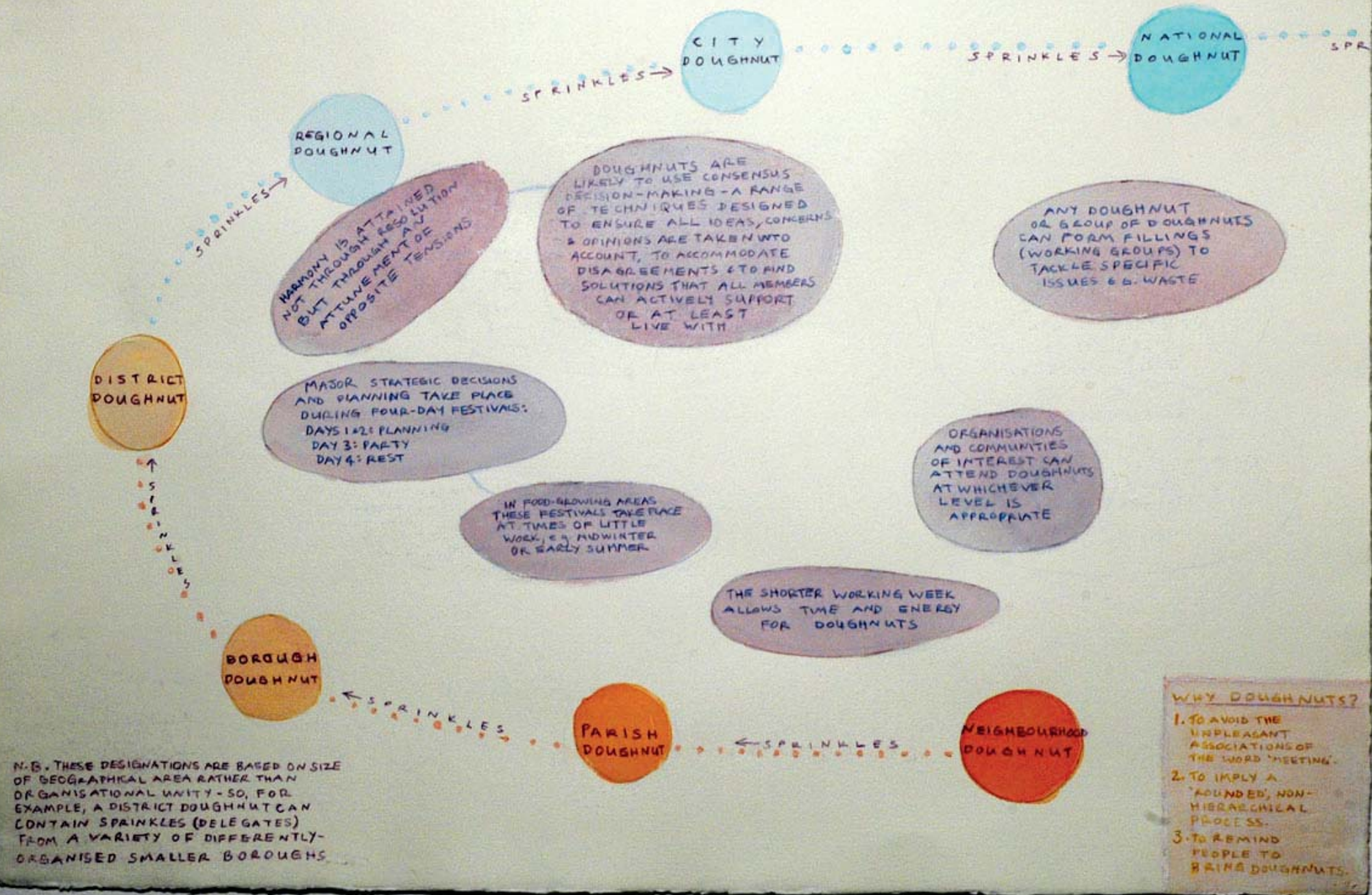
The space that emerges through Lawson's mind maps is planned collectively through practices of community building, "commoning" and self-organisation. From carpools to freeware and from food to energy, goods and resources are shared, managed collaboratively or exchanged between citizens. Rather than megaprojects, it zooms-in on local, small and incremental actions that start where it really counts. (Hamdi 2004, 98)

Locating the transformative potential on the micro scales of everyday life, but with an eye on the macro scales of organisational and institutional structures, the work is made with study, vigour and often pushes towards humorous and imaginative edges. Decisions are taken by working groups of "doughnuts" during 4 day festivals that include a party, a rest day and real doughnuts! The artist does not forget to include even the simplest gains resulting from self-organised urban practices: "Food grown locally is tasty!" Although they do not always appear as revolutionary, such small 'acupuncture' points can function as the guiding principles for the fundamental changes needed in the paradigms governing our systems, and our collective imagination. (Martinez-Alier, et al. 2010, 1742 quoted in Santos 2012, 5)



Jane Lawson. MM1: Study for a Possible Future No. 1. 2013.
 Photo: Jane Lawson.

DECISION-MAKING



Jane Lawson. MM2: Decision-making. 2013.
Photo: Jane Lawson.

NETWORK NOMADIC ARCHITECTURE: WALKING THE ROUTES OF THE DISPLACED



Eleni Tzirtzilaki. Cartografie. 2013.

Nomadic Architecture uses walking as a means of re-establishing the relation to the city of Athens and its changing physical and human landscape. Their walks are statements about the city's current situation and a call to influence and change it. A video documenting a walking action from the occupied Embros theatre to the area of Exarheia run during small change. The urban walker adapts his pace to the rhythm of the city in which he finds himself in. Walking slowly and aimlessly is reserved for tourists, dog walkers, children, the old, and is sometimes suspicious (Luiselli 2010,33) In the centre of Athens, it is also the migrant, the homeless, the day labourer that disrupts the fast walking paces of the city. The streets where the action took place constitute the old core of the city and host a.o. small shops by migrants or their informal gatherings and activities. The area has known an increase in arrests and police forces, as large-scale occupations and hunger strikes had taken place by those seeking legalisation and a temporary 'home'. Interrupting the narrative of displacement happening in the centre of Athens, Nomadic Architecture's walking actions, during which poems are recited, flowers are given to passers-by, goods and stories are exchanged, a shared experience of the city takes shape.

Participants of the walk: Tonia, Fares, Despoina, Fezmiester, Omar, Patricio, Aya, Kristina, Lynn, Aglaia Komninou, Nazari, Efi, Aggelina, Sofia Grigoriadou, Giannis, Aggelos Skourtis, Eleni Tzirtzilaki, Stefanos Handelis, Kostas Plessas.

WALKING. LIKE FIREFLIES SURVIVING. AN ESSAY ON METHODOLOGY

by Eleni Tzirtzilaki

Nomadic Architecture's actions take place in public space and in urban voids. The actions lie at the intersection of architecture and art, art and life, and, through the body, attempt to negate the exemption and state of emergency in Athens city.

Connecting the body with the earth of the city, practices include walking, food (giving and eating together) in public space, planting seeds to create gardens together with communities and participating in occupations (theatre Embros).

Bringing people together through physical expression, the actions are addressed to those leading a bare life, the marginalized communities, those who are in conditions of poverty and are being increasingly excluded by capitalism and the post-colonial condition. The question is no longer how to accept the foreigner in a better society, but how to think about a better society that centres on the foreigner. "Hospitality is our utopia". (René Schérer, French philosopher, from his lecture in Athens).

Through actions – performances directly related to the centre of Athens and its ongoing transformation, Nomadic Architecture proposes a temporary cohabitation in the city. New collectives emerge and a life of common goods takes shape in autonomous spaces and times.

The methodology relates to the experiential, Walter Benjamin and the flaneur, the Situationists' *dérive*, and land art –mainly Richard Long- cartography. Matters of social, ecological and urban geography, such as gentrification are raised, while new and unpredictable spaces and times are created in the urban fabric. The urgent argument of space as a common good draws from anthropology, looking at forms of sharing in *panigiria* (Greek ceremonies)examples of autonomy and non- ownership in Mexico's Chiapas and Australia's aboriginal communities, and envisioning a transformation of society through the redistribution of common goods.

Walking constitutes an autonomous art form, is an action of a symbolic transformation of the ground and tool to approach this transformation of space as it is being traversed. Walking is often an act of protest for the river (Kifissos) that was lost. "Revolution Bodies, Walking" is a performative critique towards Re-think Athens and Reactivate that are today the dominant narrative for the city centre leaving aside (although claiming otherwise) its residents. Revolution Bodies focuses on alertness and awareness of our senses in everyday city life and calls to participate in its shaping and its collective memory.

We can oppose the injustice and deny the exemption with our bodies. Moving away from being the object of political control, the body enters the space of gestures and actions. Through urban actions, the body is able to oppose the exception or express its support to such conditions; it is a practice of resistance. This resistance emerges when the exempted bodies come together in public space and produce collective actions that negate this life condition. Expressions include protests, occupations, community gardens, and actions in public space. The actions are meant to show new forms of life, posing questions about the body, ultimately posing questions about how biopolitics function. (Judith Butler)

The actions of Nomadic resemble the survival of fireflies in the dark landscape of Athens. And perhaps by increasing their presence, the landscape can become gradually brighter. Constantina Kuneva recently said in an interview from Paris: I have no fear. You cannot live in fear, try to live with compassion, respect and, increase love.

"The survival of fireflies" is the title of an essay by Georges Didi- Huberman, (original French title *Survivance des lucioles*), refers to Pier Paolo Pasolini's essay on the disappearance of fireflies (1977). In this, the Italian director talks about a political survival through art, through fragile images and vulnerable performativity. Nomadic Architecture's actions are characterized by this fragile and vulnerable condition. They emerge from a vulnerable condition as fragile and fragmented images in the urban landscape. They are images of people of different origin surviving an occupation, walking in vulnerable conditions, acting or eating together in abandoned spaces in the centre of Athens.

Translation from Greek by Sevie Tsampalla



Network Nomadic Architecture. They forced us out of here: Walking the routes of the displaced. 2013. Video. Installation view.

Network Nomadic Architecture consists of: Eleni Tzirtzilaki, Christina Thomopoulou, Aggeliki Vakali, Sofia Grigoriadou, Kostas Plessas, Passtrespas, Panagiotis Andronikidis, Aggelos Skourtis, Lynn Edmonds, Ilana Giannakou, Patricio Villareal, Stefanos Handelis.

NOOR NUYTEN: A HANDFULL SKYLINE

Change is present in Noor Nuyten's work both in spatial and temporal terms. Subtle and imaginative alterations on devices like tape measures and watches suggest alternate ways of relating to space and time. Her work investigates a concept of measurement that contains subjective elements, even the aspect of fiction, and invites to creatively rethink methods of measuring.

In *A Handfull Skyline* (2013) seven cards are glued together in the way one would hold them to play. The handful of the title, intentionally misspelled as handfull, suggests various definitions of quantity: an amount that can be held in the hand, a small quantity, something difficult to handle, or, in the misspelled version, a hand full. Is something as small as a hand able to hold a city's skyline? The horizon that appears as the cards are superimposed seems to divide two kinds of skylines: the ones drawn on the cards' surfaces and a more abstract one formed by the cut-out parts which resemble high-rise buildings.

The rise of the skyline is linked to the birth of the modern city. The term itself was coined in relation to New York, in 1896, after a colour lithograph by Charles Graham, depicting its outlines. By the middle of the 19th century the steel frames and the passenger elevators meant that buildings could grow upward, maximising land use and value. By now, the skyline serves as an indicator of a city's success and even used to rank its position on a global economic scale.

Seen as a city's fingerprint, the skyline might give the illusion that it allows us to "see the whole", the city in its real limits, but it's far from an objective visual representation. The city is difficult to capture in its physical entirety, let alone grasp in its full complexity. We all create our private versions of the cities we inhabit. Associative, emotional, subjective, our relation to them is not fixed, but malleable. This soft city of emotions cannot be easily quantified; it resists dry measurements. (Raban 1974, 9) Skylines are often part of a symbolically charged urban imagery. Expectations of all kinds are projected to them. New York's skyline, for example, is mediated, and especially after 9/11, even the voids left from the twin towers have come to signify through their absence more than their physical presence ever did. (Lindner 2006, 128)

The city becomes more legible when seen from above. The skyline, like the vantage points of high buildings, offers us the possibility to look at the city almost as if we were voyeurs. This perception, which Michel de Certeau describes as 'erotics of knowledge', rationalises and objectifies the complexity of the city, but it is only a deception. (Bate 2006, 114) When held in our hands, the playing cards form an intricate fan that makes it possible to see through, implying perhaps this voyeuristic relation. Alluding to a card game and indirectly addressing the ambivalence of measurability, the work literally plays with the city and its representation.



Noor Nuyten. A Handfull Skyline. 2013. Courtesy: Upstream Gallery Amsterdam.
Photo: Gert Jan van Rooij.



Noor Nuyten. Two meters. 2009. Courtesy: Upstream Gallery Amsterdam.
Installation view. Photo: Glen Stoker.

LAUREN O'GRADY: OTHER POSSIBLE LOCATIONS

A strong sense of craftsmanship underpins Lauren O'Grady's practice. Her sculptures are made out of several components, brought together in ways that reveal both a manual and intellectual skill. The interplay between a physical involvement with materials and ingenious assembling indicates a close collaboration between the hand and the mind throughout the process of making.

O'Grady constructs spaces. Her three-dimensional structures belong to an expanded field of sculpture and open up a dialogue with various fields concerned with spatial representation, from model making to cinema and architecture. Despite the plethora of references, the works are characterised by an economy of means, are relatively small scaled and use modest materials, such as plywood, perspex, vinyl, cork, clay or plaster.

Other Possible Locations (2012) comprises a series of sculptural scale models, close-ups of urban scenes, which displayed as an ensemble could make up a cityscape. A kind of a 'flexible' city can take shape, as the group can be re-configured to form a different whole. The title introduces the ambiguities that are typical of the artist's work in general. Does the possible otherness imply alternative locations already in existence, or proposals for future urban scenarios?

Depopulated, with scarce natural elements and a clean-cut geometry, the works transmit the same feeling of eerie stillness found often in cinematic narratives beyond the end of time. Like in post-apocalyptic cinema, it is not the staging of the catastrophe that is interesting, but the speculations that the locations generate. One could project on some of them an underlying fear of surviving major changes on the planet. *Water Tower* could point to concerns around shortage of water resources, while *Motorway Bridge* could be evoking a state of abandonment and ruin. Something seems to have happened (or will happen?), but, we are never quite sure what. Fascinating is that the play with time is solely articulated through spatial elements.

Rather than locating them in absolute terms of time, one can place these urban fragments in the sphere of the uncanny —an unnerving encounter in the Freudian sense, when the familiar is rendered strange and alien. 'How would our cities look like if we would try to rebuild them based only on what we remembered?' is the underlying question behind this body of work. Working from memory, the artist creates simulacra of urban life that bare a vague resemblance to a distant reality.

The narrative in-built ambiguity is closely related to the minimal elements and spatial set up. O'Grady's variants of -scapes, ranging from the urban to the abstract landscape, allow us to view them from above. From this perspective, they appear accessible and self-contained. At the same time, they resist full deciphering as to their origins or intentions.

Economy and ambiguity are qualities of a good craftsman, as the sociologist Richard Sennet argues. "Effectively using an ambiguity forces its maker to think about economy". (Sennet 2008, 234) Engaging with the ambiguity of the urban reality requires equally pragmatism and vision in Nabeel Hamdi's *Small Change*. (Hamdi 2004, xx) In Lauren O'Grady's work reason and imagination are used interchangeably. By measuring, scaling, cutting, assembling or engineering, the artist constructs spatial narratives embedded both in the realm of the real (i.e. remembered) and the fictitious. The rational and the imaginative are both methods and properties of the imagery produced.



Lauren O'Grady. Other Possible Locations. Crossroads. 2012 & Water Tower. 2012.
Installation view. Photo: Glen Stoker



Lauren O'Grady. Other Possible Locations. Motorway Bridge. 2012
Installation view.

PLUS-TÔT TE LAAT – QUARTIER MIDI



Posters by Plus-tôt Te laat – Quartier Midi. Installation view. Photo: Glen Stoker

Can a poster bring change? The collaborative actions by Plus-tôt Te laat and Quartier Midi propose a citizen-led regeneration. Their posters attack the politics of large scale regeneration aggravating social inequities in Brussels and address the vital right to housing. This 'social and political publicity' aspires to subvert the dominance of commercial messages and banners announcing large construction projects in the areas affected.

SURVIVING PARTICIPATION FATIGUE (EXTRACT)

by Axel Claes – Plus-tôt Te laat / Mark Saunders – Spectacle

The Great Participation Swindle

In practice all European policies are interpreted through a hierarchy of filters, national and regional government and local city administrations. In order that these policies may be slotted into existing local constitutional structures a degree of domestication is tolerated. This domestication of European urban policy obscures the real driving force behind what often appears, on the ground, to be locally inspired, spontaneous eruptions of enlightenment. Politicians are reluctant to shatter this misconception, for not only is there reflected glory to be had but revealing the true source of their new found interest in notions of participation would also reveal that meaningful participation is a condition of their getting their hands on the budgets. Consequently people believe in the UK that the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) and New Deal for the Community (NDC) schemes are Labour Party initiatives, in Brussels that the Contrat de Quartier is a local government initiative, in Florence that the Contrat de Quartier is a regional socialist party initiative. This ignorance only facilitates the abuse of the notion of participation.

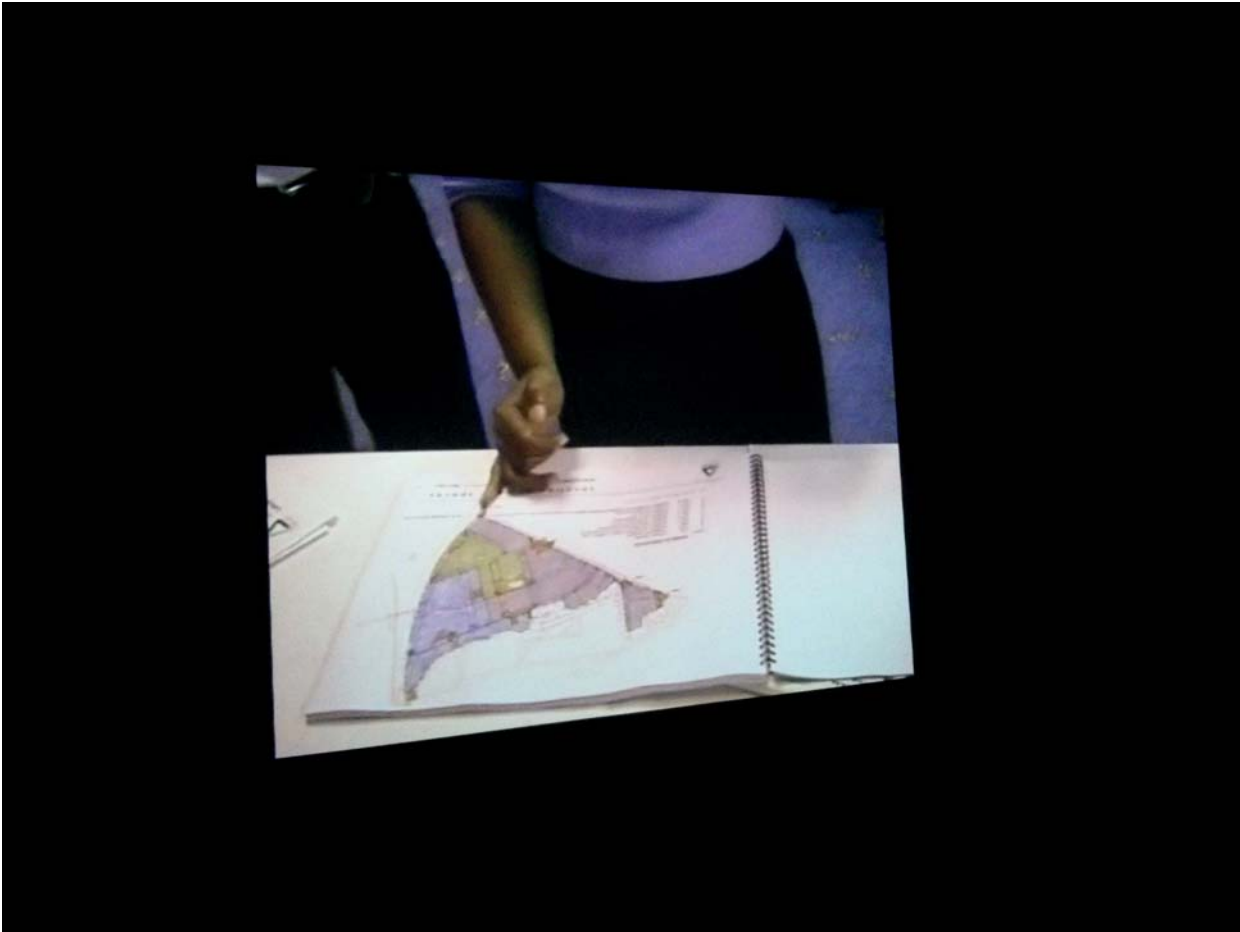
Politicians understand well that there is the letter and the spirit of any contract, the important thing is to get the money. It is not difficult to put a cynical spin on the idea of participation. You can participate by being “consulted” on a range of pre-determined pseudo-issues such as the style of street lighting. You may participate by being present at an “open day” to gawp, gormlessly at the impressive model of the proposed “fait accompli” towers. Or you might participate by being one of the minimum requirements of two people co-opted onto a board as a resident representative, hopelessly outnumbered by politicians, business interests, and representatives of the police and government officers. Unable to bring to bear any real influence, your presence only serves to rubber stamp and to invest some semblance of democracy in decisions that in former times would have been taken anyway, but behind even more firmly closed doors.

We have seen our video work as an antidote to this cynicism, to raise expectations, to shine a light on the European urban policy context, to focus on the notion of citizenship and political rights. If you want this in, I propose to put it here, and not at the end of this little chapter *** To paraphrase Derrida in *Archive Fever*, There is no political power without control of the archives.***

Politicians, obsessed with self-image, adore a camera. That is an adoring camera in a safe pair of hands. To a politician video is pronounced Public Relations. At best a camera is a useful, but harmless, tool to collect “evidence” of their efforts to “involve” the public in the great participation swindle. But there are some promising moves against this tendency.

Saint-Josse, January 2002

SPECTACLE / SILWOOD VIDEO GROUP



Video still.

...PEOPLE'S LIFE RECONDITIONED
AND MADE NEW ONES
STILL I'VE GOT TO MOVE ON...*

The Silwood estate was a council estate located on the borders of Rotherhithe in the London Borough of Southwark, and the Evelyn area of the London Borough of Lewisham, London. It has experienced a massive Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) project. Tower blocks were demolished and the residents had to move to new low-rise, more traditional style houses in the area. The Silwood video group was started with the help of Spectacle in 2001. With more than 25 members, the group has been documenting and seeking to positively influence changes to their environment. By now, more than 200 people have been involved in the project (filmed, edited, interviewed or conducted interviews).

*Extract from a poem by Beverlyn, resident of the Silwood Estate.

CLAIRE WEETMAN: REVERSAL OF FLOW

Trace and movement are key elements in the ways Claire Weetman engages with the city and its life. Her work often records changes in place or position, follows courses or interacts with motion in public space. Done directly on the city's surfaces, drawing is an integral element of her performative actions. Pavements are jet washed; squares and roads become hosts of water marks that are as ephemeral as the movement that traverses them.

Reversal of flow took place on Tuesday morning, 19th of November 2013 and opened a dialogue with change and the city on various levels. Having observed that some bus stops were devoid of their function as a result of the newly built bus station in Hanley, Weetman focused her research on Stafford Street. This change – the redirected bus routes – was translated in an action that saw the artist laying ten six-metre-long arrows made of felt onto the road surface. Pointing north at first, their heads were subsequently moved to point south, marking how the movement on this street had been altered. The artist traversed the road a few times in order to lay the arrows. Covering each time a longer distance from the empty bus stop where the fabric was stored to further points on the road, her repetitive and persistent movements became a physical way of measuring space.

The blue felt arrows mirrored the standard 'one way' signs and the diagrams issued by the City Council to communicate the re-organisation of the road network. Departing from this visual representation, the issues of wayfinding and urban communication strategies come to mind. In the constantly changing city setting communication is about flow, movement and transportation (Gumpert and Drucker 2007 in Thompson 2011, 7) and sign-literacy is a precondition for navigating it. Signage systems (maps, signs, boards...) inform, guide, or prohibit us, with the apparent aim to make the cityspace more legible. (Lynch 1960, 2)

Much information in public space is accepted without questioning. As planners define orientation systems and devices, communication is more than often a top-down process. This movement mirrors the prevailing top-down urban design processes and ultimately, becomes an issue of authorship. If earlier urban planners saw it sufficient to 'educate' city dwellers on how to look at or read the city (Lynch 1960, 117) the question that is now more pertinent to ask is how we can be co-authors of the city's text. In Small Change terms, how can we participate in the processes of (re) designing spaces?

Signs are recurrent visual motifs in Weetman's work. Their capacity to mediate or facilitate the city's legibility is, however, playfully questioned. In the *Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?* (2012/13) series, for instance, an excessive use of arrows indicates confusion and disorientation. In the interactive version of the work, their authority is questioned, as arrows are forced to re-direct their course, following the users' movement in space.

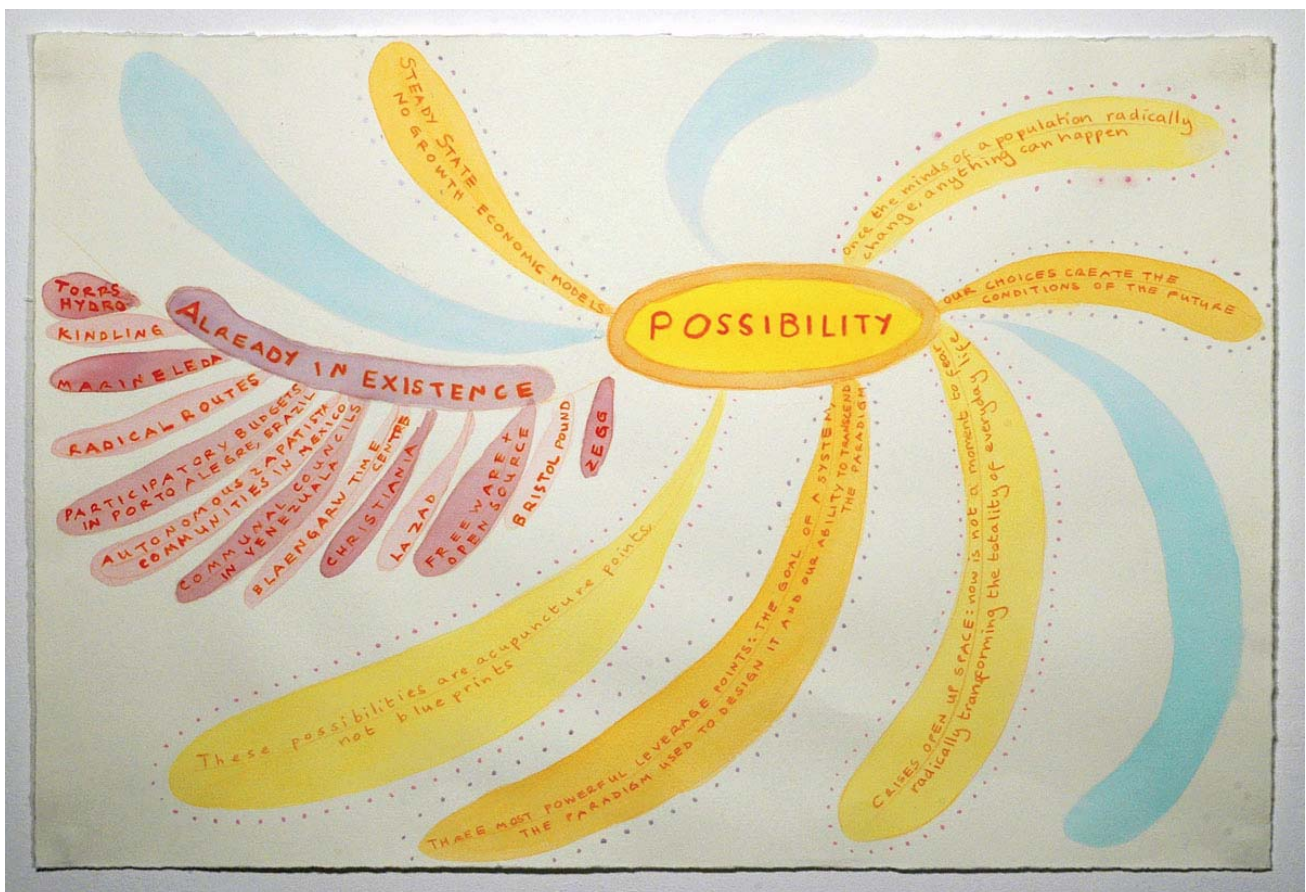
A short-lived spatial drawing, *Reversal of flow* visualised both the past movement at Stafford street, absent but still traceable in the empty bus stops, as well as the, not visible yet, future (at the time of the intervention) flow. The impact of this change on the experience of the city is still in progress. Its transformative potential was perhaps momentarily captured in the artist's physical movement. Beyond this layer, the act of reversing prompts reflection on the way communication flows, the hierarchical relations that define public space, and our potential to renegotiate them.



Claire Weetman, Reversal of flow. Intervention, Stoke on Trent. 2013.

LIEVEN VANHOUTTE: IS ANOTHER WAY POSSIBLE?

Is it possible to initiate projects without a charitable approach, based on respect and equality? With partners who are strong enough to guarantee sustainability and the necessary know-how to run a project without consultants, monitoring and expensive evaluations? The answer is difficult and not a black or white matter. It is easier to say what should be avoided: neo-colonialism. The aim must be solidarity: Change has to be based on equality, participation and collaboration. Many Ngo's include this as a theoretical stance in their mission statement, but in practice a lot of questionable practices appear. Since 10 years ago, the Belgian socialist union organises projects in developing countries, from union to union, based on equality. This is not always viewed by everyone in a positive way. Oxfam is a popular good cause, but unions without frontiers less so: Some politicians are even afraid of this approach. Developmental work from peer to peer (communities, regions, unions) results in a surplus value between equal and identical organisations.



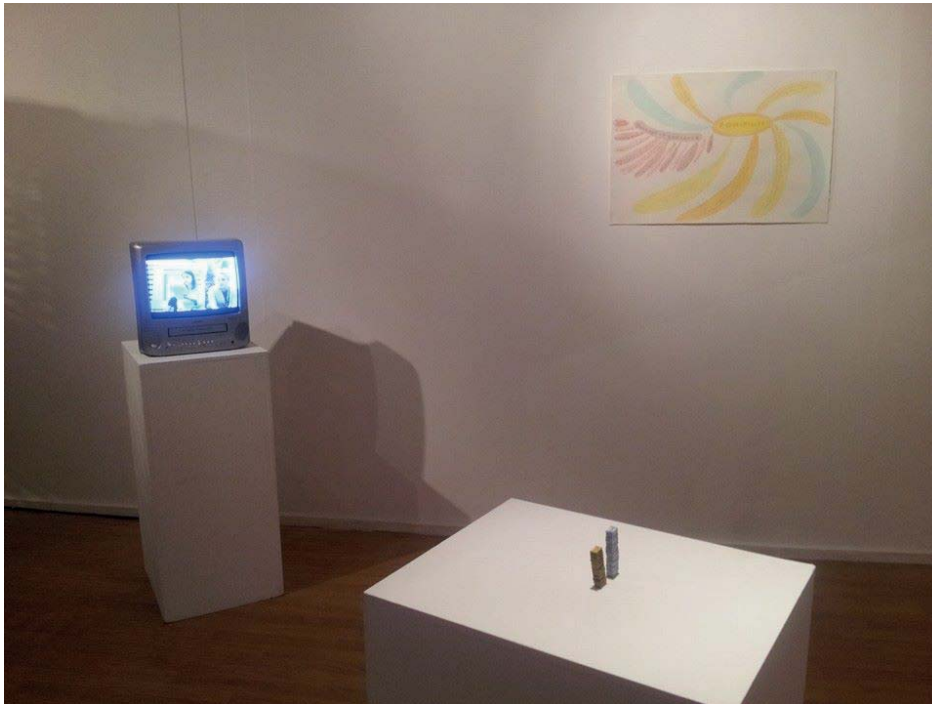
Jane Lawson. MM4: Possibility. 2013. Photo: Jane Lawson.



Installation view.



Installation views.



Installation view. Photo: Claire Weetman.



Installation view. Photo: Glen Stoker.



Lauren O'Grady. This is a reconstruction. All of it is a reconstruction. 2013. Installation view (Window of AirSpace Gallery).

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BIOGRAPHIES

Sevie Tsampalla (GR) is a Manchester based curator. She studied Art History at the University of Athens, Greece, and Cultural Studies at the KU Leuven, Belgium. A founding member of the collectives Re-construction Community and Audiovisual Artists Anonymous, she initiated interventions in publicspace in Athens and Brussels. Alongside an interest in collaborative processes, her practice researches intersections between art and broader modes of cultural production. She has co-curated sitePARAsite, L'ecurie, Brussels (November 2008) and Extra Muros, Koninklijke Ganderijen, Ostend, (May 2008), group exhibitions with site-responsive works and performances by emerging Belgian artists. Her most recent exhibitions were small change, AirSpace Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent (November – December 2013) and Some Misunderstanding, Castlefield Gallery, Manchester (August 2013).

Jane Lawson (UK) is a Manchester based artist. Her work attempts to make visual sense of the complex processes and systems underpinning human existence and is informed by her experiences as political activist and researcher into corporate ethics. She is a member of the collaborative The Heinrich Event. www.janelawson.co.uk

Noor Nuyten (NL) is an artist that lives and works in Amsterdam. She graduated from the post-academic course in visual arts at HISK, Ghent in 2011. Recently he showed her work at the Ithuba Art International Istanbul, Arts Gallery in Johannesburg, Art Rotterdam, Kunsthalle Münster and Upstream Gallery, Amsterdam.

Lauren O'Grady (UK) is a Nottingham based artist. She studied Fine Art at the Nottingham Trent University. (MA 2012 and BA Honors in 2007) She had a solo show - Asteroid II, at The Old Library, Mansfield (2009). Group shows include: PRE-FAB, White Collar Zoo Nottingham – Nov 2012, Nottingham Castle Open – Sept/Oct 2012 and CUBE Open, CUBE Gallery Manchester – Dec 2011. She has been a member of the art group Tether. www.laurenogrady.com

Claire Weetman (UK) studied Fine Art at Liverpool John Moores University (2003). She is a founding member of POST Liverpool, a co-curatorial group of female artists working with European Capital of Culture Cities. In 2011 she co-founded the artist-led studios and artist network Platform Art St Helens. Exhibitions include: The Drawing Project Castlefield Gallery, Manchester, UK (2014); Small Change, Airspace Gallery, Stoke on Trent, UK (2013); Two installations, The Bluecoat, Liverpool, UK (2013). Residencies include: METAL International residency Award in partnership with Shanghai Fine Art University, China (2012). www.claireweetman.co.uk

Buddleia (UK) is a commissioning agency based in Manchester, which takes a collaborative approach to commissioning by shaping a process that allows artists, residents and agencies to work together. Buddleia was set up in 2010 by independent curator Kerenza McClarnan, as an attempt to help develop a culture of 'socially engaged' art practice within the city. www.buddleia.co.uk

Network Nomadic Architecture (NNA) (GR) is an open research laboratory from Athens. Consisting of architects, artists, groups and individuals, Nomadic Architecture is interested in public space, territories under crisis, urban transformations and their cultural, social and political extensions. www.nomadikiarxitektoniki.net

Plus-tôt Te laat (PTTL) (BE) is a diverse and non-hierarchical collective from Brussels. Founded in an unemployment office in 1998, it initially focused its actions on the politics of institutional neglect of artists in financial need. Their efforts contributed to the absurd law forbidding unemployed artists to publicly show their art while on benefits, to be abolished. The group's scope soon expanded, to include urban and social urgencies in Brussels. Sharing the means of production and authorship among its members as well as with other collectives, lies at the heart of the collaborative art that PTTL produces. www.pttl.be

public works (UK) is an art and architecture practice working within and towards public space. Projects span across different scales and address the relation between the informal and formal aspects of a site. public works (Torange Khonsari) has been commissioned by Buddleia to develop a project which looks to bring collective and community making to Cheetham Hill, Manchester. www.publicworksgroup.net

Quartier Midi (BE) is a neighbourhood association (Comité) from the area around the Brussel's South (Midi/Zuid) railway station. Acting within a context of private and state-led investments, its members oppose demolishing houses in order to build office buildings and shopping malls. Their struggles and politics behind the area's transformations are exposed through a series of video's and posters that are co-produced with Plus-tôt Te laat. www.quartier-midi.be

Spectacle (UK) is an independent television production company specialising in documentary, community-led investigative journalism and participatory media. Set up by Mark Saunders, its work ethics are informed by non-hierarchy and openness. Spectacle has been collaborating with collectives, among which PTTL, and developing practices that encourage residents in sites undergoing regeneration to use video as a tool for making their voices heard. www.spectacle.co.uk

Bethan Harries (UK) is a researcher at the Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity (CoDE), University of Manchester. She completed her PhD in Sociology at the University of Manchester in 2012 and worked on a project examining the housing experiences of white and South Asian British women in different parts of the UK. Prior to working in academia she was an immigration lawyer specializing in applications for asylum and human rights claims and cases of domestic violence in relation to immigration.

Maximi Papathanasiou (GR), is an architect and museologist. She obtained a Diploma on Architecture and an MA in Museology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. She was always fascinated by the emotional bonding ties that engage people with places and objects. Currently she is a PhD candidate at the Department of Architecture & Urban Planning, Ghent University, while working in parallel as a designer in Belgium.

Eleni Tzirtzilaki (GR) is a practicing architect, researcher, and activist. She studied Architecture in the School of Architecture of the University of Florence and completed her dissertation on "Urban Nomadism --Displacement and Habitation" (2008) at the School of Architecture of the Technical University of Athens. She is a cofounder of Urban Void, a multidisciplinary research group which stages urban actions in Athens, and of Nomadic Architecture Network, an open workshop that searches for modes of interaction in urban areas in crisis. Her work has been featured at the 9th Vienna Architecture Biennale, 26th Sao Paulo Biennale, in (Un) common Place: Art, Public Space

and *Urban Aesthetics in Europe* (B. Pietromarchi, ed., Actar, Barcelona and Fondazione Andriano Olivetti, 2005). She maintains an architecture practice in Athens, and is member of the architecture team that won first prize in the competition for the remodelling of the Monastiraki Square in Athens (completed in 2008).

Lieven Vanhoutte (BE) is a social pedagogue, journalist and former coordinator European and International action of the Belgian Union. He is the author of the book *Short stories about solidarity* (original title in Dutch: *Kleine verhalen over solidariteit*, EPO 2012). He is currently preparing a book on a Palestinian activist.

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is a collaborative, artist led project in Stoke-on-Trent, providing professional development opportunities, studio and exhibiting space and support for artists. Through a dynamic and evolving programme of exhibitions, events and activities AirSpace Gallery brings critical, high quality contemporary art to the region and provides opportunities for a broad range of artists.

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