

Curatorial Case Study

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Curator of *Visionary Thurrock*, a series of cross-
disciplinary investigations involving international
visual artists, architects and theorists in the
Thames gateway

CLARE CUMBERLIDGE: Hi, I'm co-director of General Public Agency; the other director is Lucy Musgrave. I'm going to say a little bit about our work and our philosophy in General Public Agency before I move on to talk about Visionary Thurrock.

We launched on May Day 2003, we're a creative consultancy providing a range of services including strategic brief setting, public realm strategies, urban design, cultural policies, cultural programmes, conferences and publications. Importantly we are not led by any one discipline, we use architecture, artistic practice, community planning, environmental and creative regeneration, design and issues of active citizenship to develop what we believe is a unique service.

Lucy's background, Lucy used to be Director of the Architecture Foundation and has a strong background in promoting social architecture. My background is as a curator mainly in collaborative practice and commissioning artists to insert creativity into different sectors. Our overall mission at General Public Agency is to affect change in the public sphere. We've tried to set up a new model of an agency which can operate commercially and doesn't rely on public funding. Projects cover a broad range; we're currently working on the redevelopment of Kings Cross Central doing public realm strategies and design studies for elements within that. We're working with various artists initiatives on symposia around rural practice and ethical town planning.

We've been commissioned by Thames and Hudson to produce a book around socially and environmentally engaged practice, designing landscape for urban renewal and a variety of other projects. As I said our client-base is very mixed, we work with both corporate and public clients and here are just some examples of our clients.

We have a process that we follow, we always begin any project with sensitised and critical local research and we use that to assess and inform how we are going to respond to that brief. We deliberately take a broad definition of culture and environment and we draw from inspiring international practice and learn the practical lessons of local application. We have a methodology, first we start with a mapping characterisation, we then go through a process of exchange and this can be intellectual exchange which can be local, national or international and we work with all of this to pull together a strategic vision or a route map to delivery.

And the project I'm going to talk about today is Thurrock, a visionary brief in the Thames Gateway. We were invited to tender for a conference on culturally-led regeneration in the Thames Gateway and the aim of the conference was to raise the profile of Thurrock and to look at what culturally-led regeneration could be. We didn't feel that a conference would have achieved either of those aims so we proposed instead a whole programme of research in activity and we won the brief and the following project emerged from that. We had a client body with 13 agencies which included Arts Council East, Thurrock council, Heritage Lottery Fund, Sport England, East of England Development Agency, a wide range of agencies all working on the ground in Thurrock. Thurrock itself is part of the Thames Gateway to the East of London and it's one of the major areas of growth so it's going to undergo massive transformation in the next 15 years. It's a site of heavy industry most of which is disappearing and incredible landscapes, 60% of it is green belt, the reputation of Thurrock is kind of as a dump really, there's a major road that goes through it, the A13, with shared development on either side and there's a horrible

example of a kind of major out of town shopping mall and that's what Thurrock is known for if it's known at all. It has an incredible history, the International Cruise Terminal is in Tilbury and this is where people came into the country and left the country so it was where the Empire Windrush brought the first group of invited Caribbean immigrants which is an incredibly resonant place. This is where it is on the map as I say just to the East of London. The programme we undertook involved four stages, factual and creative research, three multi-disciplinary charettes. A charette is a kind of open ended laboratory/ workshop where you set a brief and invite a group of people to come and work together and they all produce what they can produce and then at the end of the day, that's it, time's finished and you take away what you can; but the term of charette doesn't mean that you are expecting the group to work to a finished result, it's about generating a number of ideas. We then pull together all the findings from the charettes to draw together a set of strategic principles and visionary briefs for all the agencies in Thurrock and then did a number of public and policy presentations. The first thing we did was, we drew together a new atlas of maps, we collated all the information held by all the different agencies and pulled this together into a publicly accessible source so that everybody operating on the ground was starting from a position of knowledge of what was there.

The maps covered history, landscape housing, industry, demographics, water, leisure and I've pulled this one out in the context of the subject of today's session. This is the water map and you can see the flood plain, the fluvial flood plain and the tidal flood plain outlined there. That is also the site where they are proposing building all the new housing. We commissioned a photographic portrait by the artist Jason Orton. We think there is a really strong aesthetic within Thurrock which is not recognised either by the people who live there or who are outside, so we wanted to commission this to start building that aesthetic and recognising it.

We commissioned a couple of writers to produce essays, Ken Walpole produced a wonderful essay about the social history, the landscape and the memory of South Essex and the tradition of small communal groups and alternative settlements and referred back to the impact of the flood, the great flood in the 50's. Chris Baines, the Environmentalist wrote an essay 2020 Vision from the perspective of 2020 as if all environmental principles had been adopted and what that, what Thurrock would then be like. We commissioned three creative mapping projects to inform the briefs for the people who came to take part in the charettes, the first one Public Works; public works are an art and architecture collaborative practice. We commissioned them to map the culture of Purfleet. Purfleet is the first town which will be redeveloped under the current plans and we thought it was really important to map the existing culture there and to make that available to everybody who was making decisions or indeed producing designs or master plans around this community.

We commissioned Nils Norman, who'll be talking after me, to map the environment of Thurrock, and he produced this wonderful graphic novel, Some Solutions to the Ecological and Social Impact of Global Warming and it produced solutions ranging from small scale community activism through to alternative fuel factories in the redundant car parks of Lakeside Shopping Centre. We commissioned Helen Ben-Zenou to produce a kind of small scale detailed visual map of East Tilbury and this page here is Bata, this incredible model village in East Tilbury which still is pristine and Tilbury town which used to have this incredibly rich communal history and now is in serious decline. Also to inform peoples, the thinking of both the policy makers

and the agencies, we felt it was important to refer to examples of international best practice that were relevant to this area. So we drew together a set of cases studies. The WiMBY, 'Welcome into My Back Yard' in Hoogvliet in the Netherlands, this is a long term programme developing various strategies of welcoming incomers into an existing community. Hoogvliet in the Netherlands is the best example of contemporary master planning and creating diversity within a system and if you just look at that top collage there, if that were what we were to achieve along the Thames, would be wonderful in comparison to the kind of formulaic volume house monstrosities that are currently being constructed.

Common Ground, we think a world leading organisation in terms of local distinctiveness and community development, this is a snapshot of a programme they do around community orchards, developing community orchards. North Duisburg Landscape Park in Germany, this is a post industrial site where significantly the design, Peter Latz and Partners did the design for the park and they take a very long-term view of that process so they've initiated the design and they've started it off but it won't be finished for years, either with regard to the planting or the community usage of that space. So the planting detoxifies the land over time and the community inhabit that space over time. They're all given bits of the park to inhabit and use as they will. An Amphibious Living, this was a design competition in the Netherlands looking at creating solutions to amphibious housing.

So the three charettes, we invited 20 international practitioners to come and respond to the briefs that we'd set them, the days of the charettes started with a tour of the relevant site, we then had eight hours, the tour of the local relevant site was undertaken by somebody who lived locally and then the groups spent the day together producing responses to the briefs.

As you can see from this list we had a really amazing selection of people, from many disciplines, designers, artists, environmentalists, academics, biologists. We were really encouraged actually that everybody, we asked people in a very short timescale and there was only one person who said no because he couldn't do it in his diary. Everybody else we invited said yes. The groups were set three different briefs so they'd come up with different solutions, and they happened on three consecutive days, the charettes. But across the group we asked people to look at principles which they felt should underlie any redevelopment within the Thames gateway and they were shared principles. So the principles that were agreed on were: 'to do no harm', Thurrock is a place where damage has been done to the natural and social environment; all future developments should be restorative and respectful of the local culture and ecology. 'Community engagement': participation of local people must be actively and creatively integrated into all stages of the regeneration process. Innovation and creativity; as the first area of the Thames gateway to see co-ordinated development under a UDC, Thurrock should lead the way with innovative approaches and quality as a priority in all areas of future development and long term thinking. All programmes should be planned over a period of not less than 10 years to ensure a truly sustainable process. These key principles can appear to be common sense and yet if they were adopted they would fundamentally change the regeneration process that this country is embarked upon.

I should say that before the participants came to the charettes they were all sent a briefing pack that included all the information that I've shown you previously so they were all very well informed before they arrived. The first charette group, their brief

was to look at the Thames at Purfleet and the redevelopment of that area and their solution was to reconnect the river to its flood plain as a new marine park. I don't have time to go through all the ideas that emerged out of these charettes but I'll just flick through some of them and you can always ask questions if you want to afterwards. I mean it's probably worth saying that the relationship between Thurrock and the river is currently, it's seen as a barrier really rather than being linked into it; so one of the first ideas was that slipways and jetties should be built and it would be quite a simple action but would have a massive effect on the relationship between that community and the river there used to be one public jetty that the housing developers who've done the first range of housing have removed.

The proposal was there should be new prototype aquatic housing, and in fact that the whole of the culture at Purfleet could come around the idea of being a centre for marine studies instead of being a dormitory town. Permeable slow transport route could be easily achieved with a new sort of station connecting to river transport. There should be a central green space and wetland linking communities and any new housing should be in the non-flooding areas as opposed to being in all the flooding areas where it currently planned.

The second charettes; 'new uses and proposals for the green belt'; when we set this as a brief, what we expected to happen; our idea was that the greenbelt, 60% of Thurrock is the greenbelt. It's underused, much of it is inaccessible and it's of very little ecological value and our idea was that the charette group would look at proposals for things like new forms of allotment or temporary occupation of that space or, we thought that was the sort of thing that would emerge. However within about half an hour of the charette group coming together they completely rejected that and what they were interested in was, the division between green belt and brown field was no longer relevant and they were much more interested in developing a sophisticated method of mapping land value. And I thought the process of this charette was really interesting. Each of the charettes was interdisciplinary and it was amazing how fast people started working together as a team.

This one I thought was really interesting because the artists immediately took the lead and were seen to take the lead with regard to strategies for engagement or how you mass, and gather a complexity of information so the idea out of this one is that it would be, we'd develop a kind of grid system which would map value going from the flight path of the Brent Goose right down to a local child's walk to school and that would involve forms of engagement.

The third charette was about new forms of cultural facility and trying to move beyond iconic buildings or sculptures. It's not appropriate for Thurrock to look at that as a model of culturally-led regeneration because they are so close to London and they have to look to new form of culture being imbedded and leading their regeneration process. In discussing this we were talking about what the culture of Thurrock is and what it's going to become and actually I think it was Jeremy Deller who said well it's going to be housing, that is what's going to define Thurrock so that's what we should address. So two ideas came out of this charette; one a commission programme to raise the design quality of volume housing in Thurrock and to demonstrate the embedded participatory concept of creativity in action. This is kind of high-end current volume housing and if we're not careful we will just get miles of this.

What the charette group proposed was to do an exemplar pilot project with 10 sites, 10 teams, develop 10 innovative prototypes for volume housing in Thurrock and each team would comprise a future resident, artist, architect, ecologist and volume house builder to develop a series of prototypes. The other idea that emerged from this charette was to find a new form of cultural facility, one which would be cross-disciplinary and would be long-term, and it would be a commission agency but each commission should involve at least two disciplines and participation and environmental engagement should be crucial to each.

We did a series of presentations of the ideas that emerged from stage one, this was at the Cruise Terminal at the International Cruise Terminal, Tessa Jowell came and launched culture and regeneration. We had a series of presentations as Keith Cairn and ((?)) talking about the culture charette. We had an audience of 200 kind of key politicians, national and local, stake holders, developers, agency representatives. We took a stand at the Sustainable Community Summit which is the biennial summit around government regeneration, redevelopment in Britain; we took a stand there in January.

All of the information has been gathered together as a publicly accessible tool, this is the website address. We feel as a principle that's open, you should follow open source methodologies; so that is all there for anybody living or working in Thurrock.

The next stage we are currently [working on] - these two images are immediate but kind of tangential outcomes of the programme. On the right is Jeremy Deller's banner, Empire Windrush which he's placed in the International Cruise Terminal because one of the discussions we had in the cultural charette was that there was no kind of marker of the incredible history of Thurrock and Tilbury. So that's in place now and on the left is High House Farm, Public Works who mapped the culture of Purfleet have subsequently been commissioned by Thurrock Council to develop a community facility concept for High House Farm and there they've produced a proposal for an expansive model of a new form of community farm.

We at General Public Agency are working with Thurrock Council, Arts Council England East and Eastern England Development Agency to develop a new form of commissioning agency through which the ideas emerging from Visionary Thurrock could be delivered and we've just finished that draft report so hopefully it will be taken forward in the near future. Thank you.

Studio Visit: artist profiling their work

NILS NORMAN

London-based artist, recent exhibition projects include solo shows at Galerie Christian Nagel Berlin, his work has been shown at Tate Britain, Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, and The Hayward Gallery London. He has participated in the Havana Biennial, and Utopia Station at the 50th Venice Biennale.

NILS NORMAN: OK, so this part of the symposium is called Studio Visit and what I usually do when I do a studio visit is, I usually look at what's on the walls or books on the shelves when the work isn't that interesting and what I'm going to do is, I'm going to walk through a sort of selection of what's on my shelves and some threads of research and ideas that I've been using to formulate a kind of critical analysis of public space and how artists are inscribed within a process of cultural regeneration and how can artists develop a critical voice within that.

This is a still from the first film by, well it's the first Ealing comedy in 1947 and called Hue and Cry and the film is about a gang of kids who basically play and occupy bomb sites in Central London and they get together as a gang, a sort of anarchistic gang to solve a crime. Now the first real playgrounds, city playgrounds were bomb sites which children occupied and also in 1947 but in Holland Aldo van Eyck the architect began work at the works department, the public works department in Amsterdam and from '47 until the 70's he put together a series of playgrounds, these fixed playgrounds in these surplus pavement spaces, these interstitial spaces and he almost set up a network of 700 playgrounds, well he did, offer 700 playgrounds round Amsterdam. And I think a few of them are still left today, they're quite rusty now but the idea of creating this network of playgrounds for me was quite compelling.

This is a very good book (Aldo van Eyck: The Playgrounds and the City) on what I've just described by Liana Lefaivre and Ingeborg de Roode, my interests in playgrounds started from play or the Ludic, from my interest in situationism, and particularly the situationist meta-architect Constant. Constant was quite an interesting character, he started the Situationist International together with Guy Debord in 1957 and two years later he left, he resigned from the Situationist International and went on to develop the idea of his Utopia New Babylon which he saw as a critique of contemporary architecture and urbanism.

This is a, he made many, many models of this of New Babylon and some of them are very, very intricate, some of them are very simple but this one is interesting because for me it embodies a very similar aesthetic to what is now perceived today as adventure playgrounds. Constant made a few structures himself; he and those were playgrounds and play furniture. That's one of the seating platforms that he made. He actually worked together with Aldo van Eyck and Aldo van Eyck gave him a lot of commissions for the play structures. I don't know if you're familiar with Constant but he also had a pipe, he was smoking a pipe and he always had a raincoat on. He looked very similar to Jacques Tati's character in Playtime and this playfulness about being an architect for me was a very interesting kind of figure.

This is a book that I published last year on my research into adventure playgrounds in London and the architecture of adventure playgrounds. So basically where I was coming from, what I've just shown you, that was the direction from where I was coming from and my interest lay in the makeshift and the kind of informal qualities of adventure playgrounds and creating these small pockets where play was the most important part of the design. There is very little literature on adventure playgrounds, there's only literally about three or four published books that, this was published in the 50's, this also in the 50's and then later on this was published in the 70's but there's very little information.

And when I first started this investigation I was interested in making an exhibition about adventure playgrounds but because there was no archive material I suddenly

realised that I was going to be the person or I would have to myself archive or document these spaces and that ended up becoming a book rather than an exhibition. First, from these bombsites that children would play on, the Danish landscape architects, C. Th Sørensen, he formulated this idea of a junk playground which is a more official idea of an adventure playground to get kids away from dangerous sites and to develop these playscapes which would be in the public spaces in between new modernist housing complexes that were being built at that time in the 30's. This is the first adventure junk playground; Emdrup, it's on the outskirts of Copenhagen and it was opened in '46 I believe, '43 sorry and as you can see this one's Ballerup which is at the same time as well but this is very similar to the one in Emdrup and as you can see there is this mound around it which is very important a way to hide or to make it, the playscape, more private but also to hide what was going on inside from people outside. Because the playgrounds were just basically made from junk, they were made from recycled materials, wood, old cars, bits of boats and what children would do, in the Spring, they would all enter the playground together, they would have access to a wood yard and to a tool shed and the children would actually build these structures themselves and design them together with usually one play leader, an adult. But the idea was that these spaces would be totally available for free play where children were pretty much allowed to do whatever they wanted within these spaces.

This idea continued all through the 50's and it only arrived, in England in the late 40's and some of the playgrounds that sort of started then still exist and because of that, because of the fact that these spaces have been playgrounds for such long periods of time, they become incredibly important ecological niches within inner city spaces. But they also become extremely valuable in terms of real estate so this is probably one of the best adventure playgrounds in this shadow of Trellick Tower in West London and this playground has many different, there are many different choices children have to enable them to play and a lot of these structures have been built and designed by children formally. This is the largest Burma Bridge in England in South London, as you can see this, the wild area, this playground was started in the 60's and in terms of wildlife, in terms of ecology this is a very important site or it has become a very important site.

These catwalks, these are a very important part of the architectural adventure playground and for some reason children enjoy or they feel the necessity to stay off the ground at all times when they're in the playground so some playgrounds, there's a playground in Plumstead where you can enter the playground in the morning and you can stay off ground for the whole day and then you come out at the other end still off the ground in the afternoon.

Most playgrounds are exempt, adults are not allowed to enter them and when I was doing this research because I wanted this kind of more architectural photo, this image, I came when there weren't any children there so I was actually playing in these playgrounds on my own. There's also incredible fear and paranoia around playscapes and in England there's only three now left where children actually have access to tools and can build stuff because of litigation. It's almost now impossible for children to do that. It's more the fear of litigation, no one's actually been sued yet. Statistically adventure playgrounds are extremely safe places, they're very risky places but they're very safe. This is another example of a catwalk, this is a child built

structure. This is a stage area which is also another important feature as well as towers.

In England playgrounds seem to gravitate towards more social structures, so you have more swings and more see-saws and kind of more play type structures and this is very different in Europe where you have more house building but we'll see that in a minute. Talking to play leaders and people in different councils about how this history has evolved, one council worker was telling me that he saw it as the social structures were more based on a Soviet model while the hut building which did occur in this country was stopped because it was thought too petit bourgeois.

This is a see-saw for kids with special needs and it's basically a group see-saw, so large amounts of kids can actually see-saw together. If they can't move, they're placed on the see-saw because of the very important ecological qualities to adventure playgrounds, they're very important spaces also for children with special needs and some of the designs are specifically for them which makes them also quite unique spaces.

This is called an around the world and in England the most popular structures are the ones where the most children can play at one time so you could imagine 25 children playing on this structure, that has then basically survived over a period of time because it's basically just re-made. That was probably there when the playground was first built but the wood has just been changing as it has evolved, but because it's such a popular structure it stays.

One of the things about the recycled wood now and also formerly children of the playgrounds used to receive a lot of wood from builders and demolition sites, all that's completely stopped because also the fear of litigation and also telegraph poles were quite important and invaluable structural elements to the playgrounds and that's also been stopped as well. The culture around playgrounds is that they always are continually being tried to closed down rather than continue them, where statistically these are actually very, very popular and well used public spaces by children.

Statistically they have a very integrated group, a client group. They are from different ethnic backgrounds; different economic backgrounds and these children use this as a public space in which to meet. This is a very interesting playground which is under the West Way, under the motorway and all these structures are actually built under this motorway which has quite a science fiction quality to it. This is probably the most anarchistic playground in Dalston which I think actually just shut; this is still one of the last playgrounds where children are allowed to build their own structures. This is an example of a stage that has been built by kids. As you can see these structures are very makeshift, they're always changing, always being knocked down and rebuilt for a different use within weeks or possibly days; but sometimes years.

My research has then taking me to Germany, where in Germany they still allow for kids to have free access to tools and to wood, not power tools, like just normal tools. And this is a wood yard in a playground in Hamburg and this is what the children make so as you can see it's a very, very different type of playground. It's actually, it's almost like a bombsite, it's just this kind of extreme, extremely makeshift space but then you see it's very different as well in terms of it's just buildings that have been built, it's not really, there are no swings or roundabouts, very rarely do you find swings and roundabouts in German adventure playgrounds. You see more

of this sort of hut building. So you get these small little makeshift villages. One of the scary things, entering these playgrounds is that every, you can't really see it from the photo, but every surface is bristling with nails. So it's actually quite a scary place and if I were to actually stand on this structure it would collapse immediately.

Tunnel building is also very important and a lot of playgrounds have systems of tunnels underneath them, not in England, in Germany and one of the things, in England there are special areas that have been put aside just for digging. So you get these sorts of strange areas with just these little fox holes and things in them. Fire and cooking is also very important. In Germany you have huge fire pits which just gangs of children sit around and that's actually something that's dying out more now in England once again because of litigation.

So composting and gardening and urban farming are all issues that are interlinked with adventure playgrounds and it's probably one of the most important parts other than play that's part of the adventure playground ethos. So you see these make-shift kind of rickety structures they half-built, a lot of the German playgrounds don't even have real walls around them which the English ones do.

The English ones are very, very secure spaces but the German ones are more porous and I think the reason (my research hasn't gone into the legality of it) but I think the reason is because of the fact that maybe the German ones are organised and run by private initiatives, not public ones. The city farms and other, there were earlier when adventure playgrounds first began in the 50's, there was a kind of an explosion of different types of playground. There were Robinson Crusoe playgrounds and there were also playgrounds based on Native American villages. City farms which now, there are a few still left in London, they came out of the whole adventure playground movement and you would sometimes have farms together with adventure playgrounds so you'd have these adventure playgrounds with animals integrated.

This research has led me on further to this idea from the 60's of non-plan of taking the area and removing it of all planning regulations and so people locally could get together and start designing their own spaces, their own small areas of the town. And so at the moment what I'm trying to do is quite an interesting bit of sort of trellis work here made from pallets but what I've been trying to do is to put together this idea of an adventure playground of the earlier ethos of an adventure playgrounds and couple it with non-plan to make a large adventure playground village which would also be a place where adults could also participate together with children to make actually a functioning sector or part of a town.

So the only piece of work that I'm going to show you is something that I'm doing for a space in Himmerton called City Projects and that, outside of City Projects in Himmerton by the hospital is a place called Himmerton Green, well it's been renamed now Himmerton Cross. And that space is a large site that's been put aside because they possibly might build a tube station there, so it's actually just been this dormant space that's waiting redevelopment and my proposal is to use that for that intermediary time to set up a non-plan experiment.

Just going back to this [German model] is quite an interesting plan of an adventure playground and what happens is that once a hut has been made it's drawn onto the map and then when it's demolished they just erase the chalk and then they draw another one which I thought was quite an interesting way of urban planning. So this

is the drawing that I've been doing, it's a bit out of focus but this is actually a work in progress and because this is a studio visit I thought it would be more appropriate to show something that I'm still working on and so this is a drawing of the Green, here's the adventure playground and this is the Green that I'm proposing to develop into this experimental non-plan village if you like. This is where City Projects is just there.

So that's I all I really have to show but another thing I wanted to talk about was how urban planning has changed considerably from, I've understood now from my research that in the 30's, specifically in Scandinavia, urban planning seems to be, and I might be completely over-romanticising this but urban planning used to be more of a sort of empirical based idea of data analysis where city spaces were defined much more in terms of usage and how those spaces were used in an interdisciplinary way. So it was spaces were determined in terms of how women and mothers would use the space, how children would use the space and then from that the designs were considered in this extreme modernist way and that has changed considerably where now, urban planning seems to be developed just through the laws of the market. And I think if we were possibly to go back to a more analytical idea of how spaces were used and what they could be used for other than just profit, we might come up with more interesting alternative and ecological solutions. Thank you.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

Declan: Well, I think all together it's been a really fascinating morning. We've moved from the sort of high theoretical approach in the sense through issues of urban regeneration and then to the idea of play in that process so I think it's been a very rich experience so far. Any questions for Clare or Nils?

Q: I'm Peter Fend (PF) I know Clare from various projects here and there, I'm an artist. First in yesterday's paper there was something, maybe this is for Clare about the Thames Gateway saying it was a hopeless condition for the housing project that's been proposed, is that what's going on? There's a bit of a battle or something you were mentioning, I see this in the paper about the Thames Gateway is that the same thing that you're working on?

Clare: Yeah.

PF: They don't mention Thurrock or the...

Clare: The Thames Gateway has got three parts to it, there's Thurrock, Kent and London but as a whole it's called the Thames Gateway. What date's the paper Peter?

PF: Yesterday. Yeah I just came to town and saw this stuff about Thames Gateway so I guess the battles somehow are going on, there's some back and forth. And also for both of you has there been any wildlife census about, you mentioned wildlife into play at the adventure playgrounds, this may be for historical matters, I did a project in 1980 about Duisburg encouraging wildlife to be brought into those same zones, is that what's going on? Is there a wildlife increment and what types?

Clare: There are a number of projects relating to wildlife in the Thames Gateway, there are forest projects, there's the Thames Chase, there's a big new bird sanctuary being developed in what was military land. But the problem with achieving a delivery of ideas within the Thames Gateway is that there is very little communication or co-operation between agencies. So, yes that's happening in certain parts, and it's happening with a great deal of intensity but they're not then communicating to people who are doing the regeneration of the urban areas. So that would be my answer really, yes it is but it's isolated and that was one of the reasons for the idea behind the new form of mapping for the green belt, to say actually some of the brown field land is of much greater interest for wildlife and environmentally in general. But current planning laws allow you to build on brown field without having to do any kind of analysis of that but green belt is automatically protected even if it has no intrinsic value.

PF: Well I guess my point being did Duisburg have an inventory more wildlife or did you find out in your area what kind of wildlife was coming back?

Nils: No, I didn't but what is, because the majority of these spaces have been there for so long they actually have very integrated kind of wildlife. They're quite, because they're not developed in any way except for these structures they have, and they also have given areas over just to be maintained as wild, they have a lot of different wildlife there but I'm not sure and I couldn't name you what they were, or what were migrating or changing, but they are in terms of other public spaces, they are actually more diverse.

Declan: OK, thank you.

Q: I want to, my name's Julia Rowntree and I've worked at the Lift International Theatre Festival for about 20 years now. I'm really, really interested in the intersection between the intergenerational play that you touched on briefly and issues of privatisation and it seems to me that it's a really critical question to begin thinking about an anthropology of iterative connections. Because these transitions we're going to be, we're all touching on the work of generations and it seems that we've only just begun to think about the implications of this in terms of our cultural institutions because it seems largely that people, you know we're all set up to deliver things rather than to issue iterative invitations. And I just wondered whether in thinking about the cultural institutions and processes in that area you had any light to throw on my enduring questions about those range of curiosities?

Declan: If you could just summarise your point then question?

Q: Yeah I'm sorry it's a bit wide-ranging but basically I'm very interested in whether you have delved further into the intergenerational issues of play that you were touching on and implications that that has for the nature of our cultural institutions over time?

Declan: Nils do you want to start and then we can go on to the wider issue?

NILS: The book that I published has an essay in it by Keith Cranwell which is about different, basically adventure playgrounds through decades and it talks about how each decade has a kind of different ideological shade to it in terms of how play was perceived and how play was managed and how playgrounds were also dealt with by governments. So that maybe answers your question a little bit but in terms of privatisation I think play is actually quite an interesting problematic area because play has now been integrated into privatisation kind of language and as I said in the very beginning because artists are now becoming more inscribed within these regeneration processes, I think as artists we have to be much more self-reflective and critical about what we do because otherwise we're just going to be part of the problem rather than offering any kind of real alternative solution which I think, I mean, artists don't necessarily have to do that but I think they can.

Declan: Clare can you say something about play in relation to Thurrock?

Clare: Well not actually in relation to Thurrock but in some of the work we're doing in Kings Cross. Part of our work there has been working with a private developer on the public realm and that private developer, is trying to find a very interesting model of management of the public realm where they will, rather than transferring it to the council on completion, they will maintain an involvement. But the purpose of that is to maintain standards rather than to legislate or patrol spaces.

Some of our work is around play spaces and it is incredibly hard to do anything that allows any kind of freedom or spontaneous behaviour in the current legislative climate. One of the things we want to do is create a kind of tree-climbing reservation because I'm continually saddened that my 6-year old boy can't like climb trees all the time as I did as a child. So we thought maybe we could make this into a reservation of trees that children can climb in and you know, we can fence it off and you only go in there if you know it's your own responsibility. And it's completely impossible to get that to happen in the current environment.

So I think it is really worrying in regard to what will happen with development of play. We have one piece of work that we're doing in Kings Cross is the development

of Flux Park which will be a park that at its very heart is the idea of constant change that we would work with various cultural institutions local, national and international to program this phase. And it's a temporary site of changing play and part of that work is about developing a very interesting architectural solution that will support that but not frame it too tightly and that would all happen with the gas holder the remaining gas holder of Kings Cross.

Declan: OK, we have a number of questions. We'll start here since the microphones down here.

Q: Just a quick point. Karen ((?)) that it did make me very sad seeing, it felt like disappearing adventure playgrounds of my childhood and I thought that what my children are missing is all the magic of random organic dirt, mystery all of that stuff which as you've said is made so difficult now by current legislation and if you see something like, I think it's absolutely grotesque the new so-called creepy crawly thing at Kew Gardens which is totally not interactive. You always press the same button, it's always the same thing comes out. It's very proscribed, it's very synthetic, it's very rigid, there are horrible simulacra of animals and plants and I think one of the challenges for the artists to come up with something which is maybe impossible within all the legislative difficulties but in some way to make play for the children which as you said they can make huts to disappear, they can have dirt, they can have water going, they don't know where it's going to go and it's not this increasingly banal sterile, repetitive modules that we keep tripping over in the City Parks.

Declan: OK, can we have another unless you want to say anything? OK can we have another question up here?

Q: Hi, I'm Alan Baldwin, head of arts and ecology at Dartington College of Arts. I'm curious of the charettes, just as a model of kind of engagement with play so I just wondered if you'd considered inviting other kinds of approaches to place, I think related to Peter Fend's question in a way, maybe inviting ornithologists or local people or farmers or I don't know, a whole range of other kinds of perspective on place that might inform design processes?

Clare: We did actually have representatives of most of those groups as part of the charettes but what we did was we felt that we wanted to invest local knowledge into that group but we didn't want the group to be overtaken by local agendas. So we invited local ornithologists or in Purfleet we had a local resident who was running a kind of Military History Museum so we had that kind of local expertise but their role was they gave presentations at the beginning and then they were there to answer questions. But we felt it was important to give the practitioners who were coming in to take part in the charettes should to a certain extent be local agenda free, and that did seem to work.

Q: Can I just ask why local agenda free?

Clare: Because it's an incredibly contested area and if the purpose of our system of enquiry had been to manage local conflict then, which actually is one of the strands that's coming out around land evaluation is a process of managing local conflict, we'd have done that in a very different way and we will do it in a very different way. The purpose of this exercise was to inject some vision really and a bit of international perspective into a debate that was really very, well actually there wasn't a debate, there wasn't a debate, there was a kind of very low-level arguing between a whole host of agencies and interest groups.

Q: Sorry just to add a little bit on there but I was also curious about the length of time, I'm just thinking about Alfredo Jaar's projects yesterday, he was very careful to say that the projects took between one and five years and I think you know, this kind of debate or argument and these kind of inter-subjectivities are a part of the essential ecology and the nature of the process I just wonder if you feel like you might be able to affect these design processes by challenging this paradigm which is kind of short-term, quick you know narrow in it's kind of focus?

Clare: I see Phase I of the Thurrock project as being, it's possible to see it as either a success or a failure and it is Phase I of a continuing programme. And I think the two biggest challenges are to get the variety of agencies involved to be able to align themselves to deliver what in fact most of them want to deliver. And I think that's a long term process and to some extent that was helped by this first phase of Thurrock. I think the, I hope that the programme will have affected decisions happening within Thurrock, and I know that agencies with different areas of responsibility have taken elements of that programme and tried to move them forward and I think really it's all about tenacity and somebody has to just stick in there saying, you know, you've got to look long-term, you've got to look long-term and it's not possible to know at the moment whether what we did in that part was just a kind of provocative challenge or whether we will be able to embed it in practice and I hope we do.

Declan: OK, bring it down here.

Q: Thank you. Kit Oliver, I'm here representing the South East of England Bio-Diversity Forum so I'm one of the sort of environmentalists though I have a lot of interest in the work of artists and it's delightful to be here. But what's been striking me is sitting in this audience because of the work of Gauntari, the work of Ness, is familiar, sitting in my usual audience which is environmental, what Professor David King said last night would've been very familiar. So I was struck that the audience last night found it new and the degree of what was happening was new to them, now that ... I gasped. Even you yourself this morning Declan, said how new. I know very well that the environmental audiences I sit in all the time would find Ecosophy where did that come from? What planet? They wouldn't know either so it's this talking together, this learning about each other which I feel it would be so valuable if the RSA, which surely is an organisation where it's well-placed to bring about this knowledge transfer sort of thing, this talking together. And I think this is well pointed out in what Clare has been talking about with Thurrock because in some way I too have been involved in public trying to bring together different groups in public planning etc. Now it seems to me that this is just not happening and it's terribly sad. Development is going on apace, not just in Thurrock but everywhere. People like Clare and other groups are thinking up very worthwhile approaches but it will be ten, fifteen or more years before they hit policy or strategy and by then an enormous amount of development in the flood plain and in other very unsuitable places will have happened. So I do feel there is an urgency for groups to talk together and to raise the profile of what's happening much further up the agenda. Do you see any chance Declan, of the RSA trying to add that onto this programme?

Declan: I can't speak for the RSA but I think that is the intention behind this process. But I think we have to start with an understanding that there is not even a consensus within the art world never mind the environmental world about what are the causes of the issues and therefore how they can be addressed. There isn't a

consensus in the art world for instance that artists function in the social space in the way that certainly I would believe. There is a debate that the role of the artist, there is an argument coherently put and argued and supported is that the role of the artist is to be separate, and to be out of the social space, existing in some other objective plain in a way. So we can't start with a presumption that there is a consensus in the art community or that there's a consensus about environmental issues in the environmentalist community and that all we have to do is join those up. There are huge issues within each territory to be addressed and I would say that the profession that I don't represent here in any formal sense but in which I live, the curatorial profession has to admit a failure and that failure in standing between the artist and the public space as it were, certainly in publicly-funded curatorial processes, we have failed to construct the language which persuades the decision-makers in this society that culture and in this case the visual arts are part of the determinance of value within the society.

The environmental lobby has succeeded over maybe four decades of at least getting those issues onto the agenda. We can complain about how well or to what degree they're followed through by the decision-makers but we're hardly even at the table I would say in the visual arts which is why there's no debate in the election about the arts at all and there rarely is in elections when it comes to the real processes of power. So I think that we have to acknowledge that there's been a failure on the part of the arts administrators, the curatorial profession despite wonderful intentions and that failure comes out of an unresolved dispute and contested ideas about what the role of the artist is. What is the deal between the artist and the society which justifies public support for the art process? And we have not convinced the state or the general public I think and that's why I told the story about Damien Hirst's mother, as a sort of anecdotal illustration of that dissonance, that disconnection.

So I think we have to yes, absolutely I think the short answer is yes to your point, somebody would take all those points, there's huge work to be done within each terrain.

Q: Declan, can I just say I'm sure the environmental community would love to help you because I can't believe that an environmentalist can't see what an aid art and visual representation or literature or whatever, that they can't see what it gives to the appreciation of care of the environment. So just call on us.

Declan: Thank you, another question over here.

Q: Thanks, my name's Mark Bennett and I'm North Kensington Sustainability Manager so I work with the local council and just talking about the value of some environmentalists and a bit of social and a bit of everything but maybe the function of artists is to help people to see, I mean I was late this morning because I went to a consultation event because we're redesigning Kensington Memorial Park which is in North Kensington. And I went to the event all full of anticipation for these great ideas that people were going to have and three people who'd turned up to talk to me, there was one person who was fifty and then the other two people were young mothers and the older person in fact very interestingly talked about in her day how they used to have an adventure playground in Kensington Memorial Park and now it was gone and what a shame it was. And the two younger mothers were obsessed

really about how cold the toilets were so I think without the input of artists, with input from people who are worried about the ecology of the park etc. that we really wouldn't get much further than putting heaters in the bathrooms. So I think it's very valuable and this kind of discussion is invaluable for people who are in my position, trying to think of how to make these public spaces much more usable, I think people need to be led a little bit because this obsession with consultation but I think you have to inject the ideas first for people to work with.

Declan: OK, thank you. Question you too just there.

Q: My name Heather Ackroyd I'm an artist. I'm very interested in the experimental complex fragmentary ideas that have some kind of momentary sort of unification at the structure that Clare talked about, where people come together from diverse situations and create ideas through the strength of their vitality, their experience their knowledge and you said you didn't have time to go through all of those ideas. How do you access those ideas? Because I think those experimental ideas are part of the seabed of something that is attempting to shake the foundations that have always been set in some kind of concrete.

Clare: The ideas that emerged from the charettes are on the website. Most of them are on there and your question actually reminded me of something that we had to deal with in developing the idea of the charettes. And we wanted people to contribute from their kind of position of experience, whatever their discipline was but from a kind of post-authorship position, they had to, any idea that came forward as part of those, that process then became part of the public realm. So even if it was an architect said you know, this is the solution here that was very much part of their experience, if they said it in that charette it then became part of the public realm and we could take it forward, so we made that very clear as part of the process of invitation and people had to sign a contract. [end of recording]