Pass the Parcel: Art, Agency, Culture and Community

Nina Edge

Contravision: Repeat patterns for Condemned Housing. Phase 1: Wallpapers for the Dispossessed. Nina Edge Liverpool Biennial Fringe 2016. Photo: Tom Lox.

Liverpool Biennial's 2015 Community Arts conference offered lots of people a ten-minute speaking slot. In some presentations, the organiser's goal for an artist to build community would be warm and clear. In others, artists would electrify groups, and occasionally a community's ability to build an artist would come through like light through a cloud. Community Arts is an area of work that at its best, catalyses creative action - and at its worst, exploits and makes fools of us all. The most successful and admired work I've made in the field falls outside the existing frameworks and expectations of Community Art. Its scope, longevity and ambition went beyond anything facilitated by arts administrators and well beyond anything I imagined possible.

Guest List

Much has been said about Community Arts, often derided as not being a fitting area of work for serious artists. In the 1980s and 1990s, I was cautioned by curators and artists to avoid getting involved; it would reduce my value, it wasn't artwork, it was social work. It would prevent me making serious work, they said. If I made work with communities it would downgrade my status, and doors to the higher institutions of art would slam in my face. Forever. Such critics saw art practice as a kind of exclusive club with a strict door policy. For them, art had a particular audience: entitled, educated people approved by the gatekeepers of creative activity. The cutters of the curranty cake of cultural resources. It all felt a bit limiting to artists like myself who saw creative practice as a party everyone was invited to.

It turned out that the mission of Community Arts was limited in its own way too. Its stated intent - to bring production resources to 'ordinary' people - seemed simple enough. But what artists and the public could do with these resources was tempered by the administration's need to court sponsors, funders and local big-wigs and the press. So a community access programme was desirable when it was celebratory and photogenic, but much less so when it was radical and provocative. Challenging the status quo or fostering sedition were not permitted, regardless of what was being shown in the main programme. If it did open opportunities for 'ordinary' people, it was an opportunity restrained by PR considerations.

The selection of groups for inclusion in Community Art projects was made to serve many needs - just

not necessarily (or in my experience, not often) the needs of the communities selected. The soft social messaging that community projects offered promoters of health and equality is not necessarily how host groups would invest their cultural resources - given the choice. If chosen, host communities were confined to having a slight influence i.e. a-bit-of-a-say in an artwork, and occasionally to handle materials and have a-bit-of-a-go at something. Works were usually devised and delivered by an administrator and their professional artist(s) in response to a brief limited by the interest of the funder. My proposal that public arts spending should inevitably belong to the people is popular with the people, but not at all popular with administrations who are inevitably invested in their role of arts professional or social benefactor. More like doling out pocket money and ice cream, less like a society reaching consensus about how resources are used. The cake and the knife are kept out of reach.

Since earnings for artists were scarce, the field saw artists and organisations chasing small amounts of money using bold claims to plant projects amongst the least powerful groups in society. Groups for whom art was not always a huge concern. Slowly but surely, though, socially engaged practitioners have refined their trade, or cried trying. The sheer volume, invention and vigour of work in the field has impacted critical frameworks, so respect - and even accolades - have followed. The nomination and eventual award of the Turner Prize to Assemble in 2015 broke the mould by recognising a collective of architects, designers and artists who had been hired by the Granby community in Liverpool 8 to essentially deliver a design brief. The turning of the Turner prize is a significant gesture towards socially engaged practice, although Assemble appeared primarily to offer a socially engaged architecture and design practice at the time of their nomination. They were, after all, delivering costed architectural plans to their clients brief - and didn't necessarily view their own practice as art. Unusually, their clients were many: at least a community land trust, a wider district community, and a series of cash or in-kind benefactors. The community is hugely significant in this award. They are the force that protected the Granby houses from demolition, activated the site creatively and initiated an extraordinary process of area renewal following decades of failure by professional service providers. Together, they are the rightful winners.

With rare exceptions, like Granby, 'chosen' communities are recipients of a benevolence; Community Art is a 'gift' from outsiders. Outsiders who define the scope of creative activity, accept or deny access to participants, and control the criteria for evaluation. The possibility that communities have the capacity to initiate and create esteemed projects is confirmed in both Granby and the Welsh Streets both in Liverpool 8 in ground taking works that seem remote from schemes concerned with doing good or splashing the art-wash for organisations who recognise the PR potential for creative projects. Neither purveyors of the food parcel model of art-provision for the culturally hungry, or traders in the Fine-ar--with-a-capital-...F that pretends no hunger, foresaw the Turner Prize landing here, especially not the liberal elite who manage art resources, and who write and talk about art on behalf of society (Society and not Community).

Getting warmed up for the Brouhaha International Festival, carnival party on the corner of Kelvin Grove, 2013. Photo: Nina Edge.

House Rules

Self-directed creative communities like Granby are rare or at least rarely spoken of. There is much unsaid about the arena that simultaneously invites, values and depends on participation, whilst controlling, rationing, and patronising the recipients. Central to the administrative behaviour is the need to define acceptable content, corral expectations, and maintain control of resources. The administrative bodies that enable community programmes (or inclusion or outreach work) can be required to deliver to agendas beyond, and sometimes in conflict with, the agenda of the participating communities. For example, the administrative agendas of enacting-equality-by-performing-race, or crime reduction, or say health education, may have secured the resources that both seed and control creative activities. It is taken as read that the interests of the artist, the community and the delivering organisation are aligned. It is barely imagined that communities have an agenda or artistic proposition of their own. Arguably, community agencies and their artists depend on the poverty of the populations they work amongst, since other people's poverty is what levers in funds to enable the gifting of an art opportunity. Community Art might be deprivation dependent.

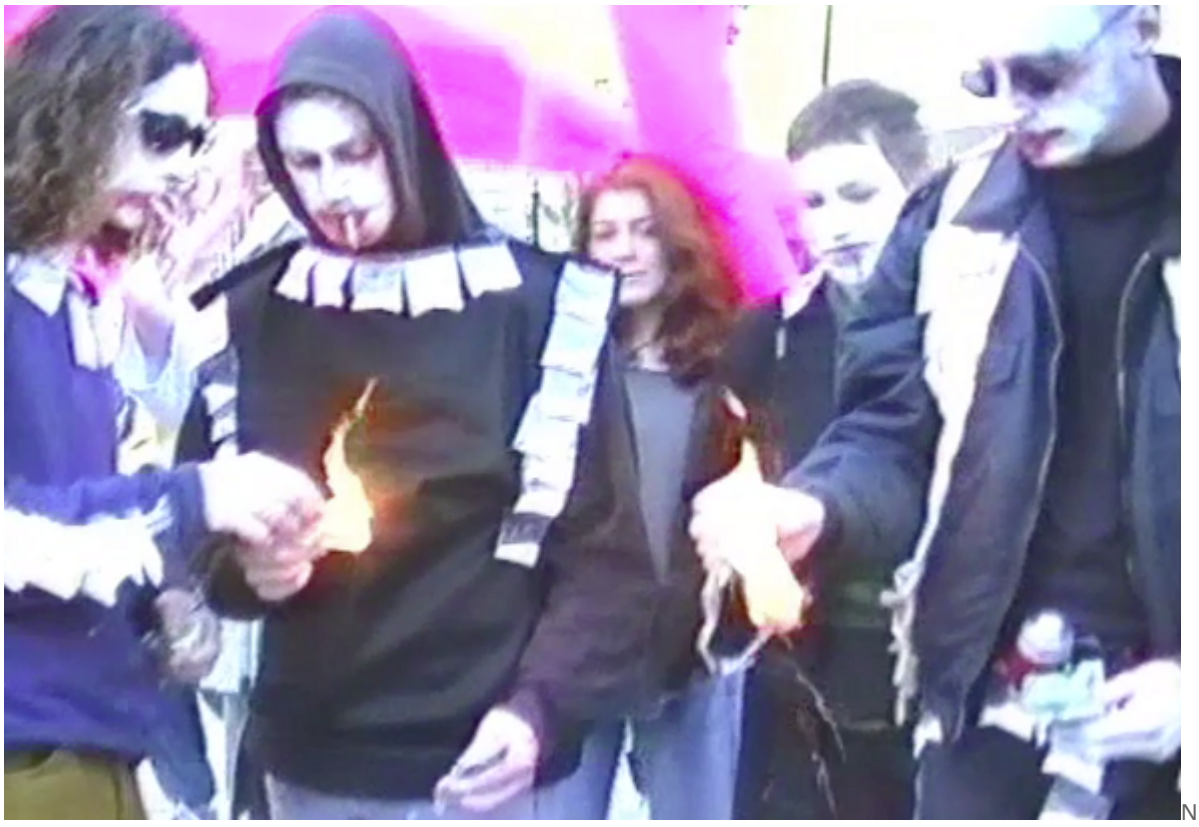
Whilst the administering sector seems embarrassed to acknowledge this reality, host communities readily communicate about the core inequities and tensions thrown up by the honey-pot that their poverty provides for the busy ambition of others. Liverpool Biennial saw their trestle tables overturned at their 2009 Happy City conference in Bootle, when access to a community food garden initiated by the organisation approached closure. The community felt used. My own technician was thrown into the Leeds and Liverpool canal whilst installing work for an MDI Year of the Artist commission one bright summer morning in 2000. The community felt suspicious. Nobody was hurt in either case. Maybe an injury or

manifest loss would have been preferable. Maybe then we would have had to reflect on the imposition and talk. The silence around such instances echoes other silences around art. The general lack of security, lack of resources, and lack of status in the arts produces an environment where self-criticism is being drowned out by self-congratulation.

Can the essentially exploitative dynamic of socially engaged art, dropped in like food parcels, be disputed in those (albeit rare) cases where artists are actually members of communities? The notion that communities might produce, co-opt or integrate artists comes as no surprise to artists who are the interfacing workers, the lubricant between social enterprises, public authorities and art institutions - all of whom are keen to trumpet how much work they do 'in the community'.

Artists' low incomes and insecure lifestyles make them in some small respects similar to the communities where they are sent, or live and work. Artists, and the communities they work with, are often on a similar band of the food chain. Curators, academics, arts administrators, critics and members of the press are seen more often at the more glamorous end of the scale where the wine and canapés are found, not so much in the church halls, community centres and clubs where the hospitality is loving, but more towards the Best-In coffee and Rich Tea biscuit end of the catering scale. There is a lack of discourse and integration around art and community in many of the organisations I have worked with. Linking the two terms 'community' and 'art' presents more a predicament and less a promise of power sharing.

Street Parties



Nina Edge, *Sold Down The River* performance, 1995. Film still: Sandi Hughes.

Sometimes, rarely but fabulously, a project achieves heightened power among the communities who provoke, collaborate, participate or watch it. In the 1995 Bluecoat Live Art Commission *S*old Down the River, more than a hundred people, young and old from all over Liverpool effectively *became* the artwork, watched by hundreds more. The work resonated. People wanted to be in it, organise it, add to it, come to it, record and recount it. Fifteen years later, when the documentation of the event was shown at

the Bluecoat Democratic Promenade show, participants remembered it and came to see the film. It was understood by viewers and participants because it encompassed their concerns, used commonly understood symbols and engendered a kind of collective understanding.

And no - it wasn't funded as a Community Artwork, it was funded as a live artwork by ACE Live Art and commissioned by the Bluecoat. We burnt waxed cash and 8 kg of frankincense, coated coats in cocaine wraps, put the 'flag men' in slave punishment collars, and launched corpses in Salt House dock. Images that resonate with the community don't necessarily attract community funding. Anyway, the performers, composers, dancers and designers who made Sold Down The River; A Post-Betrayed Ritual for a Post-Industrial City were not viewed as a community, not a single community – because they were like all citizens united in some respects and divided in others. They were a matching set of communities though united by their shared experience, their shared recognition of betrayal. Street Vimbuza complete with enduring archetypes. This was not pretty Mass.

Let's define a community as a cluster of interest around something shared, like a specific location, or experience, or value system. Work that might impress a community of interest can at the same time be viewed lowly, or absurd, by mainstream commentators, by the Grand Masters of the Art World. Particularly if the medium, as well as the community, is viewed as low-status or marginal. How does this impact the practitioner's currency, their value in a market place?

Does the status and earnings of artists whose behaviour is socially-orientated really diminish, like other workers whose practice is primarily social, public and practical, workers like nursery teachers, nurses and care workers? Locating their practice around their communities has been a practical solution for artists faced with an art market that would only ever provide a very good income. Artists working outside of the global Art Market may view the whole of society as their as their audience, rather than, the art world alone. They have created economies where more artists involve more of the the public on projects for which the artists may be paid. Artists working outside of the global Art Market may view the whole of society as their as their audience, rather than, the art world alone. They have created economies where more artists involve more of the the public on projects for which the artists may be paid. Usually poorly paid. Paid less than minimum wage as self-employed workers, and afforded social status on a level somewhere around volunteer, or student. The status of the socially engaged artist might be further diminished if their practice is too engaged with social action and approaches known political boat-rocking taboos.

As predicted by those who cautioned me about devaluing my personal cultural currency, my status, earnings and location in the cannon are all insecure even though my work has apparently been predictive, influential or thought-leading stuff. I chose to ignore the warnings and joined lots of big community parties rather than join the single snaking queue of an exclusive culture club, to which I and other socially engaged artists might be refused entry. With the passing of time, producing art which is enmeshed with communities has come with less of a devaluing forfeit. Ideas espoused decades ago are valued differently now. This is reflected in the Turner Prize award mentioned already and in funding streams like Awards for All, a Big Lottery Fund scheme designed to support grassroots and community activity. Also reflected is the stubborn low status of the area – grants are between £300 and £10,000. The will to empower creative communities is spread pretty thin. In State schools, especially in Academies where the battle for access really starts, creative subjects have all but been dismissed as folly, with little opposition from either the up-market art stars, community practitioners or public galleries. A community programme is now of course an ingrained and important strand of activity at publicly funded galleries. If artists with a socially engaged practice didn't access the higher reaches of the exclusive culture club, they may well have met the same people. Their own open door policies as community creatives has meant that falling art stars are caught on their way down - and invited in for a Rich Tea.

Door Policy

West Close Garden, community design Nina Edge and Green Youth Connexion. Ceramic production by David Mackie. Cardiff Bay, 1993. Photo: Nina Edge.

In 1988 Butetown, previously known as Tiger Bay, was about to be renamed Cardiff Bay. The city's slumbering coal docks were waking. One of the first portents of the investment to come was the appearance of public art, commissioned as a part of the re-branding process. West Close in Tiger Bay a.k.a. Butetown a.k.a. Cardiff Bay was home to the Green Youth Connexion. A group of teenage girls who had developed an exchange with me as children, via Sol Jorgenson at U-Print at Chapter Arts Centre, which was a kind of outpost of London's Cameraworks. We did printing workshops in the old slipper baths, reassigned as a Cultural Education Centre by a group of Welsh Rastafarians - the Inited Idren of Israel. The Green Youth girls, their extended families and I became friends during years of creative activity. We added textiles projects and carnival design to our activities and somehow I was living there and involved in the weddings, funerals, carnivals, election campaigns, picnics, and dances of everyday life. Three years into this exchange, a youth worker asked Green Connexion girls how they'd improve their environment. They said they'd invite me to join the group and take it from there. As far as they were concerned, they had a neighbourhood artist - like they had a hairdresser, a cook and a singer. They had no interest in approaching other artists. So the administration bent to the gentle insistence of the young women, who in turn knew and pursued the aims of their wider community. Normal recruitment, tender and selection processes were adapted or abandoned by sympathetic youth and arts trust workers. So via a bunch of teenage girls, the dock's community negotiated control of the site, the shortlist and the artist's selection. Although offered a window box and planters scale of project, we went onto produce a sizeable environmental improvement project on a vacant lot in a council estate. The original budget of about £200 was never going to be enough for the ambitions of the local people. We spent about £170k. I did the community liaison and workshops,

produced concept design drawings and took them out for public consultation. Then, working with local potter David Makie we turned an idea into West Close Garden, a place to show off, sit, play, chew ghat, smoke weed and meet. The 42 Nations who formed the docks community were traceable in the work. Many years later, my description for this kind of collision is Community Curated.

Gatecrashers

As well as commissioning permanent public realm and re-branding art works, regeneration companies routinely hire Community Artists for targeted direct contact with communities where regeneration plans are afoot. Artists are brought in to aid goodwill, engender trust, involve people, and mediate change, as much as to make art. The kind of art that might change perceptions of an area, adorn the pages of an annual report, be used in a Public Inquiry or add value to property development. Artist's residencies on regeneration projects have documented environments destined for destruction, used demolition spoil for building artwork, and collected The Hopes of a neighbourhood. The Fears though? Not so much.

The creative agenda for Community Art projects funded by the regenerist will likely differ from that of the local artists or residents. One is primarily concerned with promoting a Promised Land, the other is focused on surviving the external investment, and the social cleansing or gentrification that might come with it. The task of shining a light on the displacement and dismay of the people designed out of post-demolition development is not going to be supported by the developers and regeneration officials. Such visions run contrary to the interests of the development partnerships. By chance, I joined one of many communities destined for demolition in 2004, when my home and neighbourhood in Liverpool were scheduled for destruction. I translated my experience as a piece of human spoil into an art work that was appreciated by the local community and others like it. It was reviewed in the art press, covered in the academic press and was toured in a North of England textile exhibition. The work Nothing Is Private - a net curtain with audience activated security lighting was shown and promoted as part of Liverpool Independents Biennial in 2006. So it straddled many communities and resonated in multiple contexts. It was shown in the front window of my home.

Nina Edge, *Nothing Is Private, 40 Kelvin Grove in the* Welsh Streets, Liverpool, 2006. Photo: Peter Carr.

Nina Edge, *Nothing Is Private, 40 Kelving Grove in the* Welsh Streets, Liverpool, 2006. Photo: Peter Haggerty.

I live over the road from Granby in an area similarly blighted by failed regeneration schemes and where another grassroots campaign has succeeded in rescuing homes from the bulldozers. When my home and studio in Liverpool's Welsh Streets was threatened with demolition in a regeneration area, the Compulsory Purchase Orders did actually come with the sweetener of an official artist-in-residence, Moira Kenny, who came and worked in an empty house in Powis Street for a number of weeks in June 2006.

The residency, funded by the local Housing Market Renewal (HMR) company New Heartlands and their partners Plus Dane, took place in an empty corner shop on the contested site. Applications for the post were filtered. I was forbidden from tendering for the official Welsh Streets residency, despite being a Welsh Streets resident and an artist. As secretary and spokesperson for the local campaign group seeking alternatives to demolition, I had a national media profile, my opinions were known, and the protagonists of the scheme presumably needed to prevent me from articulating dissent amongst a local audience. In protest, a reputable local Community Art group refused to apply for it themselves as a response to my exclusion. So they filtered themselves out in solidarity. A closed tender process selected an artist from outside the area, but inside the arts community, who came and made artwork in Powis St. I showed my work concurrently with her official Welsh Streets residency work as part of Liverpool Independents Biennial 2006. I suppose I effectively infiltrated the programme of creative work visible in the district, made a local dimension available and overcame the ban by simply being a) a resident and b) an artist. The work - the net curtain - received critical acclaim expounding the loss of privacy and personal autonomy faced by the little people when confronted with big plans. Its performative aspect (the work exposed the household to the street by lighting them) was as uncomfortable for the viewer as it was for the viewed. Rather than sit by and become the invisible Welsh Streets resident artist passed over by powerful external interests, I created a piece that engineered super visibility. Without a doubt I was emboldened by the support of my community.

The *Nothing is Private* net was made and toured as part of the Mechanical Drawing exhibition

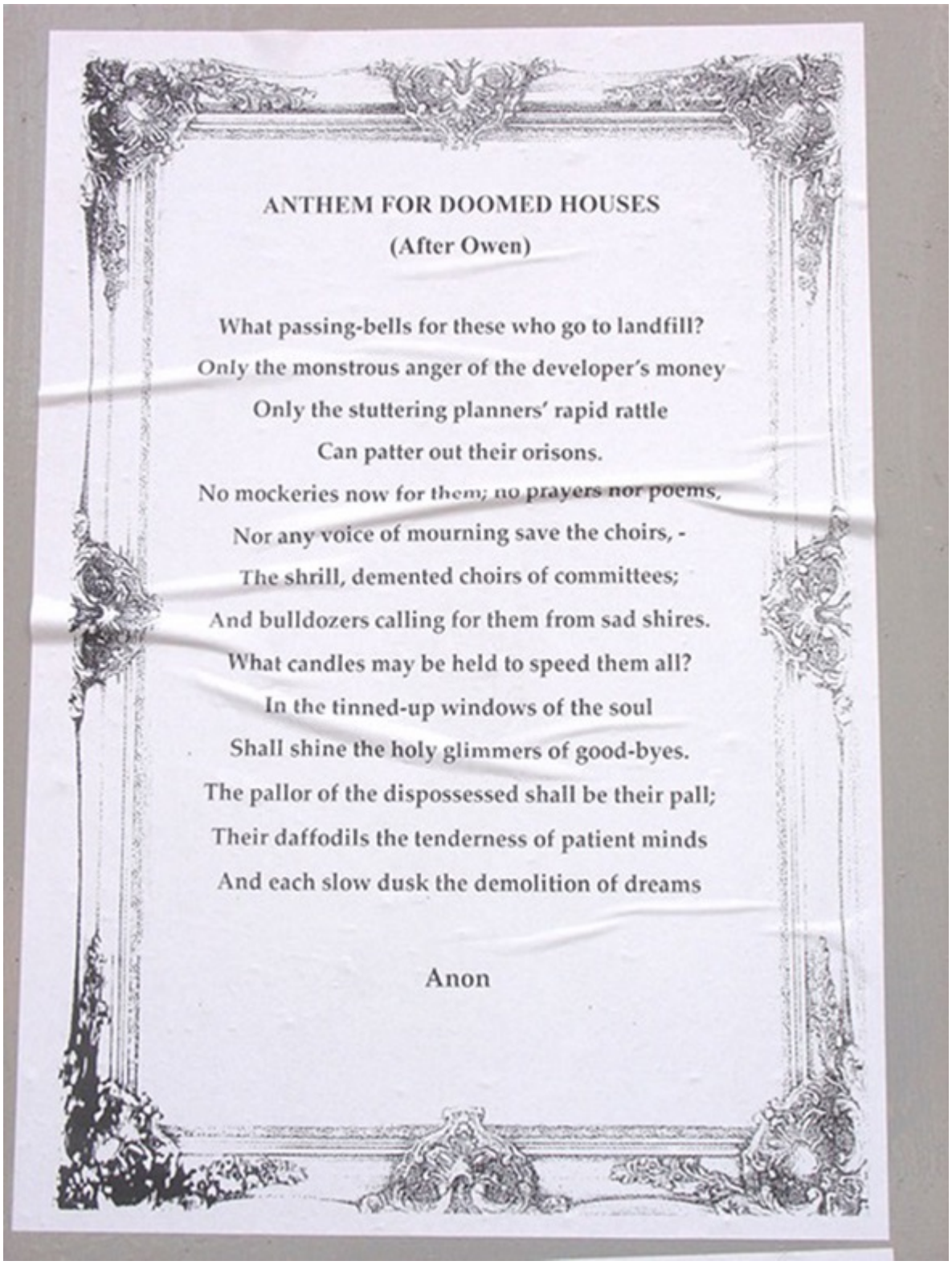
produced by the Embroidery Department at Manchester Metropolitan University. So it was enabled by another community: the embroiderers, textile makers, lace workers and academics in the North West who view me as a radical textile artist, and a bona fide member of their community. So they visited too, traveling to the Welsh Streets mostly from the North. I put out a visitor's book and people wrote in it, thus becoming part of the archive of commentary about the streets, the houses. A new dimension was added to the cultural tourism package that Liverpool is so proud of: the ghetto tourism of the tinned-up terraces. They were followed by Heritage tourists, UNESCO walking tours, Jane's Walk town planners, law and social science departments, urbanists, artists, drama, art and composition students, historians, archivists, architects and journalists, TV crews and animators. All visited the Welsh Streets and as campaign spokesperson I spoke with them all. In 2016, Samson Kambalu filmed in the Welsh Streets for a new commission that was presented as part of Liverpool Biennial 2016. He walks in the footsteps of numerous photographers, among them Mark Loudon & Sandy Volz (commissioned by Welsh Streets Home Group), Rob Bremner, Peter Carr, Peter Haggerty and Ciara Leeming, who included us in her comprehensive photographic journal of the HMR process. Kambalu will join countless press photographers, TV camera men and bloggers. All welcome, all walking the wasted Welshies, pointing cameras at our homes while we twitch our nets.

And me, I've taken thousands of photographs here too, because as campaign spokesperson, I found that a picture speaks a thousand tears.

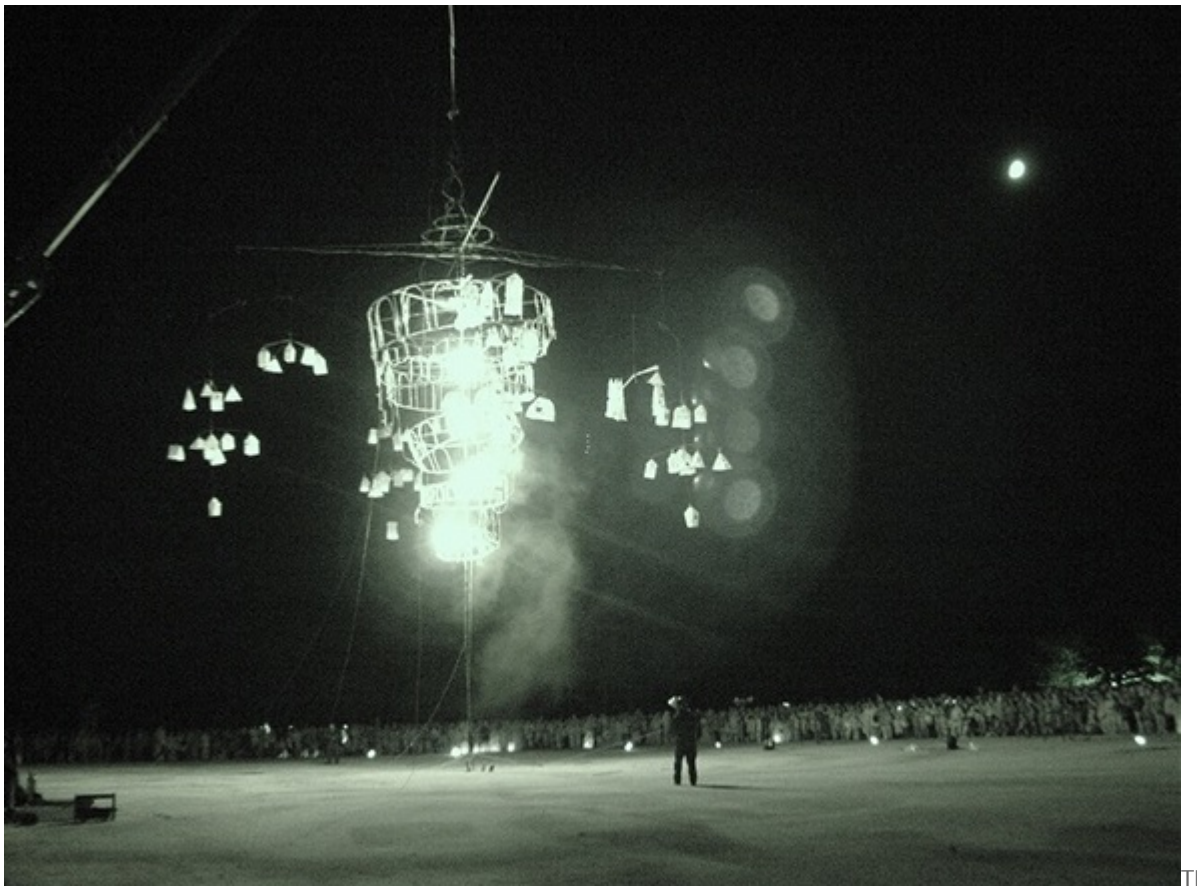
The net curtain *Nothing Is Private* is a direct action that harnessed art as both a shield and a decoder in a war of information. It can be contextualised among other cultural resistances that re-negotiate imposed narratives. Here the flimsiest, lowliest media articulated the experience of dread and degradation experienced by communities in clearance zones and became a testimony to that experience. It was documented in art and academic publications. Could it have been commissioned by a Community Arts organisation? None that I know of. Community Art tends to avoid controversy. The work toured Northern cities where large-scale demolition was also being un-rolled, by coincidence of economic history and the demise of textile production in the region. The regeneration consortia have a commissioning agenda and PR budget focused on the need to mediate the developer's aspirations. Anything else the community produces – well, the community will pay for. And pay they did.

After Parties

Cultural output from the broader community followed the net curtain. There was an extraordinary outbreak of unsolicited, unfunded and sometimes un-legal cultural intervention in and around the contested Welsh Streets.



The Anonymous Poet, *Welsh Streets Poetry Project,* papering over the cracks. Liverpool, 2008. Photo: Sandy Volz.



The Displaced, Halloween Carnival, Liverpool Lantern Company. Liverpool, 2006. Photo: Marc Loudon.

Community planting by Welsh Streets Home Group: *800 Daffodils for St David on Liverpool's 800th* Birthday. Liverpool, 2007. Photo: Jeremy Hawthorn.

Yarn bombed Railing for Rhiwlas Street, Liverpool, 2010. Crochet and photo: Beverley Dale.

Sewn butterfly on Wynstay Street tin-sheet, Varavara Gujaveja, 2010. Photo: Nina Edge. Spirit of the Streets, Janet Brandon Trick Films, 2012. Animation still: https://vimeo.com/32404603.

Playwrights, community theatre groups, poets, photographers, graffiti mongers, choirs, bands, film-

makers, animators, stitchers, photographers, seed-sowers and yarn bombers passed through the Welsh Streets each leaving a small mark. Mark of respect maybe. To residents each small work marked a small survival. Morale was super-boosted with every contribution. It blew over the road into Granby Four streets, who were, according to them, quite sparked up by the Welsh Streets tin sheet drawings and daffodil planting. They were to go creative in grand style - with paintings and planters that far exceeded our Welshie productions in scale and quality. The genius Granby neighbourhood campaigners founded a community market that included music, art, food and stalls. That meant a financial, social and cultural exchange mechanism was operating across two clearance sites, one on either side of Princes Avenue. It was a community, and it was art – but unique, self-directed and un-administered.

Beaconsfield Street in Granby with windows painted by the residents. Liverpool, 2010. Photo: Nina Edge.

Sewn cherries on Kelvin Grove tin-sheet, Varavara Gujaveja, 2010. Photo: Nina Edge.

We (that is, the Welsh Streets Home Group or WSHG) swapped campaign news, traded ideas and ran campaign events on stalls at the Granby Four Streets Market, at carnival, in Toxteth Town Hall, Toxteth TV and in the local shops and chippies. We had received local and national press for years, but nothing glued us together and drew us out and drew us together as well as culture did. A community of supporters had made themselves visible independently, creatively and repeatedly. The media coverage of threatened communities and their homes in the Welsh Streets was un-abated; four TV features supplemented considerable print and radio coverage. Liverpool Biennial began projects in Anfield and Bootle, both areas stalked by the bulldozers. As the renowned Homebaked Anfield project went from strength to strength, TV foodie Jay Rayner arrived to judge a baking contest. I entered a loaf of bread in the bake off, for which I made special commemorative packaging. It was a throwaway thing. Merchandising survival.

The wrapper read 'RISE UP ANFIELD' in red and 'Greetings from the Welsh Streets' in green. I took a picture and tweeted it. It pinged - appearing in ghost form when Liverpool Football Club used a similar wonky red text to repeat my slogan on a 12 x 24 ft hoarding outside the ground, opposite the Homebaked bakery. So Rise Up left the bread wrapper, travelled via social media and landed on the hoarding of (one of) our famous football club(s). You're welcome L.F.C.

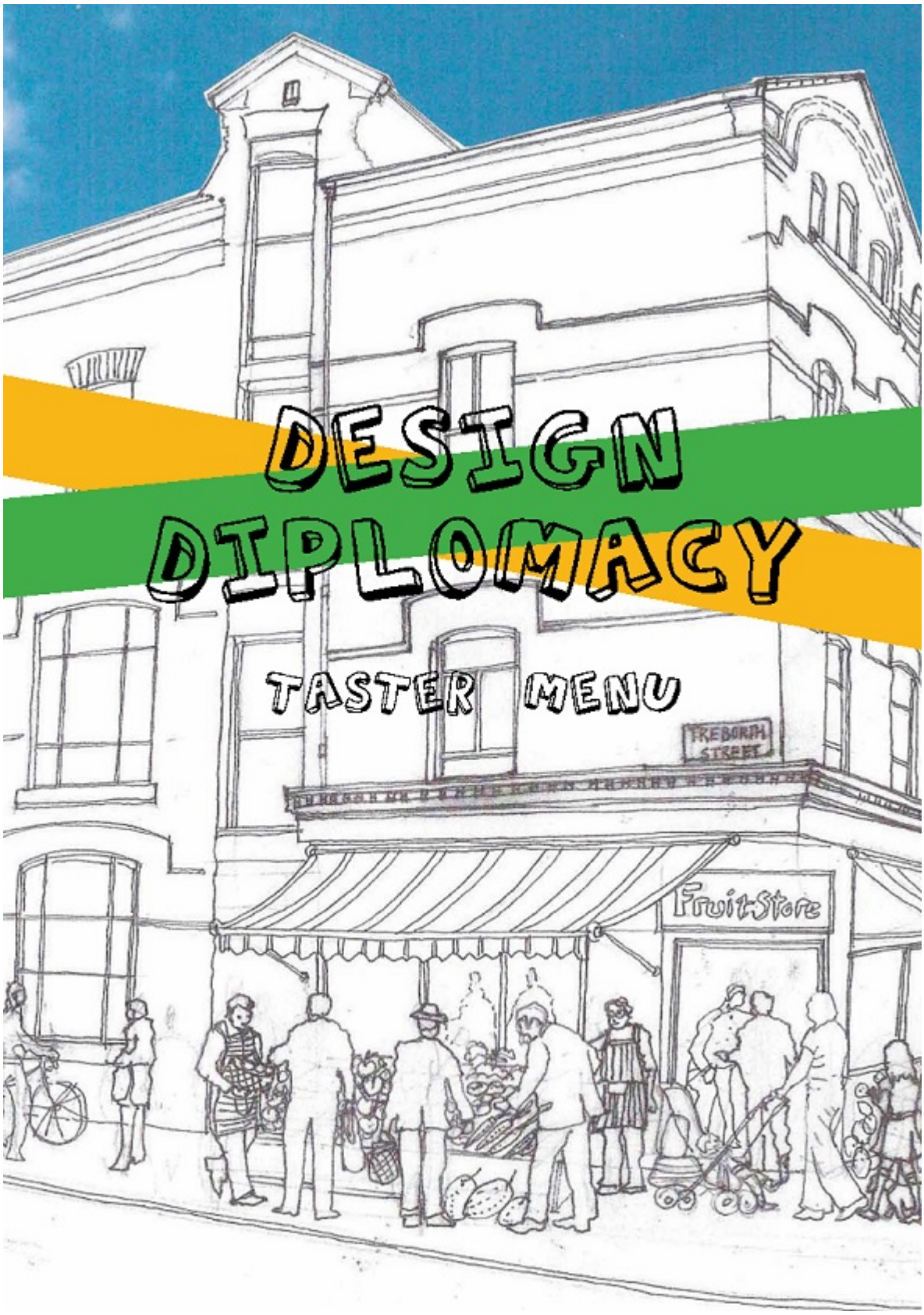
Rise Up Anfield. Liverpool 2012. Packaging, loaf and photo: Nina Edge.

Rise Up Anfield hoarding Liverpool Football Club. Liverpool, 2012. Photo courtesy of Homebaked.

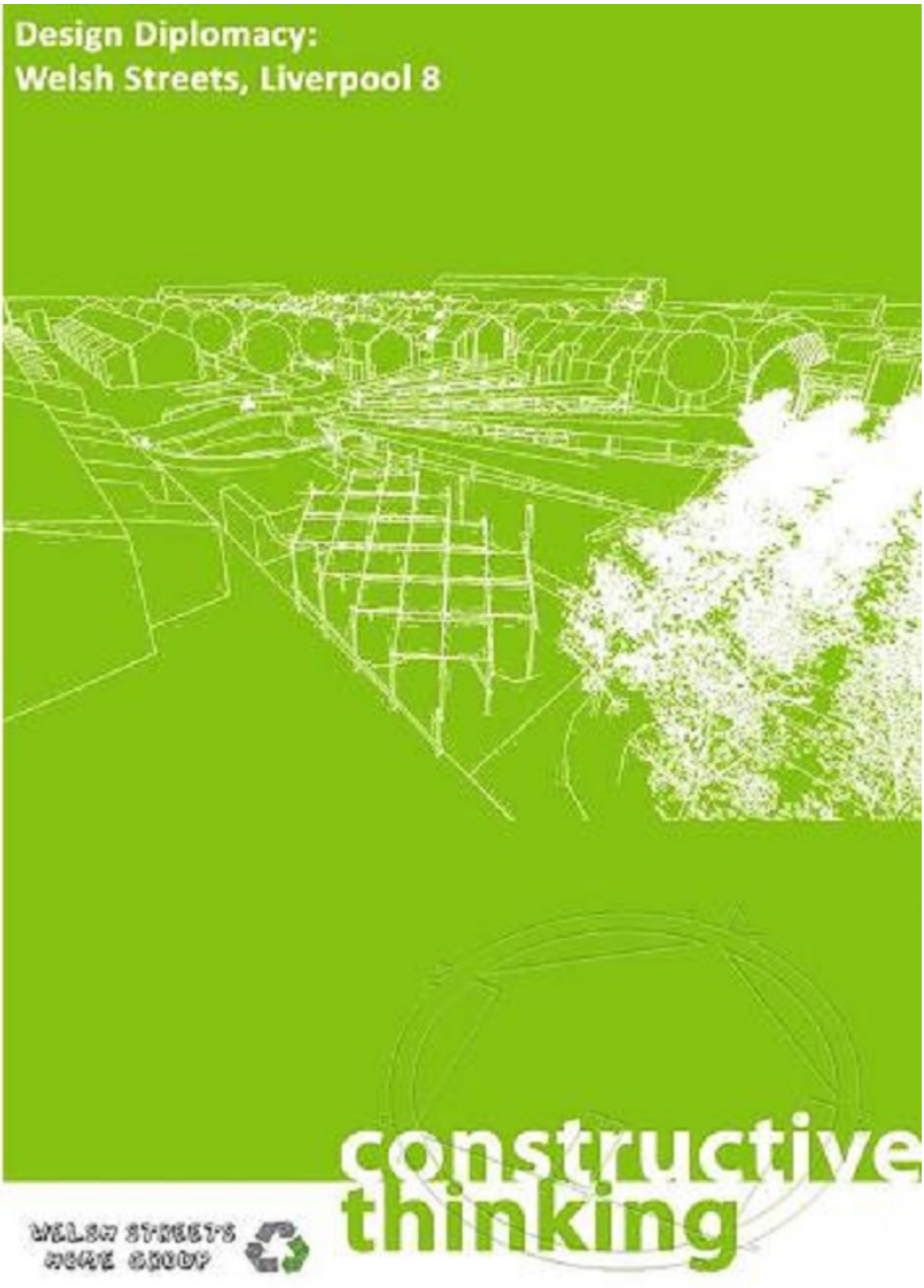
RSVP

The regeneration agents lost control of their housing narrative, and with it, eventually, control of the housing policy. The tale was retold by community campaigners and their allies. Cultural production played a part in this too. It boosted morale, linked campaigns, created spaces for exchange, challenged the authorities and bore witness. But whilst culture realigned what people believed was possible, and how communities felt about their predicament, it provided no bankable fire power. That takes political, legal and financial control. Those are the heavy guns. The creativity and independence of an artist-lead community group opened the way to realigning control. The triggers that catalysed political, economic and cultural change eventually freeing the Welsh Streets from the threat of demolition were varied. Our production of community design research, attraction of investors large and small, consideration of tenure options and archiving of consultation evidence meant we could articulate multiple voices simultaneously. Eventually quite a lot of people were listening.

Select Committee evidence documents. Nina Edge for Welsh Streets Home Group. Liverpool 2005-07. Photo: Nina Edge.



Design Diplomacy Handbook, Drawing Terry Lau, Design Jessy Edgar, (Welsh Streets Home Group: Liverpool, 2012).



Design Diplomacy Final Report, Constructive Thinking Architects, 2012. Image courtesy of Nina Edge. For further information visit Do It Yourself City Liverpool University.

What had started in 2004 as collecting local feedback led to the production of Select Committee

Evidence, which in turn lead to National Press coverage. Eventually we met government departments, senior politicians, heritage organisations and empty homes charities that between them had enough leverage to go to court and challenge the clearances. Government support for demolition was withdrawn in 2011 and replaced with financial incentives for refurbishment. The challenges to the idea that demolition is cheaper, better, or more desirable were assembled from painstakingly gathered community feedback. The plan to demolish the Welsh Streets has gone back to the drawing board. It will be redrawn as a plan to repair as many houses as possible following a ruling from the Secretary of State in December 2015. We imagine it will look like our WSHG drawings in which refurbishment is an option. The triggers, which enabled such monumental changes may have been creative, clever and artist lead - but none of them were art.

Dancing with the bouncers

There was art though. There was Homebaked, born of Jeanne Heeswijk's project with Liverpool Biennial, there was Assemble's work, commissioned by Granby community, whose street planters, market and window painting had already put them on the map. The Granby Market had hosted Izzy O'Rourke's painting, and musicians such as Bolshy, Beatlife, Mick Head and Carla Ambrosius. There were poems from WOWfest, Curtis Watt, Hazel Tilley and Tom Calderbank. There was Janet Brandon's animation in the Welsh Streets and her co-production with Jaye Lawless in Anfield, along with The Anonymous Poet, who has flyposted poetry on the tins on and off for eight years. There were many more anonymous interventions too. My favorites include 'Capital of Culture?' written large on a wall in Gwydir Street and 'We only asked for carpets' – both anonymous and sadly now removed by the authorities. There was Moira Kenny's 2006 residency, funded by regeneration giants Plus Dane and New Heartlands, under the Government's HMR scheme. There were performances about Welsh Streets from Dingle Community Theatre and Liverpool JMU, mohair sewn into the tin sheet by Varvara Guljajeva and ruffs crocheted on the railings by Beverly Dale. The HMR scheme that catalysed so much unsolicited and creative feedback, left the city itself very much a work in progress, with significant areas either ghosted and tinned or flattened and binned. The early independent cultural interventions around HMR are detailed in Cultural Hi-Jack [1] and will be discussed by their makers as part of at Metal's Future Stations series in October 2016.

The achievement of the self-started cultural campaigns probably needs recording. If recorded it would show the survival of otherwise whitewashed or art washed narratives, the tattooing of the multiple view points onto development portfolios, the boosting of morale and the catalysing of self-belief for beleaguered communities. The development of alternative regeneration approaches has happened in three areas of Liverpool where artists bedded in, or in many case were already embedded because that's where their beds are. It did not happen as far as we know in any of the other nine cities affected by a government scheme that, at one time, had earmarked 400,000 houses for demolition.

Art is not always actually a great tool with which to tackle power. But in the HMR clearance zones it has clearly been a means of refusing powerlessness, which is a start. Creative action has calmed troubled waters, troubled calm waters, made us laugh, provided platforms to exchange, communicated outwardly, and ultimately, against all the odds, seeded deliverable alternative regeneration schemes where once only bulldozers and bullshit reigned. It is at art events that irreversible loss and grief and anger has been approached. It seems crass to say it but in the face of asset-stripping and forced clearances, sometimes the art events have even been cathartic. I'm thinking of the Liverpool Biennial bus tour to Anfield. I'm holding a 30 pence brick and crying, we are both crying. I'm with the Welsh Streets Invisible Poet and we have Liverpool Biennial 2012 to thank. Taking out trauma on tour.

The expanding Welsh Streets cultural portfolio includes Design Diplomacy, a 2012 collaboration with Constructive Thinking Architects, commissioned by Welsh Streets Home Group. The project, which sought to reconcile opposing viewpoints, was written, briefed, and overseen by myself following mediation and conflict resolution training. It is a community design project, endorsed by the then Housing

Minister Grant Shapps and seen by the DCLG as a good idea. Design Diplomacy placed costed designs for refurbishing part of the Welsh Streets in the public domain for discussion. The area although earmarked for demolition is now going to be refurbished – not by our funders and not to our design, but nevertheless refurbished. So perhaps the role of culture is not only to imagine things differently, but to make them different.

In 2006, when I made *Nothing Is Private*, the schiffli embroidered net curtain for my front window, the demolition of my home and studio seemed inevitable. Now that decision has been reversed and my home is saved along with the whole Welsh Streets site. It seems the perfect time to make new work for the same windows, in an area where most houses have had their windows sealed up for twelve years. The work Contravision opened as part of the Biennial Fringe 2016 and will show into 2017: first on the windows of 40 Kelvin Grove, and then at Bluecoat Gallery for their 300 year anniversary Alumni exhibition. The new work is a series of printed wallpaper style patterns that completely cover the window panes. The prints recall both the tin-sheet and breeze blocks of the empty streets, as well as the rudely exposed interiors that are exposed as homes are demolished. The wallpaper patterns reference William Morris (for his doomed ideas of a socialist utopia) and Tipu Sultan (for his doomed resistance to colonisation by the British East India Company). My *Contravision* piece is a couple of streets away from Lara Favaretto's *Momentary Monument - The Stone, 2016,* commissioned by Liverpool Biennial for the main programme, in Rhiwlas St. Both pieces exploit the aesthetic of the deserted streets and draw audiences to the consideration of art, architecture regeneration and community. Audiences visit both pieces, and others located in Toxteth around the Granby cultural cluster. They can enjoy the work with or without knowledge of the struggles and triumphs that lead to the sites appearing in the way they do, and the stories the walls would tell if they could talk. The work - whether or not defined as socially engaged - sits amongst communities who can value or deride it as they please.

The music stops and the parcel stops with it. The accepted convention is that when the next layer of paper is removed a gift may fall into the hands of the player - or it may not. People will usually play again regardless.

Contravision: repeat patterns for condemned housing. Phase 1: Wallpapers for the Dispossessed. Nina Edge, Liverpool Biennial Fringe 2016. Photo: Tom Lox.

Nina Edge discusses the window works in her home at 'Curtains For the Welsh Streets' at Bluecoat gallery on 21st September 2016.

A public debate with other artists who delivered self started independent art projects in the Welsh Streets is hosted by Metal on 15th October 2016.

A series of new works and performative action for the windows of 40 Kelvin Grove and the Welsh Streets is currently in development and will show as part of the Nothing project from September until April 2017.

[1] *Cultural Hi-Jack* (Liverpool University Press: Liverpool, 2011), p126.

Nina Edge

Nina Edge is an artist. Her work in communities began in the 1980s when residents in Cardiff Docks established control over artist selection, insisting that their established relationship with Edge be recognised in the commissioning of West Close environmental improvements.Emboldened by the insight

such networks engender, she went on to produce similarly inclusive works using strategies such as street performance, games or hoardings to extend audiences outside gallery environments.She was a protagonist of the Black British arts movement and is known for her interrogation of the status of production methods and materials.Although sometimes working outside the context of socially engaged practice her interest in interface makes her work widely accessible.A demolition order on Edge's home and studio in The Welsh Streets area of Toxteth lead to eleven years of housing activism in which she has exploited culture as a political tool.