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Reimagining Interim Landscapes

Krystallia Kamvasinou

Since the late-2000s the urban landscape of London is showing signs of subtle but profound change. Temporary interventions, lasting as little as few days or weeks, or as long as five years, occupy vacant land where more typical built landscape would normally stand. How have these 'pop-up' landscapes appeared and do they carry a more enduring message despite their interim character?

Interim landscapes in London are currently linked to the 'black holes' left by developments that stalled due to the late 2000s Global Financial Crisis. They emerge from temporary land use initiatives, which, paradoxically, have been increasingly led by private developers and landowners whose sites have stalled. Other agents as diverse as the Mayor of London, professional journals, professional organisations, development agencies, design organisations or advisory bodies, and public authorities have also often been involved. A top-down approach to temporary use, as opposed to historical bottom-up appropriations of vacant land, seems to emerge.

Interim landscapes reanimate the cityscape, giving a temporary intensity of life to urban gaps. Their insertion allows for low risk experimentation in planning and urban design, as interventions are not permanently linked to a specific piece of land but rather to a specific time: their success will determine whether they can be replicated on other sites and at other times. The diversity and innovation noted in these interventions suggest a wider scope for temporary urbanism and urban experimentation: from food growing community projects to makeshift public spaces, and from art installations to pop up businesses, these transient

landscapes 'stand in opposition to clone towns, to the idea of uniformity and unending drabness'[1] and act as important vessels for creative uses at times of limited funds.

The focus of the essay is on urban design interventions where architecture, in its wider sense, was a key agent in the initiation, conception or implementation of the project. Emerging socially-engaged practices, and not just built outputs, are reconfiguring the role of architecture in an age of uncertainty. The essay charts the slow but significant re□casting of interim landscapes as *landscapes of potential*, beyond their frequent associations with marginality and abandonment. It compares their representation in the professional and academic architectural and property press with the tension between vision and implementation experienced in real examples. While reimagining interim landscapes has certainly contributed to, and advanced, the discourse on temporary urbanism, its impact on practice may not be as straightforward. The latter is dependent on the diverging interests, but also potential synergies and convergences of the many actors involved in the production of interim landscapes.

The origins of interim landscape: *terrain vague* and temporary urbanism

Interim landscapes owe much of their conceptual foregrounding to the notion of *terrain vague* as theorised by Spanish architect and academic Ignasi de Solà-Morales to connote a

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[1] Kira Cochrane, "Why pop-ups pop up everywhere," *The Guardian*, October 12, 2010, http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2010/oct/12/pop-up-temporary-shops-restaurants (accessed on 31 December, 2013)

place in the city that is empty and unoccupied, vague or uncertain, imprecise or unbounded.[2] Referring to ambiguous, leftover urban voids, produced by processes of deindustrialisation, Solà-Morales' notion moved a step forward from other, more negative terminology, such as 'wastelands', 'derelict land' or 'marginal landscape': *terrain vague* offers the positive connotations of 'free to be occupied spontaneously'.

This freedom often allows *terrain vague* spaces in the city to be colonised by people, vegetation and wildlife in indeterminate ways that go beyond the more prescribed uses of urban space. Opposing the predominant view of dirt, illegal activity and danger associated with vacant land, examples of positive colonisation include social activities not easily permitted in officially designated public spaces, such as unofficial agriculture, farmers' markets or car boot sales,[3] or just adventure play. Untamed vegetation is also allowed to take over, often resulting in important ecological habitats that are rich in biodiversity.[4] It is arguable thus that the actual everyday life taking place on *terrain vague* does not justify its preconception as empty and unproductive wasteland within the economic structure of the city. On the contrary, it may offer a valuable alternative to other public spaces in the city that tend to be heavily monitored and commercialised, and may cater for a variety of less well-

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[2] Ignasi de Solà-Morales, "Terrain Vague," in *Anyplace,* ed. Cynthia C. Davidson (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1995), 118–23.

[3] David Taylor, *Public space lessons. Land in Limbo: making the best use of vacant urban spaces (*London: CABE Space, 2008), 5.

[4] Anna Jorgensen, and Richard Keenan, eds., *Urban Wildscapes (*Sheffield: University of Sheffield and Environment Room, 2008). Ingo Kowarik, & Stefan Körner, eds., *Wild Urban Woodlands. New Perspectives for Urban Forestry* (Berlin: Springer, 2005).

represented social groups. From another angle, *terrain vague's* melancholic atmosphere of ruination and decay has been acknowledged as a source of inspiration and reflection on the fast pace of contemporary life by disciplines as diverse as photography and film or geography and architecture.[5]

The *terrain vague* lends itself effortlessly to interim uses, including controversial art practices such as 'graffiti art' or 'guerrilla gardening'. These have been instrumental in developing the ground for spatial practices. Ever since Agnes Denes 1982 environmental art project 'Wheatfield – A confrontation',[6] practices such as urban food growing have been steadily gaining in support and moving to the mainstream. More recent 'urban interventions',[7] by a wide range of artists, comment on urban life in playful, witty, critical and most importantly interactive ways. Through this new 'art in the streets', the formal landscape of the city becomes a stage where more informal acts of temporary resistance, change or appropriation are played out. For Alain Bieber '[t]he ephemeral and anonymous artworks also match the character and rhythm of the modern major city, which demands constant renewal and a day-

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[5] See for example work by John Davies, Thomas Struth, Andrei Tarkovsky, Patrick Keiller, Tim Edensor and others.

[6] A two-acre vacant lot in downtown Manhattan was planted with wheat in as much a symbolic act as a real proposition. See http://www.greenmuseum.org/content/artist_index/artist_id-63.html, 2010 (Accessed on 22 January, 2013).

[7] See Robert Klanten and Matthias Hübner, eds., *Urban Interventions. Personal Projects in Public Places* (Berlin: Gestalten, 2010)

to-day urban praxis'. [8] He quotes Henri Lefebvre who argued for art as '*praxis* and *poiesis* on a social scale' and remarked that 'the future of art is not artistic, but urban'.[9] In that sense, interim landscapes emerge at the intersection of urban design, art practice and 'the practice of everyday life' in the city:[10] they present novel opportunities to adapt, subvert, reanimate and ultimately relate to the landscape.

The practice of reclaiming *terrain vague* is not, however, confined to art, nor is it new. Temporary uses almost inevitably mark the re-emergence of vacant land at times of recession in the development cycle. In London, a number of derelict spaces from the mid-seventies and early eighties recessions were unofficially occupied and gradually reclaimed as permanent parks or nature reserves.[11] At the entrepreneurial end, the Coin Street community-led regeneration scheme, which involved 13 acres of prime real estate land on London's South Bank, has set an interesting example. As part of it, in 1988 Gabriel's Wharf was turned into a highly popular riverside destination, bringing shops, restaurants, cafes and public life to an area that had long been derelict. This was seen as a catalyst to convincing prospective funders

[8] Alain Bieber, "Essay," in *Urban Interventions*, 5.

[9] Henri Lefebvre, "Perspective or Prospective?" in *Writings on Cities*, trans. and eds. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 173.

[10] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

[11] For example, Camley Street Natural Park in King's Cross, Northern Heights Parkland Walk in Haringey, or Gillespie Park Local Nature Reserve in Islington. See Krystallia Kamvasinou, "The public value of vacant urban land," *Municipal Engineer 164,* no. 3 (2011): 157–66.

and leaseholders that uses proposed for the more ambitious Oxo Tower Wharf development were viable. In retrospect, this model forms a predecessor to recent schemes that will be discussed later in this essay, and exemplifies a noticeable evolution in critical praxis towards vacant land. What is new today is the shift in key players from community and voluntary groups to the commercial property sector: from bottom-up to top-down.

Apart from being a specific 'time-limited' type of *terrain vague* (due to temporary pauses in development, rather than post-industrial abandonment or other reasons) and hence characterised by the intention of the temporary[12], interim landscapes belong to a growing international movement on 'temporary urbanism'. This movement proposes more organised forms of temporary occupancy as catalysts and alternative strategies for the future development of cities.[13] This approach sees the reuse of abandoned industrial or institutional buildings and sites 'for commercial, artistic, athletic, leisure and community activities, with permission from owners and planning authorities but with a limited amount of renovation'[14] or even 'market-led' solutions, highlighting the potential economic benefits to communities

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[12] Bishop and Williams, *The Temporary City,* 5.

[13] See, for example, Jacqueline Groth & Eric Corijn, "Reclaiming Urbanity: Indeterminate Spaces, Informal Actors and Urban Agenda Setting," *Urban Studies* vol. 42, no. 3 (2005)**:** 503–26. P. Oswalt, P. Misselwitzz & K. Overmeyer, "Patterns of the Unplanned," in *Loose Space - Possibility and Diversity in Urban Life,* eds. K. A. Franck & Q. Stevens (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 271–88. Robert Temel, and Florian Haydn, eds., *Temporary Urban Spaces: Concepts for the Use of City Spaces* (Berlin: Birkhauser, 2006).

[14] Karen A. Franck, and Quentin Stevens, "Part IV – Discovery," in *Loose Space,* 231.

and spin-offs for creative entrepreneurs. What is new here is the diversification of uses, as compared to the predominantly green space focus of the eighties.

These new and adapted approaches to *terrain vague* in urban design echo architectural theorist and landscape urbanist Mohsen Mostafavi who has suggested that 'temporary uses of such sites already contain clues to the potential diversity of future activities they might contain.' [15] The significance of interim landscapes lies hence not only in their critical opposition to more established ones but, more importantly, in their function as catalysts and experiments for possible futures.

London's interim landscape in the late 2000s

A rich timeline of top-down initiatives, some of them with national scope, provides the context of London's interim landscape in the late 2000s. Their focus has ranged from public spaces to food growing projects, and from architectural interventions to entrepreneurial schemes. Interestingly, it is the private sector that is leading, closely followed by, or in partnership with, the voluntary and public sector.

In 2009 landowners and developers in the UK started to overcome their traditional reluctance and, in view of an uncertain property market, began to encourage temporary use of their sites. Even in non-stalled sites, some saw it as a way to create a positive sense of place in an area that may have been publicly inaccessible or little known in the past. Developers Argent

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[15] Mohsen Mostafavi & Ciro Najle, eds., *Landscape Urbanism: a Manual for the Machinic Landscape (*London: AA Publications, 2003), 7

notably supported a skip gardens food growing scheme for London's King's Cross Central regeneration site (Figs. 14.1-14.2). The scheme treads carefully between providing for the local community while the redevelopment is still in progress, and making sure this provision is moved to different places on the 67-acre site without hindering on-going or future works (hence the use of mobile skips).[16] Such interim landscapes not only help put new development gradually, but positively, in people's mental maps of the city, they also enhance such development with values of sustainability, social responsibility and care, and networking opportunities for young people.[17]

[Insert Figure 14.1: file 'Kamvasinou01']

[Insert Figure 14.2: file 'Kamvasinou02']

At the same time, voluntary sector initiatives provided a counterpoint. Meanwhile Space CIC (Community Interest Company) was set up to tackle the problem of empty properties and sites through community-based projects and by supporting landlords with resources such as 'the Meanwhile Manual, Lease and Insurance policies'[18]. It was, however, *Property Week*, the professional magazine of best practice in the commercial property sector that took this

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[16] See http://www.globalgeneration.org.uk/news-growing-people/496-throwing-open-the-kings-cross-skip-garden-gates (Accessed on 26 April, 2013)

[17] On the subject of 'creative sustainability' and 'civil society resourcefulness' see Michael A. LaFond, "eXperimentcity – cultivating sustainable development in Berlin's Freiräume," in *Insurgent Public Space: Guerrilla Urbanism and the Remaking of Contemporary Cities*, ed. Jeffrey Hou (London: Routledge, 2010), 61-70.

[18] http://www.meanwhilespace.com/about/about (Accessed on 4 March 2013).

aim to the heart of the property sector. In February 2010, it launched the nationwide *Site Life* campaign to bring vacant sites and buildings back to life. The campaign was supported by land and property owners, as well as 'some of the country's biggest developers … [and] the British Property Federation …[It] shows that some developers do care about the local environment and can come up with innovative solutions to the challenges of the economic crisis.'[19]

2010 was also the year of many publicly funded initiatives including *Capital Growth*, supported by the Mayor of London together with the chair of London Food Link, which aimed to transform 2,012 pieces of land in London into space for food growing by 2012 – a year of special significance due to the London Olympics. The initiative supported schemes on or near housing estates, schools, hospitals, waterways, and parks, and instigated the *Edible Estates* competition for the best social housing food growing projects.[20]

Architectural organizations have also led in exhibitions and forums for debate. In January 2010, the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) launched the *Forgotten Spaces* competition to seek speculative ideas for overlooked pockets of land in London. Although the projects were not intended to be realised, the competition's aim was to kick-start a conversation between the interested parties that might later lead to more formal agreements in

[19] Bishop and Williams, *The Temporary City,* 43.

[20] See Anita Pati, "The green fingers of Greenwich," *Inside Housing,* October 22, 2010, 32–35.

relation to interim use of stalled sites.[21] It is fair to suggest that the RIBA was careful to avoid confrontation while stepping into the vacancy debate. Still, by means of the shortlisted entries, landowners, developers and local authorities could gain an understanding of the range of possible solutions. A year later, the competition was repeated, followed by a three day exhibition and conference on temporary uses and how to plan for them. This confirmed the gradual expansion of the remit of the competition from vision to future application. In March 2010, New London Architecture held the exhibition *Pop-up city: ideas for re-using vacant urban sites,* which presented thirteen proposals from British Land's Leadenhall competition; a three-day symposium was also organized by the Architecture Foundation to debate interim uses in the context of the Olympic legacy.

In 2011 'the world's first pop-up mall', according to its initiators, opened in Shoreditch, East London, providing one to five year long leases to retailers. For the next five years, 'Box Park' will combine creative use of shipping containers converted into 'box shops' hosting branded retail, gallery space and leisure facilities, with a 'revolutionary' ethos aspiring to 'low-cost', 'low-risk', 'ground-breaking' businesses. Box Park will also contribute to local communities 'by adding colour, creativity and life of its own'.[22] The legacy of Coin Street and Gabriel's

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[21]See RIBA, "Forgotten spaces – An RIBA London, Design for London and Qatari Diar ideas competition," *Architects Journal*, January 7, 2010,

http://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/Journals/1/Files/2010/1/7/Forgotten%20Spaces_Competition%20Brief.pdf (Accessed on 25 April, 2013)

[22] Boxpark Shoreditch, http://www.boxpark.co.uk/about/ (Accessed on 10 November, 2012)

Wharf can probably be traced here, although Box Park's stated aim is to test and expand the concept to other sites or elsewhere in the world, proving that 'it's as local as it's global.'[23]

Against this diverse background, two indicative projects - at the intersection of property or public sector-led initiation, visionary and socially-minded architecture and public space design - highlight emerging issues typical in interim landscapes, particularly the tension between conception and production. In both examples, architecture's emerging role is that of agent of change and public participation,[24] rather than an advocate of permanency and power.

In 2009 British Land, one of the UK's largest private property developers and landowners, launched a small budget competition (£125,000) for a public realm project in the City of London, the UK capital's financial district. The initiative was prompted by the local planning authority, who were keen to avoid having the prime location site on Leadenhall Street, intended for a high-rise office block designed by Richard Rogers Stirk Harbour and Partners, the so-called 'Cheese Grater' building, lying desolate whilst development was stalled. Architects Mitchell Taylor Workshop won the competition with a proposal for a city farm-like 'secret garden'. Reportedly '[j]udges were charmed by the practice's innovative ideas, which include a wild flower bank and the Square Mile's first-ever allotments whose produce will be sold to City workers from a series of kiosks'.[25]

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[23] Ibid.

[24] See Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider, Jeremy Till, *Spatial Agency – Other Ways of Doing Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2011).

[25] "Cheese grater site set to be city farm," *Building Design*, November 13, 2009, 3.

In contrast to the soberness of the surrounding City-scape, the proposed urban farm is represented in vibrant colours and textures in the architect's spatial perspectives which are drawn from a low, human vantage point, rather than the more authoritative bird's eye view (Fig.14.3). In these drawings, where colour has deliberately been omitted from the surrounding office-building backdrop, the diversity of people and activities populating this interim landscape makes the need for it appear all the more pressing (Fig.14.4).

[Insert Figure 14.3: file 'Kamvasinou03']

[Insert Figure 14.4: file 'Kamvasinou04']

The project received significant publicity in the architectural press both before and after the announcement that it would not be realised. Titles such as '12 firms vie to revive derelict Rogers site', 'Cheese grater site to be city farm', 'City farm for Leadenhall: British Land goes shopping' chart the excitement experienced by the architectural and wider community by what was seen to be a new way of engaging with the city landscape through small scale, temporary public realm projects suited to emerging ambitious architectural practices. The initiative was seen as 'very progressive from the client'[26] and as a positive act of 'civic duty' coming from 'enlightened developers'.[27] Despite this, the follow-up was a complete anti-climax as the developers, after a few months of discussions with the architects, abandoned the

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[26] Shortlisted architect Asif Khan cited in Elizabeth Hopkirk, "Young firms vie to revive derelict Rogers site," *Bdonline.co.uk*, October 30, 2009, http://www.building.co.uk/news/young-firms-vie-to-revive-derelict-rogers-site/3152086.article (Accessed on 15 November, 2012).

[27] Amanda Baillieu, "It's a win-win situation," *Property Week,* March 12, 2010, 36.

scheme in 2010 fearing it would devalue the long-term development plans for their site, and eventually proceeded with their original plans in 2011. The disappointment felt by the architectural world was expressed in telling titles talking about 'a missed opportunity'.[28]

A number of reasons appear to be at the heart of this unfortunate result. First, there was a mismatch between the different actors' expectations and motivation. The architects strived to reinstate a piece of lively, agricultural life amidst high capital business. The developers saw this as a potential risk, giving out the wrong message about the recovery of the market, and possibly creating a precedent difficult to supersede in order to proceed with long term investment. The production of 'interim landscapes' thus involves a fundamental clash of interests, which can only be overcome through mediation between the different interested parties, as well as regulation and support with the funding and management of interim landscapes from the side of local planning authorities and policy makers. Providing security to landowners that interim landscapes will be just that – interim – through temporary licences and contracts can encourage them to be more daring and act as the 'enlightened' sponsors of temporary projects.

Timing is also crucial. As interim landscapes can only exist while the conditions that initiated them remain the same, it is vital that their installation is enabled as soon as possible after a decision has been made. In the case of the Leadenhall site the planting season was wasted in

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[28] See, for example, Hattie Hartman, "PopUp City: a missed opportunity," Footprint – Hattie Hartman's sustainability blog, *Architects Journal,* March 25, 2010, http://blog.emap.com/footprint/2010/03/25/popup-city-a-missed-opportunity/ (Accessed on 25 April, 2013)

negotiations between developer and architects, and the chance of at least having the proposal implemented for one year was lost.[29]

Despite its failure to materialise, the project represented a key type of interim landscape with the potential to become a landscape prototype linked to time rather than space, capable of being replicated in other places synchronously or in the future. Its associated publicity explored its vision through charming imagery while it also exposed the processes and actors involved, and the hurdles encountered when their interests do not converge. This, in retrospect, is perhaps the important legacy of the project: it was a first step towards bringing interim landscapes, and the tension between vision and implementation, to the foreground of professional and public perception.

Following up from *Site Life*, in late 2010 *Property Week* together with the now defunct London Development Agency (LDA), the Mayor of London and the Mayor of the Borough of Newham launched the 'Meanwhile London: Opportunity Docks' competition to promote three strategic sites in the Royal Docks, East London, by finding temporary uses as part of the 2012 Olympics regeneration legacy. The target of the initiative was that ideas tested on these sites could be transferred to other sites in the locality, and could help promote the future regeneration of the wider area, and its 'green enterprise' ambitions, as per the requirements of the competition brief: 'The Royal Docks' future identity can be inspired by meanwhile

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[29] Ibid.

explorations that engage local people, visitors and the market.'[30]All sites were owned by LDA or the London Borough of Newham.

The winner for the site opposite Canning Town train station was 'Canning Town Caravanserai' by Ash Sakula Architects, a proposal that would turn the large stalled site into a micro-scale urban 'oasis' for the next five years before handing it over to Canning Town's new Town Centre by developer Bouygues (Fig. 14.5). Although 'locally-driven public space' is at the core of the proposal,[31] the site started its life envisioning a range of activities that would engage both locals and visitors during the summer of the Olympics (2012), including, among others, 'creative micro-enterprises involved with trading, making, cooking and eating, housed in containers and some innovative integrally printed lightweight enclosures'.[32] Inspired by the original etymology of caravanserai, 'an inn built around a large open-air courtyard for accommodating caravans along trade routes, mainly in central and western Asia'[33], and perhaps in line with the Royal Docks famous trading past, the proposal attempts to create a makeshift 'trade route' landscape for all generations, akin to 'a beer garden

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[30] Lee Mallett, "Meanwhile London competition: Opportunity Docks," *Property Week*, November 24, 2010, http://www.propertyweek.com/comment/analysis/opportunity-docks/5008941.article (Accessed on 9 December, 2012)

[31] Ash Sakula Architects, "Our story," 2013, http://caravanserai.org.uk/our-story/ (Accessed on 9 December, 2012)

[32] Cany Ash, "A tool towards adaptable neighbourhoods," *Urban Design* 122 (2012): 27–28 (27)

[33] Ash Sakula Architects, "Inspiration," 2013, http://caravanserai.org.uk/inspiration/ (Accessed on 9 December, 2012)

ambiance, where the siloed generationally-defined activities of London life are eroded and children are welcomed into the adult world.'[34] The vision for the project includes local skills' development through the provision of training workshops, fostering community through food growing spaces, and even ticketed events (Fig. 14.6).

[Insert Figure 14.5: file 'Kamvasinou05']

[Insert figure 14.6: file 'Kamvasinou06']

This is obviously a moving target, as the project is ongoing and its success will depend on adapting to changing needs and circumstances. Its business plan is thus constantly under review to reflect the observed changes in community and trade interest in the site. Whilst featuring a number of actors in its inception (two mayors; one major trade journal; London's Development Agency; and teams of architects/makers) the project's day-to-day life is critically dependent on a very different set of practices, namely the active involvement of community members and volunteers (traders; gardeners; teachers; artists, performers; families; interns; young unskilled trainees; and others) and support in-kind, through the offer of voluntary services rather than monetary exchange. In line with this ethos, the representation of the landscape in the press, and through its website, is much more focused on its social capital, displaying images of people engaging in activities or inspiring posters inviting to events, rather than the equally successful formal or aesthetic aspects of its design.[35]

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[34] Ash, "A tool towards adaptable neighbourhoods," 28.

[35] See http://caravanserai.org.uk/whats-on/. See also Lee Mallett, "London, we have lift-off!," *Property Week,* December 16, 2011, 34.

Caravanserai's interim landscape is at once familiar and strange, a cross-over between a children's adventure playground, a warehouse yard and an Asian street market, inviting the visitor to relax, explore and most importantly, act- even if that means just moving makeshift furniture around, warming up at the bonfire or discussing ideas for future activities. A make-do approach is evident on the site, where most of the architectural structures have been constructed or 'hand-made' by students and interns. There is no indication of permanency in these innovative structures, which appear lightweight, demountable and made of creative combinations of reclaimed material, according to its environmental agenda.[36] And yet, there is a sense that they have always been there, similar to a backyard where timeless objects tend to be used for whatever is necessary (Fig. 14.7).

[Insert Figure 14.7: file 'Kamvasinou07']

Currently in its second year, the site operates mainly as a Saturday market venue. Although the site had been closed for the winter months and, indeed, has to be locked up at night due to liability issues, anecdotal evidence suggests that, behind the scenes, it has been in use for activities such as drinking and gathering. Interestingly, no vandalism has been noted, which confirms the theory that such sites command a different respect from marginal groups as they

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[36] Hannah Wood, "A tour of Ash Sakula's Canning Town Caravanserai," Footprint Blog, *Architect's Journal*, September 20, 2012, http://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/footprint/footprint-blog/a-tour-of-ash-sakulas-canning-town-caravanserai/8635985.article (Accessed on 12 January, 2013)

consider them 'their own'.[37] The very low winter temperatures experienced in its first year of life pointed to the need for a more sheltered and enclosed structure. At the time of writing this is being constructed as a result of 'Flitched: the upcycler's design competition.' Launched in November 2012, the competition encouraged multidisciplinary teams to reconsider construction waste and produce 'a poetic and useful structure for the Caravanserai community site'.[38]

It is important to note though, that at the time of this essay going to press, the future of the Meanwhile projects at the Royal Docks is not looking so bright. One of the projects' operators has gone to administration. Another one has been forced to close; despite the 2012 Summer Olympics, it did not manage to achieve the visitor numbers expected in its business plan.[39] This showcases the vulnerability of interim landscapes and their susceptibility to under-use, lack of funding, and failure. However, Canning Town Caravanserai appears to be more robust against the nose-diving trend. According to the architects, this is largely due to 'the project's use of found materials and community volunteers.'[40] Indeed, locally sourced

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[37] See Wendy Baverstock cited in David Hickey, "Growth Initiative," *www.Regen.net*, May 04, 2010.

[38] http://caravanserai.org.uk/flitched-the-upcyclers-design-competition/ (Accessed on 12 January, 2013). See also http://www.flitched.co.uk/ (Accessed on 12 January, 2013).

[39] Ellis Woodman, "Join Canning Town's Caravanserai," *bdonline.co.uk*, November 23, 2012, http://www.bdonline.co.uk/comment/join-canning-town%E2%80%99s-caravanserai/5046461.article (Accessed on 12 January, 2013).

[40] Cany Ash cited in Mark Wilding, "Ash Sakula issues site waste challenge," *bdonline*, November 23, 2012, http://www.bdonline.co.uk/news/ash-sakula-issues-site-waste-

materials and 'up cycling' construction processes can work towards financial efficiency and environmental sustainability, but to have a chance of surviving, interim landscapes rely on volunteers and need to be embraced by the local community; even better, they should 'emerge' from it. Second, this proposal has a less 'spectacular' scope than the others – it does not rely on large numbers of visitors, or offer breath-taking entertainment. Instead, its scope is local in nature and long-term in ambition – to build skills and involve young people both in trade but also in the construction of the scheme, whilst reconnecting the community through ordinary activities. Last, its designers and initiators are directly involved in the running and funding of the project, while working closely with traders and guests using the site, confirming that a more hands-on and collaborative approach is necessary to push such projects through production barriers in a reasonable time-frame.

Facets of representation: diverging actors and potential intersections

While interim landscapes seem to slowly find advocates in such unlikely agents as the commercial property sector, their representation in the academic and professional press has evolved much faster to embrace interim use as a way out of crisis. Whilst the early 'academic' labels attributed to interim use initiatives pointed to their exceptional and almost revolutionary character – 'Urban pioneers', 'Insurgent Public Space', 'Guerrilla Urbanism', 'Reclaiming urbanity'– more recent popular terminology has adopted a less polemic style in line perhaps with the observed integration of interim uses in mainstream master planning and

challenge/5046347.article (Accessed on 23 January, 2013), where it is also mentioned that 'Market stalls, cafes, workshops and public spaces have all been built using reclaimed materials at Caravanserai.'

city development more generally. We are witnessing a gradual shift from the negative

connotations implied in terms such as 'urban wastelands', 'abandoned plots', 'lost space',

'TOADS' (Temporary obsolete and abandoned derelict spaces), or 'eyesores' towards the

more promising 'pop-up city', 'temporary city', 'sites for more eyes', 'fertile streets', 'edible

bus stops', 'site life', and 'meanwhile space'. The latter give voice to novel approaches to the

desired broader sustainability and resilience of the city, a key focus in current architecture,

urban design and planning debates, but also indicate a shift in public perception towards

recognising the potential of vacant land.

Their representation in the professional and academic press can certainly help inscribe

interim landscapes in people's consciousness. Analysing how the same project is presented in

different publications depending on the target audience can also provide evidence of areas of

convergence in the interests of different actors implicated with interim landscapes. Property

Week's titles such as 'Life support will revive blighted sites', 'Back to life', 'Sites for more

eyes', 'Top of the pop-ups', 'New land of opportunity', positively support and encourage

developers and property owners into temporary schemes highlighting their social contribution

and consequent long term financial benefits. By comparison, titles in the architectural press

(for example, Building Design, the Architect's Journal and the RIBA website) aspire to

architecture's ability to be radical and innovative, to inspire and revive: '12 firms vie to

revive derelict Rogers site', 'Cheese grater site set to be city farm', 'Caravanserai takes shape

in east London'. The press openly supports initiatives and encourages architects and built

environment professionals to support them too, while critically confronting failure to bring projects to fruition.[41]

Representations of interim landscapes in the architectural press tend to rely on architects drawings, with a dominance of eye-level perspectives in bright colours (rather than the more technical plans and sections or bird's eye overviews) presenting people actively engaged with the landscape. The proliferation of eye-level perspectives can be associated with the notion of 'tactical intervention' as opposed to the bird's eye overview commonly associated with the more authoritative 'strategic masterplanning'.[42] However, similar to the property press, once the projects have taken off, a range of photographic images rather than drawings, subtly interweaving people, engaged in activities, with innovative architecture structures, start appearing in official online representations.

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[41] See Woodman, "Join Canning Town's Caravanserai". See also Amanda Baillieu, "Legacy needs to stand by its radical neighbours," *bdonline.co.uk,* August 10, 2012, http://www.bdonline.co.uk/comment/legacy-needs-to-stand-by-its-radical-neighbours/5040973.article (Accessed on 27 January, 2013) and "Carry on Caravanserai," *bdonline.co.uk,* November 28, 2012, http://www.bdonline.co.uk/news/carry-on-caravanserai/5046641.article (Accessed on 27 January, 2013).

[42] For a discussion of this distinction based on reflections from recent practice see Dermot Foley and Eimear Tynan, "The relationship between landscape representation and landscape design," *The Journal of Architecture* 17, no.1 (2012): 119–29. See also various articles in the same volume commenting on the criticality of representation and its relationship with city planning.

As Solà-Morales has put it, '[w]hen we look at photographs we do not see cities - still less with photomontages … Yet by way of the photographic image we receive signals, physical impulses that steer in a particular direction the construction of an imaginary that we establish as that of a specific place or city.'[43]For Solà-Morales, the urban photographer approached the *terrain vague* intentionally, as strange but desirable photographic subject, allowing the charged photographic gaze to show through the photographic output. In a similar manner, architectural representations of interim landscapes give life to the imaginary, literally inserting it in-between the real. The perspectival drawings at the design stage communicate vision, they render the imagined accessible. The photographs after implementation act as an archive documenting a soon-to-be-gone landscape for posterity.

In general the national press has also actively helped to bring the issue of interim landscapes in the foreground and nurture readers into its benefits.[44] In addition, a range of representational material has flourished online, mostly from voluntary community

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[43] Solà-Morales, "Terrain vague,"119.

[44] See, for example, Chris Tighe, Bob Sherwood, and Andrew Bolger, "Radical thinking revives derelict areas," *FT.com,* January 17, 2011, http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/29e1089a-226c-11e0-b6a2-00144feab49a.html#axzz1E4o1fpj7 (Accessed on 26 January, 2011) and Oliver Wainwright, "Garages to provide 'pop-up' housing for homeless people," *The Guardian*, November 12, 2012, http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/architecture-design-blog/2012/nov/12/garages-housing-homeless-people (Accessed on 8 February, 2013).

organisations, including inspiring videos and photographic galleries. [45] The outcome is that the representation of interim landscapes in the popular and professional press and the mediated and rapidly distributed online image has decisively contributed to their revamp as *landscapes of potential*.

The enduring image of interim landscapes

It is not yet clear whether this potential can truly be realised in practice. It is too soon to draw solid conclusions about the way that interim landscapes are changing the face of the city and more specifically that of London today. It is also uncertain whether they set an example that is here to stay or whether they are just a passing trend, destined to extinction as soon as market conditions change. One thing that is clear, however, is that interim landscapes thrive on ambiguity. They occupy the space between public and private, secular and sacred;[46] they can metamorphose from wastelands and eyesores to creative playgrounds for grown-ups; they are informal and everyday, while being business-minded and creative; they nurture the unexpected, subvert the norm and become agents for change; they contribute vibrancy and public life to the city while helping community ties and resilience.

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[45] See for example "the edible bus stop," http://www.theediblebusstop.org/?page_id=12 (Accessed January 22, 2013) and also "global generation," http://globalgeneration.org.uk/gallery (Accessed on 22 January, 2013).

[46] See Richard Sennett, "New ways of thinking about space," *The Nation*, September 24, 2012, http://www.thenation.com/article/169758/new-ways-thinking-about-space# (Accessed on 5 February, 2013).

In contrast to the picturesqueness of nineteenth century parks, or the focus on aesthetic perfection and technical beauty in representations of twentieth century designed landscapes, interim landscapes imagery does not negate the city environment, the corporate skyline, the banal, non-descript surroundings. Instead it instils within, rather than without, this context, an element of surprise, of playfulness, an alternative sense of beauty, that bring out a feeling of civic pride not as a result of the grandeur of public projects, but because of the sense of ownership and bonding that communities enjoy. Indeed, people, rather than objects, are key in the composition of such landscape images, which often reveal activities familiar to all, and a certain nostalgia for a long lost rural quality of life. Human scale and the intimacy of views complete the scene.

This is all the more remarkable at a time when – despite global recession – the characteristic cityscape of London is taken over by large-scale, sophisticated and visible, high-rise buildings. Interim landscapes and global capital ones coexist side-by-side and it is perhaps this contrast that makes London's cityscape so fascinating. Sky-bound iconic buildings are counterpointed by interim landscapes as energised 'black holes'. The dynamics of this juxtaposition are far more reaching than in previous recessions. Both the visibility of skyscrapers, which for some have a detrimental effect on the London skyline,[47] in all their stunning visuality, and the subtle emergence of interim landscapes, mark an interesting dis-equilibrium between manifested forces of global capital and more subversive projects. As Alain Bieber has suggested, an architecture of spectacle – '[b]rand-owned multifunctional

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[47] See Marion Roberts and Tony Lloyd-Jones, "Central London: intensity, excess and success in the context of a world city", in *British Urban Design and the British Urban Renaissance*, ed. J. Punter (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 169–88.

halls, giant shopping malls, chic loft apartments, and massive office blocks' – that turns the city into a 'theme park' might backfire by 'giving rise to a desire for open spaces and more participation'.[48] In this context, architecture's position in the production of space looks unsettled between producer of objects, on one hand, or agent and facilitator of social interaction and social space, on the other (Fig.14.8).[49]

[Insert Figure 14.8: file 'Kamvasinou08']

The conflict between representation and production is obvious in the way interim landscapes are being reimagined in the professional and academic press, as opposed to actually being realised. Still, reimagining interim landscapes can be a first step towards reframing policies and administrative procedures to align with the realities of short-term projects – and avoid the perils of their production process. Indeed, as indicated in the examples presented, mediation by committed architects and local authorities is necessary for 'top-down' initiatives to take off, as is the active engagement of local communities. When those are weak, projects fail.

What, critically, emerges from the tensions identified in interim landscapes are new, tactical ways of practice, with implications for the future of the city and by extension for the professions of the built environment. At a time when a lot of unease with global recession is manifested all over the world, perhaps interim landscapes point to a positive outcome of crisis: people of all groups, and not just marginalised outcasts, are getting more engaged with their abandoned urban landscapes, and this temporary emancipation may have significant

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[48] Bieber, "Essay", 4.

[49] See Awan, Schneider, Till, *Spatial Agency.*

political implications for the future. Interim landscapes form important testing tubes for experiments with social and environmental sustainability, from the non-monetary exchange of services and goods, to food-growing, recycling and the reuse of materials for construction. Emerging do-it-yourself collective practices may build up the necessary momentum for people's conscious, and critical, involvement with producing the city, in genuine creative dialogue with more formal means of production such as urban planning and policy and the omnipresent forces of global capital. This may be the enduring legacy of interim landscapes.