MAKING SPACE FOR OLDER AGE

(towards an alternative 'architectural' practice?)

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Context:

- Twin trends of demographic ageing and urbanisation

  By 2030 – 2/3 global population will be living in cities
  By 2030 – 1/4 urban populations will be aged 60+ *

  {C. Phillipson: 2011]

Paradox:

- **Marginalisation** and **containment** of the *subject* of ageing within architectural design, thinking and practice

  Limits the way in which architectural practitioners address and engage with older people's (possible) experience of the urban environment

This presentation looks at:

1). How the subject of ageing is marginalised (how older people themselves can become marginalised) in architectural thinking, design and practice…?

2). How do you open up a critical space within architectural discourse and practice around the subject of ageing that 'makes space' for older age in a different way?

Dominant age-related conventions within architectural discourse and practice:

Limited to a **baseline of physical needs**

    - questions of disability and access
    - investment in assistive living

- Plays into **medicalised model** of ageing – with implications for design practice.

- Plays into **problem-solving tradition** within design practice [J. Hill: 2006] – with implications in stereotyping approaches to older age.

Limited geographic reach in thinking about older age:

- Focus on the 'planned micro-environment' of interior spaces (Peace: 2006)

- Worked-up typologies of interior spaces to exclusion of urban space

Limited terms of engagement with a broader 'space beyond the front door'

- eg. I'DGo's work on 'open space'

  Replays focus on the body and physical access (rates of access)
  with form and end product of standardised design guidances

'wide and flat tarmac footways'

'easy transition at level changes'

'easily visible and understandable signage'

'frequent, warm, supportive seating'

'well maintained, safe and open toilets'*

A pattern of thinking replayed in Age-friendly concepts?

Checklist of Essential Features of Age-Friendly Cities
(WHO: 2007)

The Age-Friendly Parks Checklist
(Philadelphia: 2011)

- Why have design conventions around older age traditionally been so limited in their sites and contexts of engagement?

  Limited literally to the contained interior

  Tied to the functional capacity of the body

- To what extent – and to what *effect* - do deficit-based models of older age feeds into the dominant design conventions of architectural practice?

  A limited palette of design?

  A design culture of risk-aversion?

- Could architectural design practice enter into 'other' kinds of spaces beyond the contained setting? To think beyond the physical body?

Developing a broader repertoire of spatial practice within architectural discourse and practice that makes space for older age in a different way:

- What architects, designers and other spatial practitioners might offer *beyond* problem-solving service
  (ie. providing solutions of universal checklists and guidances).

- Giving value to another dimension of design and spatial practice that is less solutions-driven is more **speculative**, **propositional** in intention.

- Giving value to design and spatial practices that are **creative** and **critical** processes in themselves.*

    * What Rendell describes as a 'critical spatial practice' [J. Rendell: 2006]

- Expanded definition of architectural practice as a practice of **social critique** and **social change**:

  - Duties of care beyond client to society more generally (Till: 20009)
  - Focus on the everyday use and production of space (Lefebvre: 1974)
  - Methodologies of participatory architectural practice (Blundell Jones et al: 2005)

- Alternative techniques of architectural practice that include **small-scale, informal interventions** (often temporary) practice, that:

  - Re-shape and re-imagine spaces in small ways
  - Build from the bottom-up (tied to everyday use of space)
  - Question top-down processes of planning

*Everyday activities and creative practices that,
rather than 'maintain and reinforce existing social and
spatial orders [...] seek to critique and question them' *

*[J. Rendell: 2006]

Working in Newham (2006-11):

- Similar demographic profile to Manchester (in terms of a 'shrinking' elderly population)

- Idea of working in the 'wrong' place– developing work around ageing where regeneration strategy and programming targeted towards youth

- Way in which physical fabric of urban environment itself becomes planned and designed with younger people in mind:

  - Cities designed with certain age groups in mind (where long-standing relationships to place overlooked)

  - Policies and planning can foster exclusion of certain generations and favour others

  - Implicit (symbolic) alliance of regeneration with youth (as generation of promise - of revival and renewal…)

2006: participative research exercise to critique and question existing, generational order of Newham

The Fluid Pavement and Other Stories (On Growing Old in Newham)
[LBN Mobile Library: 2006]

*What if youngest borough were mapped out according to its oldest demographic? ***
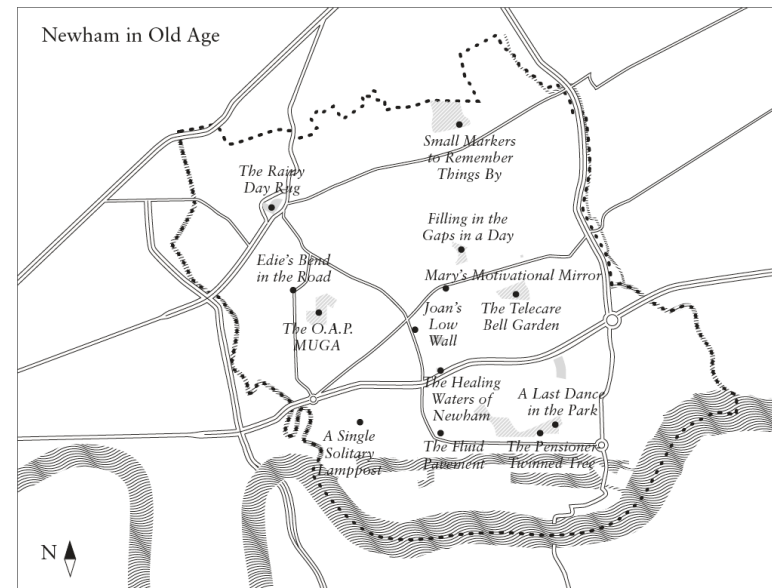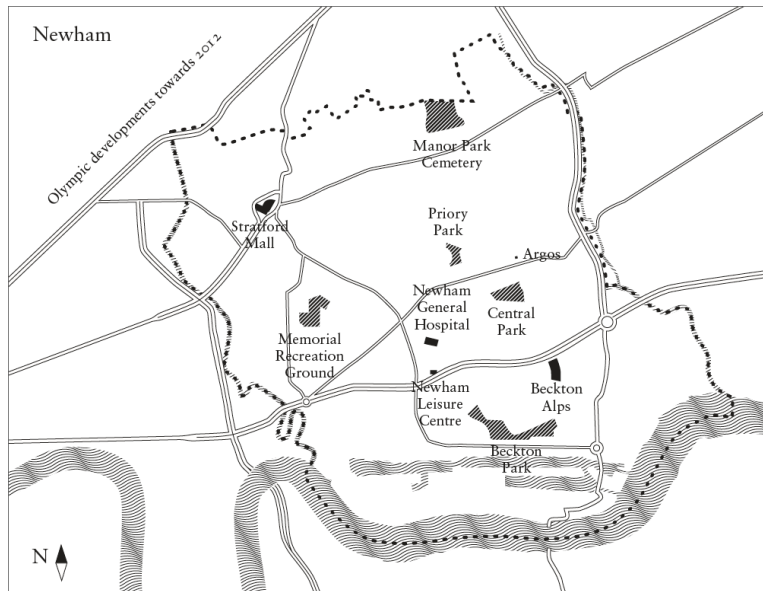
2007-2010: a series of ground-level interventions in Newham

10 Spatial Propositions

*From the Sublime to the Absurd
Testing out the Spatiality of Ageing in
Newham's Public Space**

* These propositions are the precise elaborations of
speculations that take place in the story. They are
all, technically, possible.

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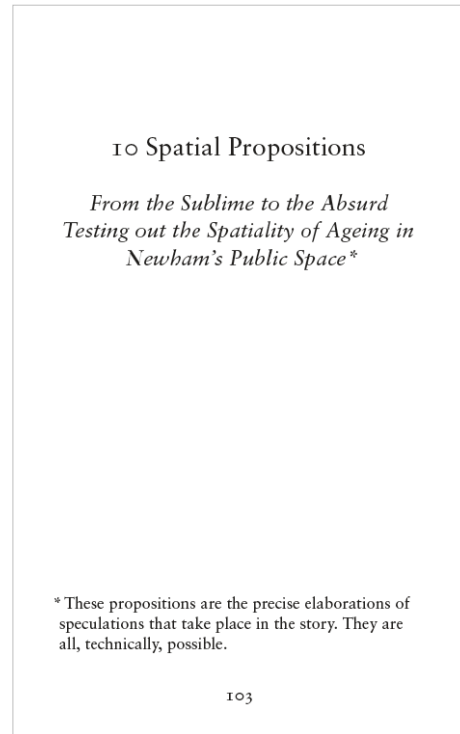
- Evolve a parallel narrative – and informal spatial practice - to mainstream programming of urban regeneration and renewal

- Imagine 'other' ways of using, reshaping, laying claim to urban space)

- Temporary interventions based on informal appropriations of 'public' space

#9

A Last Dance in the Park*

*An Illicit Tea Dance
in the Park After-Hours*

A Last Dance in the Park is a one-off, unauthorised event: a tea dance in the park after dark. The event is both a historic re-enactment of a lost tradition – dancing in the park on a Saturday afternoon – as well as an illicit flash-mob act of unsanctioned congregation in the park after closing time. With a dress-code of fluorescent-enhanced period (minimum) 1950s dress, *A Last Dance in the Park* combines irreverent misbehaviour with old-style conformity to tradition. For one night the deadening weight of preservation and tradition is provided with a bit of light relief, as historic re-enactment becomes an opportunity for pensioners to lay claim to the public realm *en masse* by night.

* developed out of pages 94 & 95

- Mapping out those hidden 'tactics' [de Certeau: 1988], everyday practices that are already played out in the urban environment.

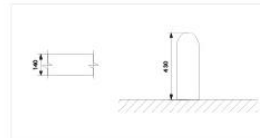**LOWER TYPE RESIDENTIAL BRICK WALL**

Function:-
Boundary wall (residential)

Informal use:-
Rest stop (on the way to the Post Office and back)

Height: 430 mm
Sittable area: 140 mm depth (max.)
Fabric: plastered brick (with paint cracked finish)

Features:-

Public property
Backrest
Available borough-wide

Last used:-
Last Monday

Location:-
139 Prince Regent Lane

Len's Low Wall

Function:-
Boundary wall (residential)

Informal use:-
Rest stop seating

Height: 630 mm
Sittable area: 215mm depth (max.)
Fabric: brick

Features:-

Public property	
Backrest	
Available borough-wide	

Last used:-
Not recalled

Location:-
Hermit Road (past the Rawalpindy before the Salisbury pub)

Sybil's Low Bollard
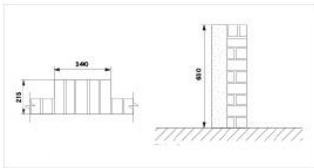
Primary Function:-
Traffic regulation (pedestrian/vehicular)

Secondary use:-
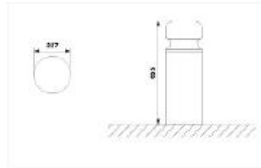Additional seating (while waiting for buses # 473, # 300 and # 147)

Height: 935 mm
Sittable area: 227 mm depth (max.)
Fabric: cast iron cap with gloss enamel finish

Features:-

Public property	X
Backrest	
Available borough-wide	X

Last used:-
5 days ago

Location:-
Bennett Road bus stop, Prince Regent Lane

- Devising new ways to appropriate, to make use of urban space in ordinary, everyday ways.

- Expanding the kinds of urban spaces that might be owned in some way 'in-between', interstitial, other 'spaces of uncertainty' [Cupers & Miessen: 2002].

- Developing a critique of urban space through those questions that interventions like these start to raise:

  Challenging conventional 'age-appropriate' relationships to urban space.

  Questioning the times of day that we might expect to be outdoors?

  Reflecting on what our 'rights to the city' [Harvey: 2008] might mean in older age?

Creative licence embedded within a spatial practice of small-scale interventions that can challenge conventional *uses* and '*readings*' of urban space.

'space for experimentation'

*[M. Shalke: 2007]

Role of an alternative architectural practice - within an Age-friendly city - not only to provide solutions but to also provoke and critique?