Belfast, like most cities, has large areas of derelict or abandoned land. Left not just in the wake of post-industrial societies, or by the ruthless infrastructure implications but also by the unique spatial dilemmas of the troubles: contested ground, ‘peace walls’ and the strange limbo of interface areas. Beyond this, the city’s changing identity and wave of new developments are leaving urban spaces caught in time, awaiting new futures while fossilised with the fragments of the past. Belfast is symptomatic of this rise and fall of urban cycles.

Much has been made of the transitorial beauty of urban ‘abandonment’ and many photographers and artists have engaged, portrayed and documented it. But rising property values and land. Left not just in the wake of post-industrial societies, or by the ruthless infrastructure implications but also by the unique spatial dilemmas of the troubles: contested ground, ‘peace walls’ and the strange limbo of interface areas. Beyond this, the city’s changing identity and wave of new developments are leaving urban spaces caught in time, awaiting new futures while fossilised with the fragments of the past. Belfast is symptomatic of this rise and fall of urban cycles.

Often, the ‘temporary’ is only possible on the basis of the legal act. The 60’s and 70’s squatting trend – a recycling and densification of the abandoned – is a precedent in many European cultures where this subverting of the planning laws has ultimately created richer social networks and uses. Pre-conditioned by the ‘logic’ of the real estate market, we assume it to be the only prime factor in the way our cities live or die. But this book illustrates the potential of other ways of thinking and intervening in the social, political, legal, emotional and spatial dimensions of our cities.

If we are still living amidst the ghosts of the modernist zoned city, then it is the Situationist that can best counter this Fordist nightmare. Florian Haydn reminds us “public space is constantly conditioned by the ‘logic’ of the real estate market, we assume it to be the only prime factor in the way our cities live or die. But this book illustrates the potential of other ways of thinking and intervening in the social, political, legal, emotional and spatial dimensions of our cities.

We have a history and heritage of public participation and protest. OpTrek – a mobile project office based in the large redevelopment area of Transy in the Hague – relocates a history of public participation and protest. OpTrek – a mobile project office based in the large redevelopment area of Transy in the Hague – relocates and intervene in the city. They have a mobile exhibition, discussions and multi-media events out to people living in peripheral housing estates and isolated communities.

In Berlin there is a well established culture of using abandoned buildings to transform them with new temporary uses and ‘socapscapes’. Sometimes it can be a building with a difficult past – such as the Palast der Republik. So too in the Netherlands where there is also a history of public participation and protest. OpTrek – a mobile project office based in the large redevelopment area of Transy in the Hague – relocates and intervene in the city. They have a mobile exhibition, discussions and multi-media events out to people living in peripheral housing estates and isolated communities.

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At times the ‘temporary’ is all about minimal structures: the construction of a pavilion, a moving newspaper kiosk, the use of shipping containers as temporary galleries, wrapping the columns of an underpass with a plastic membrane. No structure at all, and just ask people to plant poppies to change the colour of vacant land.

One of the largest temporary events cited is the Paris Plage. For five weeks during mid-July to mid-August the Georges Pompidou motorway in Paris is closed and replaced with a beach. 3,000 tons of sand cover the tarmac and prove what the Situationists always believed, “Sous les paves, la plage!” This is a compact and useful book that is referenced throughout with lots of web sites that explain the work, projects and ideas beyond the limits of the page. It opens our perceptions to other ways of thinking about the city.

But what of Belfast? It has no project in the book. Yet, it is it is possible, to imagine people having breakfast together along the ‘peace walls’ or pulling them down to turn them into beaches? The temporary can have a catalytic effect. Paul Clarke

Paul Clarke

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