

There are many ways of making radical action in the city. A pan-European exhibition in South London this summer provides a forum to represent them. Liz Farrelly investigates

I could think of better places to spend August than on Peckham Road, a super-fast artery connecting two of London's less glamorous inner-city suburbs. But thanks to an exhibition at the South London Gallery featuring a programme of talks (one every other day) and a refreshingly diverse bunch of thinkers and doers, the road to Peckham is set to become a place of pilgrimage.

Entitled *Non Place Urban Realm* the exhibition grew out of an annual collaboration between the gallery and Goldsmith College's MA in Fine Art Administration and Curatorship. The brief from SLG curator Donna Lynas questioned how local people may be affected by Millennium projects (the Dome is literally on Southwark's doorstep). A slew of proposals ensued and Lynas chose Spanish student Montse Romani's offering, impressed by, among other things, its three-part structure which included, among other things a forum for discussion, a reading room with literature and artworks (on walls and monitors) from pan-European practitioners.

Hailing from Barcelona, Romani witnessed the frantic build-up to the 1992 Olympics. Aware that urban planners across Europe are having to deal with the fall-out of post-industrialism, suburbanisation and car culture, which have shaped cities into what she calls "places of transit" her alternative suggestions are ways by which we "redefine". She asks the most basic questions, such as: a) do we need this? b) who is the city for, c) what makes the name of the city, of community and of progress? "What Peckham with the forum is putting a lot of difficult and different points of view together," she explains.

But what exactly is "non place"? A definition offered by participant Katherine Clarke (of MUF) seems appropriate: "non place is a space in the city which you would describe as a place where people may imagine or dream about who they are and about their relationships to each other." Nicknamed

Going on to reconsider a whole basketful of definitions may be a necessary tactic if the issue at hand is to include the excluded, so the aim of *Non Place Urban Realm* is to present a range of methodologies for posing and answering questions. By mixing and matching speakers at each event, a lively discussion is hoped for, so invitations have gone to a range of protagonists, from Mongrel (a bunch of subversive South London media artists) and Reclaim the Streets (anti-capitalist/pro-green activists with a brand of carnivalesque, do-it yourself resistance) to Gustav Metzger (the formulator of auto-destructive art, it being literally too volatile to collect and therefore commodify) and George Cochrane (the Tate Gallery's Community Liaison Officer at Bankside). Romani's inclusive approach, however, has prompted one awkward question. She recalls, "Some say, but where's the art? I say that everyone involved is an artist!"

Up for consideration are some major issues. For one, is "urban regeneration" simply a smoke-screen for gentrification and inappropriate development. Two, can "art" bridge the gap between an institution/government and a community. Three, can "artists" aid that process.

Four, do you then need any such what with new media (especially appropriation of "non-places" in activity and expression. And finally or "relevant" or should it stick to questions, but really just the tip expect any answers right here, right quote marks, I'm merely drawing which I think are tricky in the ex

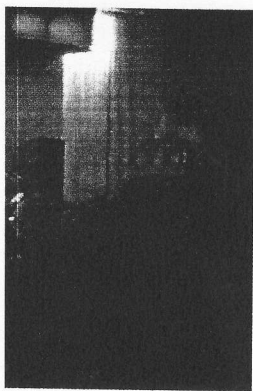
Instead, consider the disruptivity by the appearance of a prestige access roads and obligatory car portal effects of creeping gentrification rents are hiked, locals are evicted (including ethnic retailers) are luxury. Then think how you'd feel piece of "plop", sorry public art middle of such an horrendous scene. Yes way, this ain't no fiction.

Just up the road from the SLG and residencies are earmarked open up a view to the new library market is being relocated and an offered for public art intended to a night-life economy (in competition Brixton and Camberwell). Carrington had collected 5,000 artist Paula Roush and Emm (Mobile Strategies of Display) to make a video documenting the simulated discussion between video presents a discourse which antidote to the annexation of Architecture and art are made participatory but in fact truly public. We're asking, who owns the public

MSDM's video, to be screened *Urban Realm* offers one method involvement". Take a look at work or speakers and you'll find various O'Neill, an artist working in D the show which investigate how the city. O'Neill has a background admits, "I've stepped back from I'm not sure if the function of the city supports any other voice that have found that being purely a the process of negotiation is intended

Instead O'Neill has adopted anti-subjectivity: "I could look say, 'isn't it terrible', but instead that I'm an outsider, even though project he set up a camera on grocery store in a particularly The camera snapped on for the series when a stolen/joy-ridden on the scene, calling *Incident*. That level of science

# PECKHAM CALLING



Opposite page: Dublin-based artist Paul O'Neill's piece *Patrol Station: Prelude to an Incident* is a series of 88 images taken by a camera set to a timer, over a period of three months, of the area outside the grocery store on a notorious Peckham estate. Left: stills from Marcelo Expósito's video piece *October in the North: Storm from the Northwest* which juxtaposes images of 1920s Bilbao with those of the present day



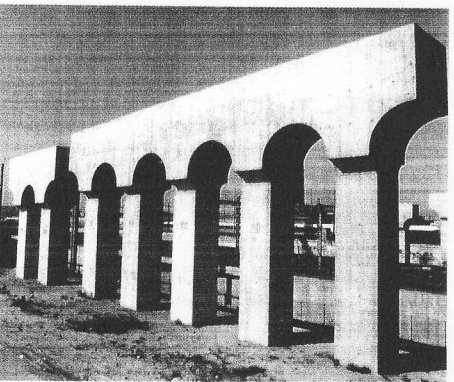
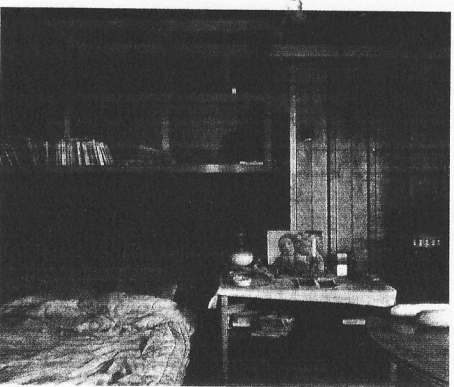
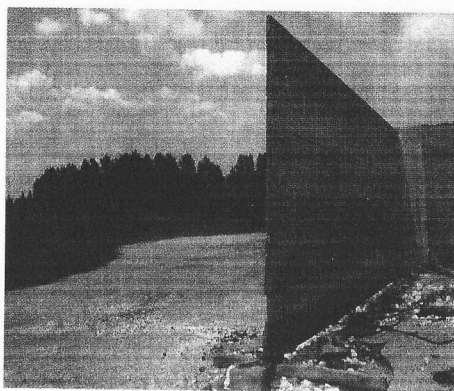
engagement invests O'Neill's work with an analytical air, but, he says, "the city is not a generic thing, the notion that any urban space has the same problems as any other is wrong." So, to that extent he admits that objectivity is tempered by circumstance. And that's an important point to make. Katherine Clarke of MUF recalls how, "We've found that funding bodies want there to be a set procedural models (for artists working with communities). But what we really need is greater dialogue between funders, users and artists."

For Mongrel Harwood, as he's known, being an "outsider" is also a prompt, but to very different ends. He's part of a collective with a core of four and up to 100 collaborators, whose aim is to reveal just how politicised and prejudiced cyberspace is, just like real space in fact. "If you don't hide the fact that you're working class in this country you get bollocks off the art world," explains Harwood, "and although interactive work may be very popular because it cuts through barriers, it's still separated out from the usual art world. Look at the Brit Art thing. Where are the computers?" Not in sight.

Mongrel's tactics include posting a search engine on the web which catches out racists (*Natural Selection*), generating software which maps popular/scary places in the city and designing an installation (*National Heritage*) which no gallery in the UK has as yet agreed to stage. Harwood puts it down to the fact that Mongrel are difficult to categorise. "We don't do nice simple things, we grow in all directions because we're experimenting, and we're all racially and culturally different. That clashes with the art world's notion of Black Art or Asian Art, and a white man talking about race seems to be really problematic." Mongrel's work may be difficult, but it's also empowering, especially when you take into account that Harwood set up Mongrel with his students at Islington's renowned Artec centre, many of whom were formally long-term unemployed.

Creating opportunities for expression in the city, be they architectural sites, designated "non-places" simply away from traffic, virtual space or a "Carnival against Capitalism", which whatever the tabloids cry, started out as a party – whatever the terminology, whatever the methodology, whatever the attitude – all Romani's examples aim to "include". And what better antidote to "alienation". So if you venture to Peckham Road this summer, remember forget orthodoxy. **B**

*Non Place Urban Realm* is at the *South London Gallery*, 65 Peckham Road, London SE5, tel 0171 703 6120 from 9 to 21 August. *Open Forum* (all at 2.30pm): 9 Aug – Who is the city for? *guest speakers*, MUF, *Anna Best*, *George Cochrane*; 11 Aug – *Architecture of control* (*Gustav Metzger*, *Jane Rendell*); 13 Aug – How far can you remember? (*Marcelo Expósito*, *Pavel Buchler*); 15 Aug – *Culture in plural* (*Mongrel*, *RichMix*); 17 Aug – *The subversive action* (or) *How to democratise the city* (*Ne Pas Plier*, *Reclaim the Streets*, *Brian Holmes*); 19 Aug – *Disneyfication?* (*MSDM*). Also see [www.mongrel.org.uk](http://www.mongrel.org.uk)



Above: photographs by Marc Pataut, founding member of *Ne Pas Plier* (*Do Not Bend*). Pataut spent two years photographing the lives of a small community of people who were evicted to make way for the new *Grande Stade de Paris*

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