

From the Ground Up:

Jo Capper & Akil Scafe-Smith, chaired by Lucy Shipp

Transcript

00:01

LUCY SHIPP: Thank you, Rosie. And thanks, everyone, for joining us this afternoon. Coming to the end of what I think has been a really enriching day. And for those of you who I haven't met yet, I'm Lucy: I'm Education Manager here at Wysing. And to do a visual description, I'm a white woman in their mid-thirties with brown hair that's currently tied up in a bun because it's very hot. So I'm really, really pleased to welcome Jo and Akil for this in-conversation here this afternoon. So we'll have a bit of an introduction from both Jo and Akil before we get into some questions and hopefully some questions from you in the audience too. So first of all, to welcome Jo: so Jo is Grand Union, based in Birmingham their Collaborative Programme Curator and Capper is an artist educator with a strong desire to heal, restore and do good in the world, creating alternative cultural and living practices that start with simple acts of growing or sharing foods, embodying the cultural-cultural specifics of human conviviality.

01:08

JO CAPPER: It's quite difficult to... Hello and thank you, Lucy, and thank you to Wysing, I've had such an amazing day. It's felt such a good energy here and I really don't want to go home. So we're just all gonna move in But anyhow, I guess— I'm gonna try and keep to 10 minutes because like this is really hard for me to do. So

I'm just going to read if that's okay, because Lucy went "20 slides?!". I was like, "Yeah, I'm going to go through quick." So I guess like the work that I do is like really important in the sense that it sort of is trying to develop genuine connections with local and existing communities and organisations I work together with people to build knowledges a sense of understanding, and collectively care how to create fairer, more inclusive communities.

Collaboratively, I create situations, activisms and conversations and other forms of community development that collectively thinks about the social and environmental crisis that we're currently experiencing, and it's like colliding together at sort of quite a detrimental effect. So I'm thinking about art as an active and a critical platform rather than an ameliorative, passive service, and I think that's quite critical. So I'm interested in developing projects that are dialogical in nature that respond to agonistic situations or situations where social justice and strengthening human relationships would be really of benefit. I'm thinking about how art can reveal the ongoing, unpredictable, and multiple dialectics between power and resistance and sort of— I guess that's the context from which I'm working. Could I have slide two please? So this is an image of Grand Union. It's situated on the canals in Digbeth, in Birmingham, Grand Union's an artist's gallery and studio, and it was founded in 2010, so it's been running 10, 12 years now in 2018, I joined Grand Union as a Collaborative Programme Curator, having spent 18 years teaching higher education and leaving like the institution feeling a little bit broken and sort of really passionate educator, felt that art had a really important job to do in the world, but felt that the institution wasn't supporting that, then found the amazing space of Grand Union, where I was welcomed in to really think about how I could

sort of work with communities and really think about the context of regeneration and sort of the wider connection with publics. Could I have slide three please? So starting with research, like I really believe context is not— is everything, sorry, I really wanted to think about the fabric and texture of the post industrial site of Digbeth. And then also like, I guess I was really thinking about the wider city issues of homelessness and people experiencing vulnerabilities, people whose needs really haven't been met by current society and really thinking about the crisis around housing and the connection between all of those issues around food, poverty, economic deprivation and really thinking about how the social and cultural capital that the arts has could do something about that. And I think like particularly this image of Digbeth was taken not so long ago, like a couple of weeks, the sea of regen— looming regeneration is like it's really critical and it's causing sort of all the problematics that probably London has sort of still not overcome really and like many, many cities in this country. So I really wanted to ask the question, was it possible to work towards collective transformational justice and really to centre care and understanding at the heart of that and really thinking about how I could create platforms and how the organisation of Grand Union could create platforms for those that most need it. Could I have slide four, please. So in 2019, I piloted a project called The Growing Project. I guess it is what it says. But with— Working with the sort of like fundamentals really of care, understanding, simplicity, humility and integrity, and I really was thinking about how I could enable journeys of connection between people, land and plants, and really thinking about how we could follow the journey of taking seeds to soil to plate. And this image here is actually the first garden that we developed together, and it was developed in a city centre hostel. The hostel houses like 33 people who

are experiencing a period of homelessness. And I guess that sort of at that point I had no funding I had a bag of seeds, and a lot of motivation to see if I could really try and improve a situation in terms of the social experiences of people in vulnerability and actually sort of change the space that that sort of they lived in. Could we go to slide five and I've got a minute short trailer

07:15

[Upbeat, reflective music] [Speaker in video] You got peas, potatoes, chilies, the lot growing around vegetables. It's given me a different perspective. The key thing about the Growing Project has been making a way to connect with our neighbors. This is a real garden. It's got me out the house and I've really enjoyed getting myself involved. I was really taken aback with visible effects of homelessness in the city and felt the gallery could use its cultural capital to support its local communities the garden offers many different ways for people to tell their story and have their story heard. We recognize the part we need to play in delivering a sustainable, thriving city It's the ability to create community and friendships where they wouldn't have existed before. It helped loads, and helped a lot of other people here as well.

08:17

The reason why it's important to show that film that it's not about me talking, it really is a community led project. And the— all the different actors and positions are really important but I guess as a group of people we're sort of building resistance and sort of creating potential for healing through sort of nurturing

plants, and through that the self gets nurtured and then the community gets nurtured. So now we have created gardens in five hostels across the city. We have two gardens on the canal side and we are soon to have one garden on the actual canal, a floating garden. So if we could go to slide six. So I guess the important thing for us is to start to think about futures. And I think it's been interesting that we started like with the presentation this morning, thinking what the future is Wysing's thinking about the future we're at a pivotal point in the world right now. And I guess for the people that we're working with that, that's— we're really thinking about how we can build resilience through transformational change. And here are some of the ways that we're doing it. So if we can just click through slides 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 So we're collaborating with artists who— like Modern Clay, and we're thinking about how we can basically start to sort of develop a sustainable income. And so we're creating a business that's going to make herbs in pots, but they're going to be bespoke, designed. Can we go to Slide 12 to 17? We're also working— we've created a garden with a group of women and we're thinking about how we can develop an apothecary sort of style garden and we're making— blending teas. And so we're creating a new business with teas. And then — can we go to slide 18? So we're also working with— on a longer term project with the artist collective Cooking Sections to think about how— what arts organisations' role is in the regeneration of post- industrial sites or cities. And we created a project called Field Commissions, and this is the site. So we adopted a piece of land from the Canal and River Trust and so the first iteration of this, when we first tested the soil was that we found out that it was highly toxic in lead, and that's like sort of endemic of probably all canal-side land. So the first iteration of this project is we're working with the artist Asad Raza look at how we can

remediate— clean the soil. And the the work is called ‘Reabsorbtion’. So if we can just move to the next slide, which is— and the way that this is working is essentially we're making a large city size compost and we're taking waste from across the city and sort of turning it into new soil and what we've found out so far is that you really can't sort of deal with toxicity well enough. And the only way is to actually sort of cover it or think about reabsorbing. And even though we want to think about sort of removing toxicity, that actually, as the world needs to work out how we're going to live with toxicity. So I guess reabsorption is engaging with the soil as a living ecosystem, thinking about the economic and cultural inheritance of Digbeth that there are toxic particles that's left by industrial sort of empire building, and it's offering new ways to think about urban regeneration. If we can go to the next slide. And the way that we're starting to do that is builds new communities. And this is a community of cultivators that meet each week and they come from many different sets of knowledge across the city. To really think about— to address questions of land ownership, consumption, and also like, quite practically, clean and sort of help to sort of tend that piece of land. That's my 10 minutes, I think.

13:13

LUCY: Fantastic. Thank you, Jo. That was really insightful to hear about some of the background process. with us we've also got Akil Scafe-Smith, and so Akil is co-founder and member of RESOLVE Collective, an interdisciplinary design collective that combines architecture, engineering, technology and art to address social challenges. Much of their work aims to provide platforms for celebrating local

knowledge as well as organising and collaborating in communities. So I'll invite Akil to share a bit more.

13:45

AKIL SCAFE-SMITH: I'm going to turn and look at the screen here

13:47

JO: It's really hard

13:49

AKIL: like that, I guess, and I'll point to change the slide at the beginning because they go quite fast. So my name's Akil Scafe-Smith, and like Lucy said, I run a collective called RESOLVE. We're an interdisciplinary design collective that works between art, architecture, engineering, technology to address social issues. And a lot of the work that we do revolves around the use of a design philosophy that we call "using the site as a resource". For us, using the site as a resource involves the appraisal and revaluing of not only local materials but also local tacit knowledges. So working with people in those local places is a really important part of that work. A lot of that started with working with young people in our own local area. I'm from a place called Streatham in South London, so working within that world of South London was really part and parcel of our first ambitions, working in our own local area to benefit those places and to do something in that local area was really the universe that we were existing in. But prior to that— after that, we kind

of received a number of different opportunities to expand and to grow and to find other locals to work with other different types of demographics, including much, much younger demographics, but also much older and kind of across the board, working across the UK and Europe. And that really landed us where we are today in terms of working in a number of different local places and focused on this way of working locally. So whether that's working in art institutions to create spaces for different artist practices and networks of maintenance and care, whether that's to work in within strategic realms or working on architectural projects or within kind of landscapes and strategies, whether that's working in more formal institutional places as the kind of artists and researchers working in the public realm as well, which is something that's also become part of that lesson and working digitally, which I think during the pandemic we had to force ourselves to become much more digitally literate. We were far more kind of comfortable working with drills and hammers than we are working with code but that's something that we kind of forced ourselves to do. As did many other practitioners. And so the work takes an array of different forms and also digital forms as well. But very largely it's comprised around a process-led approach where the process leads us towards wherever we're going. It's a really, really important part, and that was talked about a lot today in some of the workshops and the talks. that I was on as well, and I kind of feel a real resonance with that process-led approach. So today I want to talk about one project in particular, and unfortunately there was one project which was almost more topical, which I started with Rosie, but that project was still ongoing and what I didn't want to do is kind of ramble to you guys in my 10 minutes. I wanted to say something about something that has sedimented, and so I've chosen this topic and this is a project

which we commenced with the London Borough of Greenwich as a part of a Heritage Action Zone fund, which is part of a nationwide fund which looks around the reappraisal, particularly of architectural heritage around town centers. And this was a project called Reclaim the River, and why I think it's important to the context of today, although it's not in the Fens, and it's not a rural project, it's a project around our inherent relationship with water and how we're talking about water and land. We're talking about a symbiotic relationship, no matter how urban or rural that land is. And in this particular context, in Woolwich, and this is where Woolwich is, over here for anyone who doesn't know very, very deep East London, super deep East London Woolwich is a place that is in— its history, is intrinsically tied to the river, through a millennia of different kind of approaches with the river as well, but also with a imperial history of the United Kingdom. And so Woolwich dockyard is where Woolwich the town that we know today really has its antecedents, and it was one of the kind of primary sources of the Navy in Britain and the Woolwich Arsenal, for anyone who's into football, is why Arsenal are called the Arsenal, because they started in Woolwich and so it's— above being toponymic, It's also a really important factor in the kind of lived histories and experiences of Woolwich as well. And what's really important about this imperial history and this history that is really closely tied to war and colonialism and military expansion is that Woolwich was on the receiving end of these types of things in terms of how people were employed in that area. And actually during the Victorian period Woolwich was seen as a very kind of DIY town where lots of people were making goods based off the kind of parallel economies that were growing off of the military complex and actually there was a saying, which in the archives is often paraphrased in Woolwich which is that peacetimes were bad

times in Woolwich and that kind of really explicitly links the economy of Woolwich to this kind of worldwide military expansion. and then the next— point [laughs] however, in relationship to its kind of architecture, but also more rigid historical heritage, Woolwich also has a amazingly lived heritage— amazingly diverse lived heritage It is a place in which many, many ethnicities coexist and have made their own. And it's one of those places in London which is now kind of gained an epithet of being from somewhere else. So people call Peckham in London, Little Nigeria, people call Woolwich Littler Nigeria It's very— it is an incredibly diverse place so you have a huge Nepalese community in there, lots of Eastern European communities there, etc.. And so that really informs the lived experience lived heritage of Woolwich as well, where we sat, and I think this is a video so you can click it and and play but if it doesn't play then that's also fine. Where we sat was to think about how we can facilitate artists within Woolwich, primarily first time designers, so members of the community who had never designed or made public work before and to facilitate a number of these artists in coming— these artists-to-be intervening in sites across the city— across the town, sorry, in order to celebrate and emphasise not only the connection with the Thames, the past connection with the Thames, which has been severed through development and through a number of different kind of infrastructural ways of severing that connection and also to celebrate the lived history of Woolwich So asking them to respond to a number of briefs, which we set across the town centre, which responded to these ideas, both of lived heritage and of a path connecting to the river. What we ended up then doing was creating a website and this website became the platform for an infrastructure to then facilitating a competition whereby people would enter the different sites, then choosing those

different sites would respond and we would then go through a process of facilitating those endeavors. Five artists were chosen by a panel of local community groups and then facilitated through also working very closely with local mentors as well. And then we work to this utmost infrastructure whereby we were helping in the kind of fabrication and also by intervening in the different local sites. And I think you can play this video here, which is fine. What was really amazing for us was having previously been the types of artists which are delivering the work themselves, what we began doing was aiding in the facilitation of the work, and that meant that our role became intrinsically tied to access to land in Woolwich a lot of the sites that the people had chosen were sites within alleyways. And I'll explain a bit more on the next slides, but with sites with an alleyway in Woolwich. And there's always a vestige of an old urban morphology by which the river was inherently the place to be. They're almost like lanes. And vital as you can imagine, they're much, much smaller. And these were alleyways which have recently taken on a kind of completely different type of collective imagination of people as largely associated with violence, with violence against women, with drug taking, etc., but that most of the artists chose to be in these. or chose to intervene in these alleys, really reveals the wider collective psychogeography in terms of people in Woolwich thinking about these places primarily and really kind of concentrating emotional energy on these places. And so to a number to go through the five, I think there are five, to go through the five artists that we're working with within Murray's Yard, which is another one of these alleys, on to the left is a 14 year old school child called Jesse Oshogwe from Bexley Grammar who worked with a local artist called JP to make a mural, looking at the Thames, thinking about the Thames as an African goddess, specifically tying

into a Nigerian tradition by which the Goddess Oshun is kind of tied to this idea of water. And he came to the country when he was nine. And so he really infused with this idea that the Thames was watching over him and he was really—greeted by the conviviality of Woolwich. And saw that as a kind of guiding force within there. And so here, these pictures also point towards the Thames as well. And so the orientation of a lot of these works also kind of showcases or at least reveals very slowly the Thames, which is very close by, quite proximate but indiscernible. To the right is also another one by Danielle, who is another Woolwich local and she was really interested in how we can highlight and kind of celebrate these passageways as integral parts of how we navigate the urban environment through the use of cookies. She was really obsessed with cookies. This is a work by two teachers who were working in Woolwich called Luke Murray and Piotr Smiechowicz and this work is a really amazing one because this alley, Morgan Alley is a very, very Victorian type alley. There's almost— also those really strange kind of Sherlock Holmes lamps that are hanging around as well. It's quite a vestige of old times, but it's 100 meters, maybe 150 meters away from the Thames. But there's nothing to suggest that that is. It is also situated within a car washing site, which is actually one of the most pedestrianised access to the Thames. But you have to walk through the building in order to get there. The building is quite porous in that way. So it's a really complex site in terms of how it's navigated and they wanted to reveal that proximity of the Thames. And sorry and lastly, to describe that site, there was also a mountain of tyres that people in the local area would call Tyre Mountain that were existing on the site in order to reveal and highlight and celebrate the proximity of the river they took and rearranged these tires, turning them into mini planters and then painting on these

nautical signs as a way of kind of harking back to this old connection with the Thames. So often— For me, that's one of the beauties of this type of piece was in that it was really taking from the site and really taking both aesthetically and conceptually from that site, but highlighting and showcasing this real proximity of the river with the shape shifting and land making force in Woolwich. The next piece was perhaps one of the most contentious and the first, but not the only time that I had to clean up human excrement and this was in an alley called Myrtle Alley, which is quite an ominous name, Myrtle Alex by Sarah Garrod who was a fantastic artist who used boxes from the market and cyanotype prints to really illuminate photographs that she had taken of women across Woolwich. And to place those photos, those highlighted photos in the alley and they were backlit as well. So in the night they would really shine very, very bright in terms of in the very dark alley. What was, I think, the most prominent about this particular piece and this particular site was that even whilst we were installing the site, so the installation took between five— four and five days, the number of people, namely women who were traversing Myrtle Alley, was almost breathtaking. It really was this place that in the public imaginary is a Terra Nullius is a place which is kind of untraversable, in a place which is uninhabited. But the real life experience of this really reads very, very differently. And though there are certainly cases in which we— it has been revealed the type of the various types of violences in the in the alley, And that's not to discredit or to try and disprove anything at all, but rather to reveal that all these places within this contested space are— stand in contradiction to one another. We have a place which is simultaneously violent, but also traversable a place which is proximate to the river, but bereft of any impetus from it or input from it, sorry. And then the very— one of the very last

cases: Evie Athanasi within the same alley and using stencils of local people from Woolwich to do a very similar thing I'll hurry up through the slides as I think there's one more And the very last one, which is by Kharis Wong who was an amazing— she used to be a tunnel engineer and she then wanted to become a, an artist. And this was her first pertinent way into the into the art world, into the creative world. And she had a piece which was installed within the Woolwich Foot Tunnel and the Woolwich Foot Tunnel is one of two pedestrian tunnels that goes underneath the Thames. And it's also a listed building. And so it means it's very difficult to do anything in there. And one of the primary parts of our role in this was also soaking up some of the health and safety regulations in terms of attaching anything into the Thames. And she took water from the Thames and put those into recycled bottles that she had salvaged from a bottle recycling factory in Plumstead down the road and hung that in a wave across the roof of the Woolwich Foot Tunnel. And this was a really, really beautiful piece. I think this piece really stood out in terms of how it drew that connection between the Thames. And she was really interested in how we bring the Thames into that architectural history, into the architectural heritage in a very pointed way. But it also revealed as much as it highlighted being in the in the Foot Tunnel and installing that piece again showcased the amount of use, the really wide variety of use of this foot tunnel. If you can imagine this foot tunnel as being a very kind of dark and dingy and murky place. And again, this type of place, which doesn't seem like it's habited, but really seeing a plethora and a real variety of people who were using this foot tunnel, who were partying in this foot tunnel, who were being convivial, being joyous in this foot tunnel, and kind of being celebrated by this piece of the Thames, which hung above them, but also surrounded them as

they traverse that Thames; a kind of very beautiful and impressive piece and then the last slide I think is just a slide of us having fun in Woolwich So the— to round off really I think one of the the real learnings of this piece for us and this set in motion a wider number of different strategic policy... projects from the— for the Local Council and also for the Heritage Action Group as well. One of the profound pieces of learnings for us was how we can start to move in very, very small ways in order to try and provoke infrastructural change. I think what was important to us was not that we achieved a reclamation of the river and actually there's a facetiousness in that title, which only lends itself to say that the river and the land were these two things which are sym— symbiotic even within urban environments, and rather than in order to kind of ultimately reclaim the river, what we're trying to do is to reclaim as an active process and an unfinished process. And this is where it starts, but certainly not where it finishes. It starts with people, it starts with people in their local environments and where it ends we don't know. So I think, I hope that wasn't too long

29:39

LUCY: Thank you. Akil. That was so insightful to hear all those different avenues to your work. And when we were chatting before, what really came across to me in both of your practices is really that focus on process that we touched on earlier, but also this idea— ideas around care and Jo in some of your projects, and Akil I know you do too, provide food, nourishment, conversation and real sense of community. I wondered what you would say to somebody who thought— who asked the question of why should it be artists or arts organisations who do this

work? Rather than the role of social care or government organisations? Jo I wonder if you have... [laughs]

30:18

JO: I'm sure we could both talk about that. But yeah, I mean, I sort of think that there's... Arts organisations... Art is powerful in the sense that it can talk about many different things in many different ways. I think it also can sort of use symbolism and use lots of different tactics. And so I think that that's why like potentially, you know, in terms of how we think about care probably, like sort of can care in a different way that that sort of can bring people into a space. But I came across the term promiscuous care the other day and I've sort of like been thinking about it a lot in terms of what that actually means. It's exciting, isn't it? I guess like promiscuous, sort of like feels like sort of something that's wrong. And so like to put that together with care— I think that if we we sort of as a society, when we've sort of forgotten how to care, we've forgotten how to have empathy. And I guess that's sort of the capitalist like effect in terms of the value has moved away from like sort of human relationships. And I think that that sort of I guess, yeah, art has that power to sort of like care in many different ways. And I think that that sort of, yeah, we need to reassess what that can be. But like, yeah, you should say something, too.

31:55

AKIL: Yeah, I mean I completely agree. I think, you know, when we were talking earlier, Lucy, we were kind of ranting around like the role of this this mobile or

this kind of like really tactile third party within the state versus the non state dichotomy in terms of the delivery of social benefit, etc.. And I think it's really about this idea of the plenum that everything exists within that way. And as we work and not all artists do this but lots of artists find themselves in some ways complicit to— to state and institution action. We're all kind of somehow guilty or complicit in terms of thing as well, as well as the co-option of the private market as well. So all that to say is that we need to— I think it's not about trying to work to to deliver social value really the ambit is to work in ways that disrupt the status quo. So whether that's about delivery of social value, whether that's about being complicit with something else, whether that's being internal in state mechanisms that— the capacity to be disruptive, I think is kind of key. And that's integral to all of the work so someone that tried, and in the end whether it succeeds or fail, it's about that kind of strive to be that, I think

33:15

LUCY: I think I think that's such an exciting perspective to look at it. And the other kind of thread actually that came through in both the conversations was around this idea of reciprocity, again, kind of feeding into that idea of process, I think, and how we work together both as artists, arts organisations, but with communities and people. And Jo, you gave the example of starting a conversation without— or a project, without any funding and just showing up with a packet of seeds. And I know that, Akil, you've also done some more sort of in-kind work or just being kind of ingrained as part of your community to keep those conversations going. And I also wondered about your reflections on how that sort of different way of

working and that sense of reciprocity might be able to shape longer term ways of working?

34:01

JO: I feel like...

34:02

LUCY: Big questions...

34:03

JO: We might be doing ourselves out of like future funding. I mean, I think we need to be careful? That that like we, we sort of do need to value and like if we just need to sort of rethink value and, and sort of and I think as a society, like we need to sort of think about how we can resource and reuse, you know, it's like they're sort of important ways of thinking and I guess that that sort of without a doubt like we— to do the work well, to do community organisation, to care for people that we need to reascribe more value to those those sort of— that work. And, sort of, I think that activism and also community work is often done and care work is often done unpaid. And I sort of think I give the example of it, but I also sort of know that actually we need to rethink the values. So that's like sort of not just taking away all the money, but we need to sort of like create a status for it.

35:18

AKIL: Yeah, I mean, I think that the conversations around reciprocity meals are interesting in their antecedents and like to have been discussed I think today in across the different talks in the workshops is that there are old norms and there are old forms in which the idea of reciprocity, both with our built and unbuilt environment have been more resonant, have been more the forefront of how we kind of move our modus operandi and actually salvaging to go back to what Jo's saying about reusing is also about reusing these old forms I'm kind of increasingly taken by this idea that there isn't anything new, ever, there's never been anything new and there actually has never been anything but one thing one thing in which we all are some facet of. And so in that respect, it's almost freeing from the idea of novelty and innovation. I think those are driving forces of the— The types of systems that you often get bogged down by, which you often feel to quote Khairani in the last session disabled by. And I think the, really what we're— when we talk about reciprocity it's talking about not reinventing a different relationship with our environment, but it's talking about harking back and cherry picking and reconfiguring old relationships. I think the answers are in front of us and I teach as well, I teach architecture. And I always say to my students, the answer's very simple. Everyone knows the answer. The answer is if the problem's bad then the answer is good but it's about getting to that answer. And that's very, very difficult. Getting to the answer is very difficult. It's really easy to say something. And you can say in the utopia we have this, this, that and that. But in terms of how we get to the answer, the focus rather than on the infinite, but rather on the infinitesimal, I think is actually where that comes in. And so reciprocity is really key to that. And I'm learning a lot from being at Wysing in terms of reciprocity

with our environment right now and those learnings I hope to kind of take back to South London, etc. Yeah.

37:19

LUCY: That's really exciting to hear because the final question I was going to ask you both, it's a bit of a cheeky question of thinking about what should arts organisations and especially Wysing do within the context of that that we have or this land, opportunity, sharing opportunities between kind of urban and rural landscapes and community work? What, sort of— do you have ideas what we should do with this opportunity?

37:43

[laughter]

37:45

AKIL: We were both on Rosie's tour as well.

37:48

JO: Yeah, my answer to Rosie was do nothing. Like, that feels like the most radical act to do nothing. But it's not as in, like, unmotivated. But I think in sort of just thinking about what you'd said about like, you know, if we think about, you know, the world of energy and like quantum physics and, you know, on a cellular level we're sort of like all exchanging and sort of reciprocal actions all the time and I

sort of think that is enabling us. And it's a bit like thinking about sort of crip time and, sort of going into that meditative like— So I feel like the world needs to move to sort of different forms of consciousness in order to sort of like solve the issues and like, I think actually that's being able to sort of shift from a cellular sort of energy level reading the room like just feeling the energy and the good vibrations from today. And that's not me being a hippie or being like trying to sing a song, it's the real thing that happens when you enter into a space and like, you know, during the day the accumulation of like, the conversations and, you know, it's good. And so sometimes it's like stepping back, like sort of just feeling and like sort of allowing that to happen. And I think in terms of social and environmental justice and sort of community organization and sort of activisms, I think we need to be a bit more peaceful and a bit more mindful and meditative so, like, my answer is do nothing

39:33

LUCY: It reminds me, we had just pre-pandemic a billboard installation by Helen Cammock asking the question “When was the last time that you just did nothing?” And maybe there is a sense of restoration to that Akil, any final thoughts?

39:48

AKIL: Yeah, and this is definitely not to go against this idea of doing nothing. Certainly I think there was being on the walk with Rosie earlier today, there were like so many really amazing ideas about things that can be done on some of the

pieces— kind of fallow piece of land and across the three Sainsbury's that Wysing owns you have what was described as three big Sainsbury's-worth of land. And for me it's about the sanctity and being able to be generative in terms of those ideas that needs to be met with a type of, I hesitate to say the word, but a type of practicality. And I think a lot of that practicality will come from going outside of the boundary. In architecture when we do when we're working on big architectural projects, what we often talk about, especially in initial planning meetings, we'll be talking about seeing beyond the red line. And that means going beyond the sites that we've been designated. The site which is owned by whoever it is that is kind of going— it might political authority, it might be whoever, because your site only exists within a mélange of other things and is affected by that. That red line, which you can see in your architectural drawing is a confabulated one we've made it up and actually land ownership follows those same principles. It's also something which we just collectively agree on rather than something which is inherent to that. And so both in a conceptual way, but also in a practical way, it's kind of around planning around and beyond that red line, if there are certain things that we feel are immediately actionable on that land. Say, for example, someone talked about the nitrogen thing, I hope, I don't want to misquote... the nitrogen thing, it sounded really cool, but it's like really scoping out what are the immediate inhibitors of that type of idea. Do we know that there are precedents of ideas like that that which Cambridgeshire Council have turned down before? And if so, why? Are there ways that we can ensure that idea and kind of going through? Do we know that— if the idea has to go to planning, if it's inevitable that in order for that idea to last longer than 28 days, it has to go through planning? How do we win the planning battle? Well, like all

these types of things, I think— I come from a community. We were— we've been so disenfranchised by local politics and government politics that many of us don't engage and we kind of really run away from that type of thing. But I think that there is an actionability about local politics it's obscured, it's capitalised, manipulated by the powers that be, etc. But it is actionable. We can do it. Local residents do it all the time. So, I think actually I think there's something machiavellian about it. But I do think that it's by engaging in those things whilst also a capacity to see the much bigger picture of rest and see the much bigger picture of all those types of things as well.

42:34

LUCY: Almost like being a mole on the inside almost to make that change. Fantastic. I've got so many more questions I could ask, but I'm now going to open up. Just I think we've got time for a couple of questions from anyone in the audience? It's the end of a long day... We'll just wait for the microphone.

42:59

QUESTION ASKER: Thank you, James. Yeah, fascinating and disturbing all at the same time I'm interested— I'm very sensitive because of my long years of campaigning about the corporate world and the way it's encroached on every level of politics and that that encroaches on us. So I'm noticing the language we all used and we have done for a long time. By the way, you've reminded me right about 2015, 16, 17, every government document report that came out when they wanted change in the NHS started with “doing nothing is not an option.” That was

the first bullet point on every bloody report. So you've reminded me of that. So actually being radical might be absolutely, let's do nothing for a while and just see how we feel by the fact that we use social capital. Is there another word we could use? Because that is another example of a corporate word, it's a business speak. But is there another word that would have the same value that we might get away from corporate mindset?

44:13

JO: [sighing and exhaling] Uh... [laughing] Like, yeah, I mean, yeah, it's problematic, isn't it? It's sort of... but I guess it's like sort of linguistics is, like sort of we have to sort of like create that change and I sort of hope in the future social and cultural capital as words and terms don't exist. But I guess it's, it's, it's about reciprocity, it's about exchange. It's sort of recognising what you have and what you can share. And I think that like, yeah, we could I'm going to like maybe take it away for you for the future like so it doesn't need to be there because yeah I agree. But it's a recognisable form. I don't know, what do you think?

45:02

AKIL: I agree. [laughs] Yeah I think I agree. I think... yeah linguistics is a difficult territory because I think I work in lots of communities where have they ever heard the word social capital? There are lots of them who would feel inspired by that. This idea that what you have in terms of your social connection is inherently valuable, be it in a capitalistic way or any other way. And so like the words become territorised by the orator. And so I think like it's very we have to be very

careful sometimes about being universal in how we both rescind and also propagate words, I think words have that kind of local thing to them as well. So whilst I agree and I... I don't personally use the word myself, I've certainly been in situations where people would like the word and I find it very— I find myself within that contradiction of in very specific cases. I might talk about that in terms of describing how people relate to their communities, but it's not something that I use in a very widespread way. So it's a tricky one, yeah.

46:07

LUCY: Thank you and I think we might just have one one last question at the front and then we can obviously continue this conversation over drinks and snacks, which will be happening after this question.

46:19

QUESTION ASKER: Ok, So, um, thank you both. Yes, I do know both of you. Um. But I was just thinking about this. When we're coming to these things when your good selves are coming to these things, of the project that you've presented here today, which of the participants could be here instead of either of you? Because, you know, we're talking, in other words, people might not like about empowerment. So if you said, right, okay, you know what, Wysing, I'm sending people instead of coming.

46:56

JO: I can... That is amazing

46:58

LUCY: Great question

46:59

JO: I mean, interestingly, I wrote like my 10 minutes, like I was just going to tell you three stories about three people that I work with. And then sort of like, I guess like thinking, oh, what's the audience like? You know, actually, like, so this is about Wysing and thinking about like, you know, what it could do as an arts centre. But I completely agree with you and I guess that's why I wanted to show the minute trailer of the film, because, you know, it's about all of the people that I work with. And I couldn't say— you know we all play a part in that, You know, it could be the landowner, it could be the the council it could be the person that writes the housing policy. It could be, you know, the participant. It it's all of them. And I think every single one of them would present like their position. And I guess me, you know what I can be used as is a tool to sort of like try and bring that together in the same way that I'm caring for that project. So, yeah, I think people need to be centred, but equally like sometimes, like we need to recognise, I think the complexity of what we do means like even just to talk about it in 10 minutes I felt really stressed trying to do that. And then I'm sitting here thinking, there's lots of other bits of that project.

48:26

AKIL: Yeah, I completely agree. And I think it's a fantastic question and I— there's lots of projects that we've worked on where the people on that project, who certainly could take my place in terms of talking about it. And we have the fortune sometimes of revisiting those people and maintaining longer term relationships with those people. And that's definitely the case in this particular project, because what we were doing wasn't about empowering obviously which is a contentious word blah blah blah we were... We were actively trying to disempower the local government. And I don't mean that necessarily in an antagonistic way, but it meant that there was both from our side and the client side, an array of different mechanisms and policies and lots of other things that were actively preventing people from being able to do things in their local environments, we were a type of mediating force that meant that that could happen and a lot of that meant writing reams and reams of risk assessments two risk assessments a day, different chains of risk assessments, risk assessments... Continuing to do that all the time. Some of that meant liaising with landowners and not telling the entire truth all the time, yeah. Stuff, things like this, stuff that the art— I don't think lots of artists should have to do themselves. And if they find themselves in a position where that is an impedance they deserve and require and the help of a helping hand in order to do that. And so I think that's where I think our role was. And so we were trying to— and that's the role that's intrinsically tied up with the politics of ownership and land and the evolution of Woolwich as a place in the area, so we were trying to I guess no one can really talk about that bar us. However, the hope is that one day people can be that and... Not that people can be that, that people who have the capacity to be that do, are. Because when we were working initially in Brixton and

in South and a lot of these places, we were the vanguards, the people who could do it, didn't do it And that's a deeper conversation which is very difficult to have. When we were coming up, the people who could do it for us, they didn't do it and they continued not to do it for quite a long time. So we turned around and said we're at a point at which we have the resources to try and do something like this. Let's try and do it.

50:41

JO: And just one final point, I guess that as, us as an audience, maybe we need to step outside that red line. And it's not about the people coming here to tell the stories. It's about us going out and hearing the stories out there.

50:57

QA: Thank you, yeah, that's a conversation to pick up [laughter] like what you're saying about people's ideas because I'm just going to use another word be mindful of extraction, not with what you're doing. So yeah

51:14

LUCY: Yeah, that's such another topic that's come up today as well I think that...

51:17

[indiscernible from question asker]

51:20

LUCY: Hopefully we can all hold those things in our heads and take them to where Rosie is. There's going to be snacks, drinks, conversation so please do take time if you— if there's someone you haven't spoken to today, do make the time to do that and we can build on these conversations. And today doesn't have to end here. We can keep these conversations going with each other. So thank you, Jo, and thank you, Akil. Thanks all for coming.

51:44

JO: Thank you.

51:47

[applause]