

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to acknowledge a huge debt of gratitude to all those who have given their time, ideas and experiences so freely during the preparation of this book. We are particularly grateful for their enthusiastic response and encouragement at a time when the book was more aspiration than reality.

Our particular thanks go to Pat Brown of Central, who generously offered to read the final draft and provided invaluable insights on the structure and coherence of the arguments at a time when our closeness to the trees was obscuring the view of the woods. Clive Williams too, one of the greatest unpublished writers of our acquaintance, contributed some of the more eloquent turns of phrase. Liz Fidlon was enormously helpful in turning the original idea into a proposal. Special thanks go to professional architectural photographer John Sturrock, who was extremely generous in allowing us to use so many of his images. We are particularly grateful to Urban Catalyst in Berlin, whose groundbreaking work opened up the world of the temporary to us. We would also like to acknowledge Design for London for their ideas and inspiration on how to shape cities and make them better places to live in.

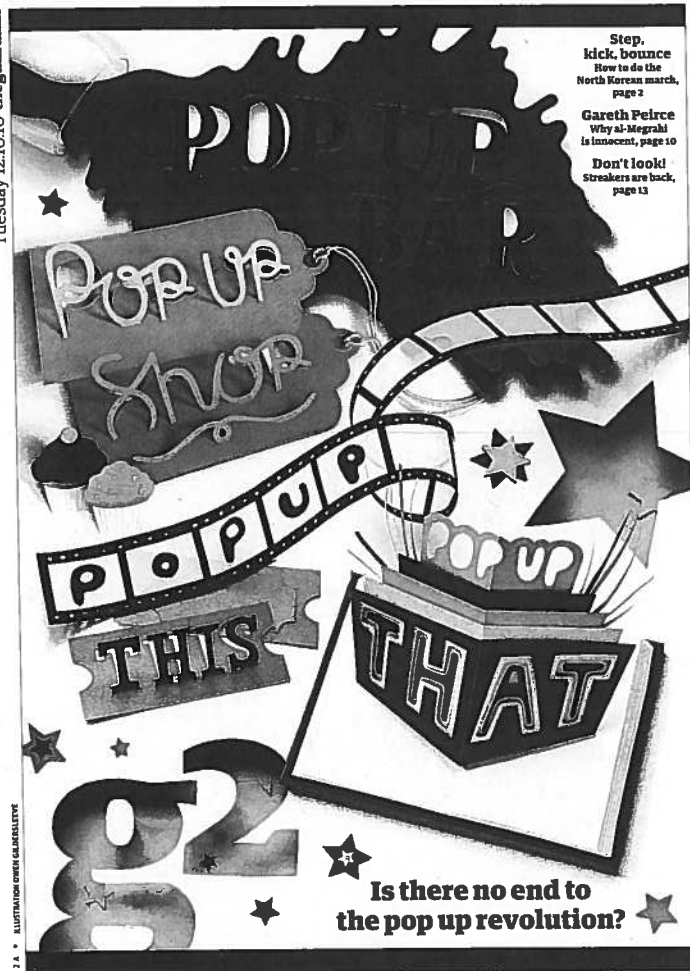
viii

Many of the case studies have evolved from our interviews and discussions with practitioners who are out there 'doing it' and we greatly appreciate the help and generosity of the following people: David West, Studio Egret West; Eric Reynolds, Urban Space Management; Giles Barrie, *Property Week*; Bill Dunster, Zed Factory; Ken Dytor; Rebecca Molina, Studio Raw; David Barrie; Isabelle Allen; Lisa Fior, *muf architecture/art*; Stephen Witherford, Witherford Watson Mann Architects; Cany Ash, Ash Sakuler Architects; Peter Murray, New London Architecture; Pieter Klomp, City of Amsterdam; Chris Shaw, Shaw Corporation; Sarah Ichioka, The Architecture Foundation; Robert Evans, Argent; Alex de Rijke and Sadie Morgan, dRMM Architects; Steve McAdam, Fluid Architects; Libby Sellers, Libby Sellers Gallery; Paul Murphy, Shopjacket; Roland Smith, Theatre Delicatessen; Dan Simon, The Oubliette Arthouse; Roger Wade, Boxpark; John Gallagher, *Detroit Free Press*; Tim Tonkins, Times Square Business Improvement District; Blaine Merker, Rebar; Victoria Lee; Teodor Frolu; Andy von Bradsky, PRP Architects; and Kerry, GINGERLINE.

Finally we are profoundly grateful to each other for the humour, generosity and willingness to debate and change views that make the partnership so enjoyable.

The Temporary City

Tuesday 12.10.10 theguardian



G2 pop-up cover by Owen Gildersteeve
12 OCTOBER 2010

1: Introduction: the temporary city

MANY CITY AUTHORITIES in Europe and North America that are charged with the task of encouraging the revitalisation and redevelopment of urban areas are now finding that, for the most part, they lack the resources, power and control to implement formal masterplans. Instead some are beginning to experiment with looser planning visions and design frameworks, linked to phased packages of smaller, often temporary initiatives, designed to unlock the potential of sites now, rather than in 10 years' time. Such approaches are finding resonance and support in the emerging practices of some new multi-disciplinary architectural studios in the UK and elsewhere. They are also eliciting an increasingly sympathetic response from landowners and developers. Some are now recognising that their plans need to be more flexible, and that there may be a role for temporary activities or interim phases of development, in the face of economic uncertainty and rapidly changing possibilities. At the same time, there has been an upsurge of 'pop-up' shops, restaurants and theatres. Some are clearly making use of the glut of vacant property, particularly on the high street, and the reduced risks that short-term leases offer to new businesses. But there is also a cachet associated with time-limited exclusivity that has consumer appeal. In parallel there appear to be many more temporary 'claims' on the city, such as art installations, urban agriculture, sports and recreation activities, from individuals or communities with alternative concepts about its use. Many of these 'bottom-up' interventions or fleeting reconfigurations of space are seemingly spontaneous or arise without consent.

These emerging signs of temporary urbanism are novel. Hitherto, both theory and practice in urban planning and design have been overwhelmingly concerned with permanence. This raises some interesting questions. Given the overwhelming evidence that cities are a complex overlay of buildings and activities that are, in one way or another, temporary, why have urbanists been so focused on permanence? What changes in society, culture, technology and the economy are driving temporary urbanism, and its many intriguing manifestations? Do different types of temporary activity have different drivers? Are these drivers themselves transient or might they represent a more enduring influence on the form of cities? Could temporary uses be a manifestation of the emergence of a more dynamic, flexible or adaptive urbanism, where the city is becoming more responsive to new needs,

demands and preferences of its users? And if so, do the systems of regulation and planning need to adjust to the requirements and implications of this new fluidity? Can temporary activities be enabled, planned or designed in order to harness their positive characteristics without stifling their creativity? These are some of the questions that we have attempted to address in this book.

This book does not seek to expound a new theory of urbanism or to provide the ultimate academic treatise on urban impermanence. Neither is it a manual. While we do suggest some ways in which temporary uses can be enabled, the book does not seek to provide guidance for the would-be practitioner. This task is best left to those with direct experience of the process. Rather, it is an enquiry, a reflection on the obsession with 'permanent' urban outcomes, and an exploration of the different manifestations of, and undercurrents behind more transient urban phenomena. Temporary uses might be part of a solution to the challenges that are facing cities as they struggle to adapt to the conditions of the twenty-first century. They may become a permanent feature of professional thinking, or be a passing fad. Our purpose is not to draw any hasty conclusions. Instead we hope that by exploring the characteristics of temporary urban activities we open the topic further to debate that may in turn broaden our thinking about the future of cities.

Research on temporary urbanism is in its infancy, but we are particularly indebted to a small, but solid body of published work. Much of the recent thinking about the potential role of temporary activities in urban areas comes from Germany, in particular Berlin, where temporary uses have found a natural breeding ground. The cutting-edge research of Berlin's Urban Catalyst has provided an invaluable record of interim solutions to urban problems.¹ The results of this research and a follow on study, the Raumpioniere Project,² that documented almost 100 temporary-use projects in disused sites or buildings across Berlin, were published in the work *Urban Pioneers*.³ Another publication, *Temporary Urban Spaces* edited by Florian Haydn and Robert Temel,⁴ provided a series of essays around the topic, and a further 35 case studies of temporary uses in European and North American cities. This work has been picked up by those seeking a solution to the vast areas of dereliction and under-use caused by dramatic population loss in the world's 'shrinking cities', particularly in areas such as Detroit and Cleveland. Here, the work of the Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative (CUDC), based at Kent State University, Ohio, and others has similarly informed our work.

The intensification and diversification in the use of urban spaces is another aspect of the temporary city. In this respect we are indebted to a number of studies on the unintended or unsolicited uses of marginal areas of urban space as explored in *Loose Space* edited by Karen Franck and Quentin Stevens,⁵ *Everyday Urbanism* edited by John Chase, Margaret Crawford and John Kaliski,⁶ the *Post-It City* of Giovanni la Varra,⁷ and Jeffrey Hou's *Insurgent Public Space*.⁸ In relation to the emerging practice of temporary use and 'alternative masterplanning' a number of small multi-disciplinary urban practices such as *muf* architecture/art, Studio Egret West and David Barrie in the UK; Raumlabor, Studio Urban Catalyst, atelier d'architecture autogérée (aaa), STEALTH⁹ and EXYZT in Europe, and Rebar in North America have been a source of great inspiration. We also acknowledge the contribution, in exploring and recording novel forms of urbanism, made by a growing number of websites in this field.¹⁰

Temporary uses are flourishing both in the in-between spaces where there is flexibility in the rigours of the property market, and in areas where multi-use is feasible. Some uses are planned and formal; some are informal, accidental, spontaneous or even illegal. Some occur when a city is shrinking, some when it is growing. Some uses last for a night or weekend, some are seasonal, while others may last five years or more. Some are acts of political defiance, while some are government interventions. Given this wide range of characteristics, temporary activities need to be defined with care.

'Temporary' is a difficult concept to pin down. The term denotes a finite period of time with a defined beginning and end. However, if we take a long enough time period or, for example, adopt the perspective of subatomic physics or Buddhism, everything is temporary, although it is certainly true that some things last longer than others. A fundamental problem with temporary activity is that it can only be accurately identified in hindsight. There are difficulties in trying to assess contemporaneously a phenomenon whose true context is historic. A use is not temporary until it has proved to be so, by disappearing. And by the time an interesting temporary phenomenon reaches our attention it may well no longer be there to be studied.

Some researchers have adopted working definitions that take into account the characteristics of temporary uses. However, this approach is difficult to apply to activities that are so diverse.¹¹ Therefore, for the sake of simplicity our definition is not based on the nature of the use, or whether rent is paid, or whether a use is formal or informal, or even on the scale, endurance or longevity of a temporary use, but rather the *intention* of the user, developer or planner that the use should be temporary. A temporary land use is an *intentional* phase. The phase itself may be short- or long-lasting, but the time element is merely a unit of measurement. When most buildings are planned or constructed, there may be an implicit understanding that their life will be finite, but there is little or no discussion of their longevity or of any subsequent uses at the time. With temporary land uses the time-limited nature of the use is generally explicit. We cannot always know the intention of the initiator of a temporary activity with any certainty. Even activities that sign a short lease or seek a temporary permission, may intend from the outset that they will endure. And there are many examples of 'temporary' activities such as squats or community gardens that have achieved this. There will inevitably be some ambiguity when discussing temporary activities.

We distinguish the definition of temporary used in this book from those that view 'meanwhile use' as an 'interim' or a 'stop-gap' solution in conditions where commercial letting is not presently viable.¹² Such definitions risk assuming that temporary activities are inevitably secondary. As Temel notes, temporary uses may be provisional, "that is, conceived as a mere substitute for the "real thing", but 'the temporary also has its own qualities and should not be viewed as merely a substitute for the fully adequate. This special quality can, for example, be that the temporal limitation permits many things that would still be inconceivable if considered for the long term'.¹³

In exploring the rise of interest in temporary urbanism, we are inevitably focusing on the UK, and in particular London, where our experience and practice are rooted. We have therefore written in the

context of the economic, legislative and social conditions that pertain to the UK, at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. We have, however, endeavoured to include case studies from elsewhere in the world, where relevant and appropriate. The conditions that are encouraging temporary activities are not, however, global. The interest in temporariness is arguably a luxury afforded only to those cities that are part of the post-industrial economy. In large parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America, many structures and activities are more tenuous or temporary and this reflects a hand-to-mouth existence where permanent structures, institutions, even hopes, are an impossible luxury.

In defining the scope of this book, the issue of how to cover temporary buildings has been challenging. Temporary housing has obviously been around for as long as humanity, as in the shelters of early hunter-gatherers and nomads. Even in the modern era more than 150,000 prefabricated homes with a structural lifetime of 10 to 15 years were built in the UK in response to the post-Second World War housing shortage, and some remain to this day. More recently the challenges of building 'temporary' camps and settlements for refugees have stimulated numerous books in their own right. So too have contemporary experiments in building with, for example, shipping containers, that offer quick, inexpensive and experimental solutions to a range of urban issues. We have chosen to focus on the planning rather than architectural responses to the temporary and for this reason temporary building per se is not covered in this book. It is, however, interesting that the debate on temporary uses and practical engagement has tended to be architecturally, rather than planning-led, with some of the most striking and interesting interventions in the field coming from a new generation of young architects. Many of the temporary uses that we do cover involve some kind of building, and in this

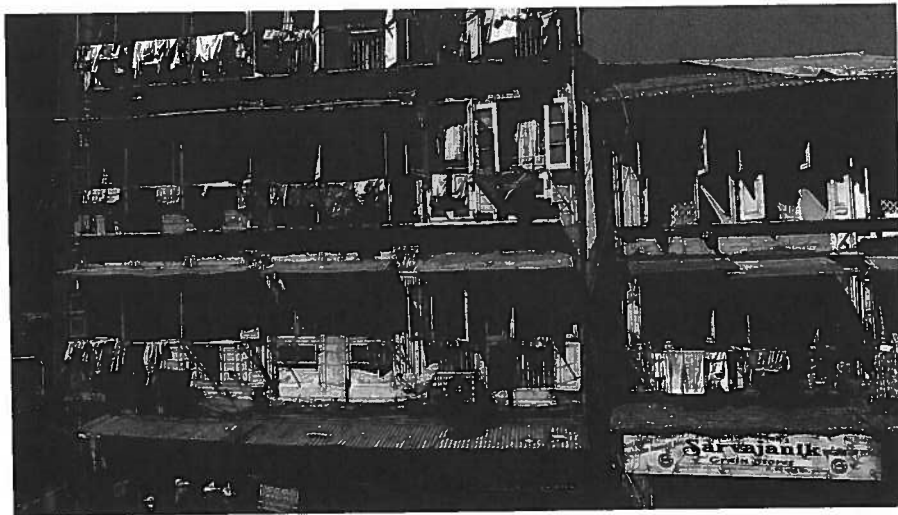
context, they are included in the book. So too are certain examples that illustrate the 'discovery' of temporary use as a profitable arena by the development industry itself. On balance we felt that the inclusion of such exceptions could be justified without the need for extensive context on temporary building itself.

Another challenge was whether to include the 'grand' temporary events, such as the Olympic Games, World Cup and Expos, and initiatives such as Cities of Culture, and Garden Festivals. Some have led to the long-term regeneration or 'rebranding' of sites or cities, or have left behind important permanent buildings and a place in the collective memory of the nation, but in other cases the legacy has been sterilised sites and debt. Such grand temporary projects have stimulated major research studies in their own right and have been explored extensively elsewhere. Again, on balance we felt that their inclusion in this book would have altered its focus substantially, away from the more everyday aspects of temporary urbanism.

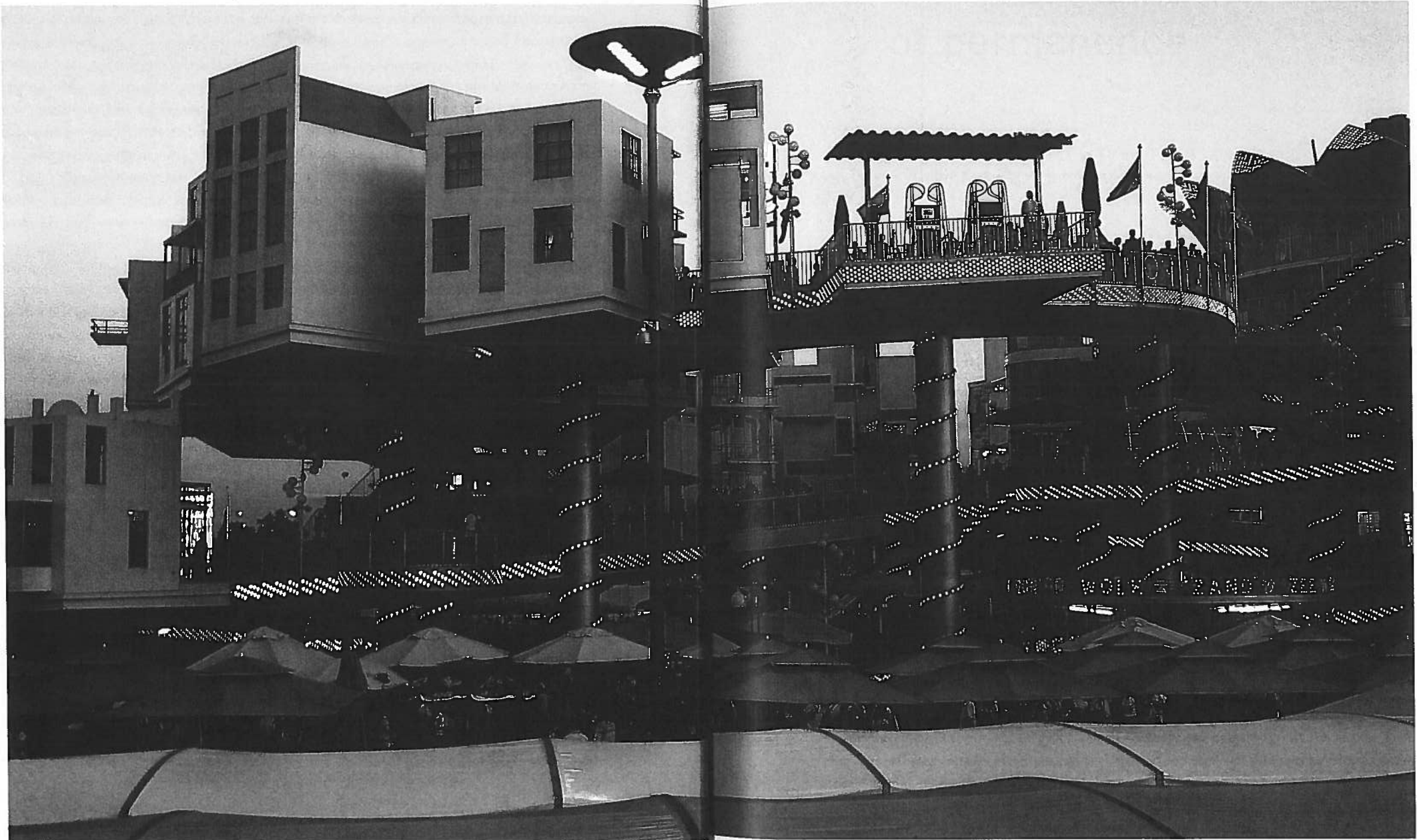
Structuring this book has also presented challenges, not just because there are so many different ways of organising the information, but because interestingly, the boundaries between so many of the themes that could help to organise the material are becoming blurred. In fact the blurring of traditional distinctions between land use types and activities, and the interaction and overlap between the factors that are driving temporary activities are themes that run throughout the book, and are perhaps a key characteristic of temporary urbanism. Many of the themes that are covered could have found a natural and logical home in more than one chapter. The same, of course, goes for many of the case studies that illustrate the themes. Ultimately the material has been organised around the topics most likely to be of use to the reader.

The book falls loosely into three parts. The first chapters provide the context. Chapter 2 examines the essentially temporary nature of cities and explores the reasons why urbanists have become accustomed to viewing them as permanent. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the changes which are shaping our cities in the twenty-first century and their role as drivers for temporary urbanism. The themes raised in this chapter are picked up in the second part of the book, which explores temporary urbanism as it is manifested in consumerism, culture, urban space, community and private sector initiatives and in relation to 'creative milieus'. The third part of the book explores some of the emerging responses to the phenomenon, such as 'alternative masterplanning' and the scope to free up urban areas for the temporary through bringing greater flexibility to the planning system.

Until recently temporary activities have attracted little professional interest from architects or planners. Yet, from the travelling fairground to the designer pop-up restaurant such activities have always been a vital part of urban culture. They fill the gaps and enliven the urban experience, and they can bring considerable benefit when sensitively incorporated into urban planning. We hope that this book will offer a different way of interpreting cities. In the 'temporary city' strategies that recognise the essential transience of urban life can be more effective in an uncertain age.



Housing in Bendhi Bazaar
MUMBAI



The Dutch Pavilion
2010 SHANGHAI EXPO



Ruins of Barāqa'n
YEMEN

2: The dream of permanence

*I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: 'Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown
And wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed.
And on the pedestal these words appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings:
Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,
The lone and level sands stretch far away'.*

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY, 'Ozymandias' (1818)

THE CENTRAL THEME of 'Ozymandias' is the inevitable decline of all people, and of the empires they build, however mighty in their own time, and the impossible dream of permanence.¹ Popes and emperors dream of an illusory legacy, yet everywhere their works are dust. Cities, towns and neighbourhoods have always been dynamic entities that rise and fall reflecting the great social, economic and political movements of the time.

The quest for permanence, however, guides many of our choices. We want to achieve 'lasting results', or find 'permanent solutions' or 'enduring love', to make 'continuing commitments', to invest our savings with 'permanent' investment funds and to achieve 'sustainable' regeneration. For most people, the notion of permanence brings a sense of security and a hedge against risk and the winds of change. Meanwhile there is implicit criticism in 'short-termism', while solutions that are labelled 'temporary' are deemed to be secondary to more permanent visions. However, we deceive ourselves in believing that the world is permanent. In reality, the only certainty is that everything changes. All of life has a cycle of birth, growth, death and decay. Even the human species shows few signs that it will remain a permanent feature of the planet.