

Dan Thompson
February 2012

POP UP PEOPLE

**We can do
much more
together
- it's not so
impossible**

Pop Up People

includes contributions from artists, arts administrators, cafe owners, circus folk, council officers, councillors, creative producers, designers, entrepreneurs, film-makers, makers, musicians, planning officers, pop up shopkeepers, regeneration officers, students, thinkers, Tweeters, youth arts workers



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Thanks to the original pop up people - Martin Harris at The Connaught, Bob Brighton, Debbie Zoutewelle

Special thanks to Tracey, Dayna, Edward & Eliza

“We used a pop up for a month in the Summer to test a business idea - it gave us a valuable insight into the demand and thoughts of potential customers. It also limited our risk, which is just what you need when researching a business plan!”
Joe Turner, Second Gear

With thanks to our funders



LOTTERY FUNDED

Worthing is where, for me, it all started

When I was 13, I went to work in the local theatre, The Connaught. Once a repertory theatre, it was now taking in touring shows by companies like Theatre de Complicite, Trestle and Siobhan Davies. The auditorium had been the Picturedrome Cinema until the mid-30s when Bill Fraser's repertory company had outgrown their space next door, and moved in.

That original theatre, the Connaught Hall, was being used as rehearsal rooms, scenery workshops and stores. There were temporary partition walls, the foyer had become a barber's shop and the roof was full of holes to hang backdrops. I fell in love with the place and spent the next eight years slowly bringing the building back to life. The barber shop became a community arts shop, and then - when the hall reopened - my office. It's now fully restored and working, ironically, as a small cinema.

So, Worthing is a town with a long history of recycling old buildings, and it's something I've been doing for a few years, too.

In 2000, I set up Revolutionary Arts. The original aim of the group was to work with local artists, particularly art college graduates, and build a stronger, more local art scene. I started Worthing's trail of open houses with my wife, turning homes into galleries. And with the help of painter Debbie Zoutewelle, we started borrowing empty shops. Since then, I've borrowed shops around the town (and of course, further afield) - not just for art, but also to create a giant charity market, a pop up playscheme, and a temporary Tourist Information Centre.

As the recession bit, more people were getting in touch and asking for help so the Empty Shops Network was born. An informal network, free resources, social media and a recession proved to be a rich mix and government got behind the ideas promoted by the Empty Shops Network in April 2009, giving funding to over 100 towns with high numbers of empty shops.

That government stamp of approval (much more than the funding) led to a boom, with an unnoticed and underground movement going mainstream over the next two years. Artists created galleries, project spaces and studios across the country. Meanwhile, Yell created a pop up record store, ebay used a Soho shop to sell via mobile phones, Orange have roadtested a new, community-friendly phone shop and in Shoreditch high-end brands created a pop up shopping mall from recycled shipping containers.

Behind every project, reinventing, recycling, reusing and reimagining our towns, are Pop Up People - this is their story.

**A popup-thing feels like a smile, y'know? Something transient but memorable.
*@tiger_tea on Twitter***



POP UP PEOPLE



2011 - 15%
2008 - 5%



Extra retail space built in last 15 years
88 million square feet



Extra retail space currently planned by supermarkets
44 million square feet



Number of jobs lost for each 1% - **20,000**



Westfield Stratford City created **10,000** jobs

Empty shops in Margate 2011



Empty shops in East Street Centre, Southampton



OUT OF TOWN

80% of planned new supermarkets will be out of town



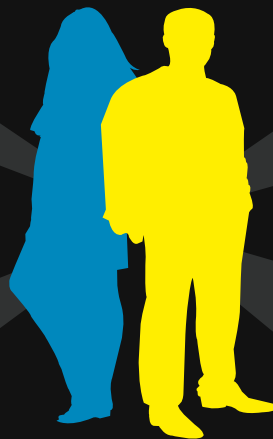
ONLINE

10% of shopping is now done on the internet



SUPERMARKETS

75% of grocery shopping is done in Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda and Morrisons



WHERE HAVE SHOPPERS GONE?



SHOPPING CENTRES

300 stores and 70 restaurants make up Westfield Stratford City shopping centre

Pop Up People:

are truly entrepreneurial, even if their project is more about community than commerce. They're making money, either through income or by attracting new funding to their area, and spending it locally, with independent shops and suppliers.

have a broad range of skills, learnt from a professional background. They may have previously worked in retail, media, marketing or as an arts professional; often they still do, and are running a pop up part time. They like spinning many plates.

are passionate about where they live, often interested in providing opportunities and experiences near to home which historically have meant a journey to a larger nearby town or city.

use local people and organisations to build loose, flexible, agile partnerships. They are quite willing to bring in people from outside the local area to make the project even better. They're natural networkers. They use word-of-mouth to spread ideas and share knowledge.

have an eye for fine detail, and will make sure their project is presented well from top to bottom. Branding, signs, visitor experience and displays are all given attention to ensure a high quality project.

are willing to embrace the temporary nature of an opportunity, and agile enough to adapt and change as the opportunity does.

always have an eye on the future, using a pop up to inform or inspire another plan or project, or to prototype a new business. They are interested in the long-term sustainability of their work.

Margate

“It’s embarrassing, I get people coming in here asking me where all the shops are. I have to tell them, they’ve gone. There aren’t any.”

Pauline Dunnill, Pauline’s Café

A poster-girl for the death of town centres, Margate has featured in dozens of newspaper articles since 2009, because one in three of its shops are empty.

Margate town centre crawls nearly three kilometres from the feet of the iconic, brutal Arlington House, along the seafront, through the skewwhiff, delightfully wonky Old Town, and in a long line out along Northdown Road. Shops have struggled since the massive Westwood Cross shopping centre opened just ten minutes drive away. Westwood Cross is home to all the big names of retail, and many of them left smaller stores in Margate to open there.

There are signs of life in Margate though, in a campaign to save the wiggling concrete of Arlington House from a Tesco development and in a rash of daring traders trying something new in the Old Town.

The Pie Factory is both the heart and brains of the old town; a gallery, five studios for artists and a dedicated Pop Up Shop which can be rented easily for up to a month. The Pop Up Shop space is there to make sure that visitors to the area always have something new to see, and to make sure that locals have an affordable space to use.

While it’s most often used by artists, in peak summer season 2011 it housed Second Gear - a shop selling ‘lost & found men’s clothing’. This vintage fashion pop-up was the latest project from Joe Turner, a one-man think tank with an interest in the ethics and sustainability of the rag trade and manufacturing. Second Gear was, while thinking about some big ideas, also a prototype for a new business; Joe, thinking, testing and prototyping, is typical of pop up people.



Another empty shop in Margate was about prototyping, but had a much bigger organisation behind it. In 2006 Turner Contemporary, while waiting for their David Chipperfield designed gallery to be built, took over the empty Marks & Spencer store on Margate High Street. In the vast, fluorescent-lit space they staged a variety of exhibitions, showing work from the Arts Council England collection. The project was a foundation stone of their new gallery, ensuring that local people were involved in Turner Contemporary’s work, and that the gallery was involved in the local community.

While Margate is facing tough times, and pop up shops are not going to fill all the town centre shops with start-up businesses, pop up people are leading a discussion about the town they live in, and the ways that the town might reinvent itself.



Coventry

Britain's post-war optimism is best captured in the beautiful modernist town planning of Coventry. The city architect laid out a network of pedestrian precincts and plazas, neatly enclosed by the city's ring road which a resident can twist under or over to reach the city's dormitory suburbs and old, historic factory sites. The precincts and plazas contained small shops for local traders alongside larger spaces for chain stores, and a dramatic circular market hall like something from the Cold War East.

The Gibson Plan has, sadly, been compromised by later developments like the Cathedral Lanes shopping centre, which in the 1990s added more shops to an already ample supply, and the edge-of-centre Ikea warehouse. So Coventry has had a ready supply of empty spaces for a creative community to use as they try to find a new, post-industrial purpose.

At the centre of this have been Talking Birds, who since 2000 have worked across the UK from their Coventry base, and have reused a former monastery, an outdoor ballroom, a cattle market and an underground car park. They even held a Virtual Fringe, not even occupying the spaces but giving artists the chance to explore what they would do, given the chance.

Perhaps most importantly, Talking Birds have inspired other artists across the years, and made the practice commonplace. They are friends, supporters and mentors to many in the city and further afield, sharing their love of Coventry and of interesting spaces. They have made local residents look differently at the place where they live, and have inspired others to visit a city which has a hidden history and a promising future.



In Brief: Theatre Absolute

Chicago's theatre companies have explored empty spaces since the late 1970s and on a visit there, Theatre Absolute director Chris O'Connell was inspired by what he saw. Returning to Coventry he found a space and the support to set up the UK's first Shop Front Theatre. The intimate space looks exactly like a studio theatre, but there are signs of its previous life as a fish & chip shop. In its first year it staged 25 activities and 52 performances for over 1100 audience members, and the company have just agreed a further lease on the premises.

Leeds



The schizophrenia of urban regeneration is nowhere more visible than Leeds. Contrast the elegantly twisted Candle House with the cavernous Dark Arches under Leeds Station, or the chichi Victoria Quarter with old Kirkgate Market. For creative people, regeneration has left a series of liminal spaces and they have delighted in them, turning Leeds into an urban playground.

Temple Works aims to restore and recycle a huge factory site. A grey stone replica of an ancient Egyptian Temple fronts a flax mill with a vast open space (the largest room in the world when it was built) capped by a field of skylights the shape of witches hats. A shifting population of creative businesses live in the various offices and ancillary spaces alongside the main factory floor and use them to experiment and create new work. The larger rooms and spaces are used for cabaret, parties, live music, theatre, dance and art exhibitions.

Occupying a very different space – both physically and psychically - is Project Space Leeds, in the ground floor of Whitehall Waterfront. It's a typical early 21st century regeneration project, so soulless even residents describe it as their 'home/investment'. Project Space Leeds bring stark, hard contemporary fine art to a bare-walled space in the main building, with a programme of exhibitions, education workshops, talks and seminars.

Perhaps the masters of the meanwhile in Leeds, though, are East Street Arts. An organisation focusing on professional development for artists, East Street Arts are known for



running three studio buildings across the city. But they have leases on over 40 other properties including empty shops, vacant offices, and old industrial units which are used for meetings and workshops, and as rehearsal rooms and as art studios. One large space was recently used by an architect's practice, to test-build a forthcoming project.

East Street Arts aims to make tenants self-sufficient but helps with legal aspects like leases and insurance. They are helping Navigator North to take control of a nine storey tower block in Middlesborough, and showing artists in Halifax how to move from being hidden in studios to having a shop front showcase.

Leeds is well on the way to creating a pop up city, layered with unlikely history, home to creativity and culture and full of quirky local character.

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The boundaries between online experiences and the day-to-day world are blurring as people find connections between the internet and the town centre. Smart phones put the digital world in people's pockets, accessible wherever they are.

Artists Oliver Scott and Ashley Brown created an interactive video game called Glow, played in the windows of the Bubblechamber Project in Coventry's City Arcade.

Workshop 24 was documented in real time using Tumblr, allowing people outside the South Kilburn Precinct where it was based to experience what was happening there.

Argos and ebay have experimented with pop up shops, using them to showcase products and allowing customers to browse, scan QR codes on mobile phones and place orders.

'For every £1 spent online,' says Google's David Singleton, 'the internet influences £3 spent in stores. Google and others are working to bring all the tools that made finding great products online easy and rewarding to the real world.'

The game's afoot, and pop up people are ready to play.



Rotterdam

A city full of cyclists has a smile spread across it. Rotterdam is built to a different scale to any of the British cities in this report. It's built around pedestrians and bicycles and people and local neighbourhoods. There are small shops and independent cafes spread along Nieuwe Binnenweg, the longest shopping street in the city. It's here that the Hub Shop is experimenting with collaborative, small-scale, social selling.

Rotterdam's size makes it a friendly and informal place, so it's the perfect playground for pop up people as well.

Leefstand is led by Kaos Pilots graduate Alex Danger Falk and Australian Charlotte Paull, who were both inspired by the work of Marcus Westbury's Renew Newcastle projects in Australia. As well as running their own Leefstand Concepts pop ups, they manage Leefstand Co-Labs to create agile partnerships between people wanting to use pop up spaces, and act as estate agents with Leefstand Rentals to make it even easier for people to run pop up projects in empty shops.

Leefstand, and others like Buurt Flirt, Killing Architects and Meshprintclub, are reinventing the city, space by space. Rotterdam is one to watch; it might just become the global capital of the pop up world nation.

ROTTERDAM
Pop Up People
Killing Architects
Buurt Flirt
Mesh Print Studio
Leefstand

In brief: Killing Architects
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Killing Architects are currently running Urban Action, using funds from Stimuleringsfonds voor Architectuur, the Dutch architecture and urbanism research fund, to look at how temporary interventions contribute to long-term development. With Architecture For One Euro, Killing Architects created a pop up, drop in space that was a shop-studio hybrid. Aiming to reach people who wouldn't normally use an architect, it helped people find solutions to problems and showed why design is useful.

In depth: We Are Bedford

From buskers to burlesque life-drawing classes and a pop up craft fair to poetry, We Are Bedford's Castle Quay Weekender brought the area's empty shops to life. The Castle Quay development, four terraced blocks of over 100 apartments with shops and cafes below, was completed in 2008 - just as the recession hit. Consequently most of the shops, new stock at the edge of a town centre, were still empty in 2011. The Castle Quay Weekender used seven empty shops and staged over twenty events, from photography exhibitions and art installations to a Gardeners' Question Time and art galleries. Poet John Hegley performed, musicians played on an acoustic stage and a Morris side danced.

We Are Bedford, a loose partnership led by RSA Fellow Kayte Judge and community newspaper publisher Erica Roffe, was set up, after the pair met through social media, to tackle the town's empty shop problem and to celebrate local creativity. It brought RSA funding to Bedford, and matched it with resources from the local council, the Bedford Business improvement District and local businesses to stage first the Castle Quay Weekender, then a crowd-funded two-day Busking Festival, a Big Draw workshop and finally a Pop Up Emporium selling locally-made work before Christmas.

The Big Draw event, Monsters of Bedford, led to the formation of Bedford illustrator's Network, whose work will be stocked in the Bedford Museum shop. The Castle Quay Weekender drove people into the newly-established Cultural Quarter to support existing traders, and as a consequence most of the area's commercial property is now let. The Pop Up Emporium helped local makers to sell to local residents and visitors, and encouraged other local shops to stock their products.

We Are Bedford, in under a year, proved that pop up people can make a big difference and leave a lasting legacy.



@wearebedford

Stuff we've learnt as Pop Up Shop keepers

- 1. Every purchase counts**
 - 2. It's all about relationships**
 - 3. Word of mouth works**
- #emptyshops**

How the government can help

Pop Up People

The government already protects things we treasure from the full fury of the market. Listing buildings looks after our most precious architecture. National parks maintain the balance in a delicate countryside. Railways, banks, hospitals, schools... they're all still there because of government support. So why not add the town centre to the list of things we love, and which need our help? And why not do that by supporting the people who want to do it?

Support failure

We have a culture where success is all that matters. Creative people know that failure is more important; by making mistakes we learn and do better next time. As Samuel Becket said, 'Try again, fail again, fail better'. Entrepreneurs know this. Virgin Brides, Virgin Cosmetics, Virgin Megastores and Virgin Cola weren't successes but helped Sir Richard Branson to be fourth richest person in Britain.

Empty shops are a perfect place to let people test and prototype, but this means some ideas will fail. Make failure inspirational, and celebrate it. Allow local councils to admit to failure, so that they can do better next time round. Allow young entrepreneurs to test ideas in council or government property with rent-free periods.'

Make it easier for people to take a risk by allowing new businesses a start-up period free of business rates, to match rent-free periods offered by landlords. Make information about business rates clearer. Make sure local authorities understand

and are applying the rules around business rate relief in the same ways.

Close shops

In places like Margate and Worthing, town centres have been spread too thin. In Southampton and Coventry, new developments have tilted the town centre and left dead areas behind them. But town centres have not, historically, been static places and have flexed and moved many times before.

The old Allied Carpets shop in Worthing was off the high street and at the edge of the town centre, and provided a perfect space for pop up people. That inspired its new use, by local internet company Fresh Egg who have spent half a million pounds converting it into high-tech offices for eighty staff.

For the government's localism agenda to work, we need places people can identify with as 'local'. Town centres should be redefined and cropped to create compact, locally distinct areas by changing the use of some empty shops. Town teams should include young people.

Don't think big

We have seen people living much more locally in the last few years. In Rotterdam, planning is used to create new communities of 3000-5000 people with workplaces, schools, shops and homes intermingled. In London, people come from Shoreditch or Brixton, Kilburn or Seven Dials. Pop up people live in urban villages, as well as a global one.

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The new, networked economy makes towns and cities even more compact, with more people working from home, more information about the local area easily available, and the boundaries between work and the rest of life more blurred than ever.

The Portas Review of the nation's high streets suggests the creation of 'Town Teams'. Make these hyperlocal, focused on a small neighbourhood, a community of a few streets or a district shopping centre - a human scaled, manageable area so that real people can get involved. They should be agile to respond to opportunity more quickly than existing organisations. Town teams should act, not meet.

Town teams should own and manage some shops to allow space for pop up people's continued work, invention and playfulness.

Never hang around

We have assumed in the past fifty years that permanent equals important. Pop up people love the temporary, like we all love a passing smile or fleeting blossom. Things that exist for a short time add interest and meaning to places. Towns and cities are about people living in a million short moments. 'Through its complex orchestration of time and space ... life in the city takes on the characteristics of a symphony' says Lewis Mumford.

Support temporary use which makes places interesting and again lets people test new ideas by letting people use empty spaces, with three months freedom before planning requires a change-of-use application.

Celebrate the temporary by creating a national, government-backed award scheme for pop up people and by recognising the work of pop up people in local and national awards.

Don't build more community centres

2012 is the year of creative collaboration and pop up people are always sharing their spaces, creating loose partnerships to deliver mixed programmes of activity in their shops. Hybrid retail, or using shops to do more than just one thing, is a key trend.

The prototype Next store in Shoreham by Sea sells clothes, furniture, do it yourself supplies, includes a garden centre and has a Starbucks cafe. The Orange community shop in Monmouth is used by local community Police officers, promotes local activity and still sells mobile phones. Supermarkets keep everything under one roof, too. 'They're not really supermarkets any more. They're almost becoming mini-villages,' says the Local Data Company's Matthew Hopkinson.

Rather than using planning agreements with superstores to build new community centres or playgrounds or public art, use planning law and that same money to create small, community shops and spaces inside large stores, which benefit from supermarket-sized footfall.

Encourage staff from larger shops and supermarkets to volunteer to support these projects by establishing national volunteering programmes and through existing corporate responsibility programmes.

In Brief: The Brick Box

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Brixton Village and Tooting Market have the perfect thing to support pop up people. The Brick Box run two cafe-venues which aim to let people 'try things out, make mistakes and learn things'. The Brick Box are permanent, but allows space for pop up events, artistic happenings and temporary interventions, always blurring the line between the artist and the audience. They're at the heart of both markets, helping the local community reinvent those spaces and rediscover the lost magic of market life.

Brixton to Britart – an afterword

What's being talked about in this report is nothing new. People have been reusing and recycling buildings for a long time.

The Brixton Art Gallery ran from 1983-1988 in a series of three disused railway arches at 19-21 Atlantic Road. In the first two and a half years, Brixton Art Gallery exhibited 1000 artists in over 50 exhibitions. Cathy de Monchaux, Zharina Bhimji and Mona Hatoum exhibited there before making the Turner shortlist. Other artists went on to exhibit at the Tate, Hayward, Royal Academy, ICA, Serpentine, Pompidou Centre in Paris and the Metropolitan in New York.

That's not what makes the gallery interesting, though; Brixton Art Gallery is still interesting after more than twenty years because it was explored new ways for artists to work together, and a different way for contemporary artists to talk to a broad community outside of traditional gallery spaces.

The space was run by the Brixton Artists Collective, a collective, and was directly funded by Lambeth Council and the Greater London Council and given support by the British Rail Property Board, in the form of a heavily discounted rent.

The initial exhibitions took place as part of the Brixton Festival, a music festival. The reuse of the space added visual arts to the festival mix. Although planned to last for three weeks, even by the end of the opening party negotiations were underway to secure a longer lease, a reduced rent and funding for the space. Negotiation worked, and Brixton Art Gallery was later described by City Limits magazine as 'the most exciting exhibition space in London.'

The end of the Brixton Art Gallery in the late 1980s can be neatly dovetailed with the emergence of a group which would become the Young British Artists. And for six months in 1993 two of them, Tracey Emin and Sarah Lucas, rented a shop at 103 Bethnal Green Road. Part gallery, part workshop, part installation, The Shop stocked and sold a range of roughly-made products including T-shirts, ashtrays and other ephemera. Emin's involvement in The Shop led to collector Jay Jopling buying her work and offering her a solo show at White Cube.

Even after that show, titled My Major Retrospective, Emin returned to another empty shop - running the Tracey Emin Museum at 221 Waterloo Road, London from 1995-1998. While there, she completed one of her most famous works, a tent appliquéd with the names of Everyone I Ever Slept With 1963-95. Emin's Waterloo shop is now a launderette - but as Pop Up People is being written, she's just opened a new shop in Spitalfields.

“Failure is a natural and healthy part of experimentation and we value what we can learn from both success and failure.”
Principles of The Brick Box

Further reading:

Town centres & urbanism:

Ruined City - Nevil Shute (Heinemann, 1951)
Making People-friendly Towns - Francis Tibbalds (Spon Press, 2001)
Clone Town Britain (nef, 2005)
The Freiburg Charter for Sustainable Urbanism (The Academy of Urbanism)
A Guide To The New Ruins Of Great Britain - Owen Hatherley (Verso, 2010)
Cities For A Small Planet - Richard Rogers (Faber and Faber, 1997)
Creating Sustainable Cities - Herbert Girardet (Green Books, 1999)
'Big Society'; Social Action And The Role Of Public Space - Stuart MacDonald (CLES, 2011)

Empty shops:

Talking Shop Volume 1 (Mid Pennine Arts)
Made In South Kilburn (Workshop 24, 2011)
An Apology To The Librarian - Katie Keys (tinylittlepoems, 2010)
Pop; Arts In The Heart Of Blackburn (Pop Blackburn)
Utilising Empty Shops; Best Practice Guide (Wolverhampton City Centre Company)
Shop Front Theatre; One Year On - Christine Hamilton & Geoff Wilcocks (Theatre Absolute)
21st Century Agora (Urban Pollinators)
The Portas Review - Mary Portas (Department for Business, innovation and Skills)

Ideas & inspiration:

Changing Chelmsford; How Bold Is Your Vision? - Stephanie Mills (Changing Chelmsford)
101 Civic Ideas (Civic Voice, 2011)
Swarming In The Statusphere (Shine Communications, 2011)

Further Reading:

<http://wiki.emptyshopsnetwork.co.uk/index.php/Popupeoplereading>



WANT TO KNOW?
www.howtopopup.co.uk

BEDFORD

www.wearebedford.co.uk

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AND
TOOTING**

www.thebrickbox.co.uk

ROTTERDAM

www.buurtflirt.nl

COVENTRY

www.theatreabsolute.co.uk

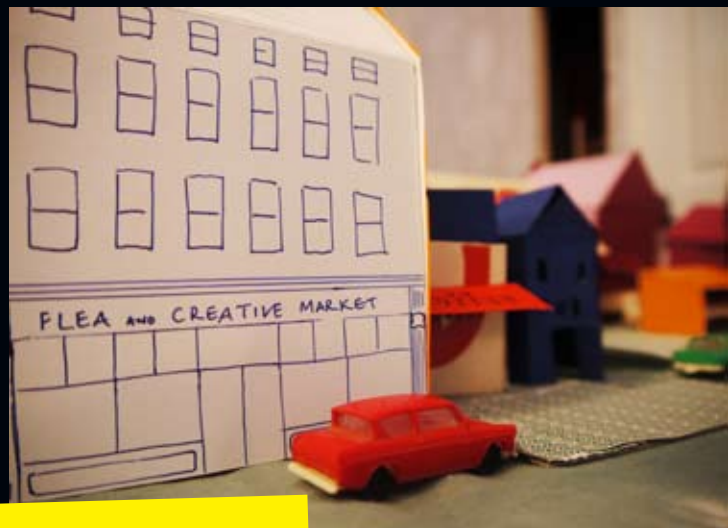
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