

Title: 'The Rooks Have Returned', Off the Streets, A Foundation, London
Year created: 2009

This intervention consists in a collective performative installation of sculptures made out reclaimed furniture found around the area which will be upholstered by using the discarded old fabric from local upholstery shops. An ephemeral and temporary space will be produced by reinvigorating the creation of a 'common' territory for 'the rejected fabric'. This place where once 5,666 people were forced to leave their homes and displaced into new slums. The creation of an area of possible disruption might pin-point the social, economical and political factors that produce these conditions. This action becomes 'a right of resistance'. Paolo Virno's in his book 'The Grammar of the Multitude' defines 'a right of resistance' as a practice belonging to a community assembled to defend either certain elements in common or its existence as such from attack by a centralized power. Resistance against the effort to control peoples housing rights, which has become the motor of the capitalist system and the government's policy on urban areas appears as one in a long line of administrative mechanisms that function to this end. This work registers the importance of local resistance against situations of extreme oppression and deprivation, but it also signals the necessity to open such struggles to the global dimension. The Boundary Estate, constructed from 1890, was one of the earliest social housing schemes, and was built by the London County Council as the world's first council housing, replacing the Friars Mount slum or Old Nichols Street Rookery. The demolition rubble was used to construct a mound in the middle of Arnold Circus at the centre of the development, housing a still extant bandstand. By definition a rookery (also sometimes described as a stew) was the colloquial British English name historically given to a city slum or ghetto frequented by poor people, criminals and prostitutes. Such areas were often overcrowded, with poor quality housing and little or no sanitation; poorly constructed dwellings were often crammed into any area of open ground, creating densely-populated areas of gloomy narrow streets and alleyways. The term may be linked with the slang expression to rook, to cheat or steal, a verb well established in the 16th century and associated with the supposedly thieving nature of the rook bird. The term was first used in print by the poet George Galloway in 1792 to describe "a cluster of mean tenements densely populated by people of the lowest class".[1] While the new flats replaced the existing slums, where many (5,666) had lived below street level and in appalling conditions, with decent accommodation for the same number of people, it wasn't the same group of people. The original inhabitants were forced further to the East, creating new overcrowding and new slums in areas such as Dalston and Bethnal Green. At this time, no help was available to find new accommodation for the displaced, and this added to the suffering and misery of many of the former residents of the slum.