

Fulcrum

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cowboy territory.

o.steele

Stefan Jovanovic: *What does pop-up mean to you?*

Olivia Steele: Pop-up means 'here today, gone tomorrow', it's an opportunity to do a flash exhibition, in our case of food, art, design and music, and reinvent ourselves everywhere we go. It celebrates the temporary and throws out the ordinary, the mundane.

SJ: *Oftentimes we read that Pret-a-Diner (PAD) is 'not a pop-up restaurant' but rather 'a dining experience', what is the difference?*

OS: Pop-up restaurants have a reputation for being cheap and low-end, and that is exactly what we are not, rather we want to emphasize that it is not just a restaurant but also an experience where you consume art, culture, food, and music. It is an all around visual experience as well as an oral one.

SJ: *So would you say that the design is then a pop-up, the construction of the restaurant itself?*

OS: It is meant to be temporary, nothing is super fixed, I mean, we still have cables hanging everywhere! It's designed to be built up and broken down in a few days.

SJ: *What is your aim of running a temporary dining experience, in different cities throughout the world? What do you hope to achieve?*

OS: Building a brand that is known for a high standard and a unique experience, a high standard of culinary excellence – its about making a platform for amazing chefs, amazing artists and amazing DJs.

SJ: *The term pop-up architecture is often coined for structures and installations that are lighter, quicker and cheaper to build, do you find this is the case?*

OS: Yes, we would do things differently if they had to be more permanent. Because they're not, we have to think about sustainability, and be realistic about the build-up. You don't want to spend huge amounts of money on making every single detail bespoke, or built to last. It's not cheap, but it can't be super-expensive either...

SJ: *And what would you say is the time-span of a temporary structure, and what does this depend on?*

OS: I think anything under six months. You do things differently when you know that it's going to be temporary. To be honest, I actually don't know that much about pop-up restaurants!

SJ: *Nonetheless, is PAD is a commercial endeavour?*

OS: It's totally commercial, it's a platform for the catering company, for my design firm, for the art, it's an indirect business card, it's to showcase what we're capable of on a more temporary basis, a one night event... that is, the catering, the event production.

SJ: *I assume you would not consider going permanent?*

OS: Hell no! Having a restaurant is like having a ball on a chain.

SJ: *Does the design aspect become a tool in itself, or rather a means to the catering business?*

OS: One hand washes the other to make the total experience, because one on its own is ordinary, but when you put the two together it's extraordinary.

SJ: *What's also extraordinary is that a designer could design a temporary restaurant from beginning to end, and you wouldn't need a fully licensed architect to do anything. What do you think this is saying about our discipline, especially today when architectural talent is getting increasingly dissipated across other more foreign territories?*

OS: **With pop-up there are no rules. Just as someone can go to art school and not become an artist, or go to architecture school and not become an architect, it's cowboy territory. Nowadays there's a vast array of what people consider to be pop-up architecture; our take on it is creative, sustainable, it reflects the contrast. I think you cannot put it into a box, to do that would be to limit it. It's still a relatively new concept.**

Olivia Steele is a designer and conceptual neon artist. She is also creative director and co-founder of Pret-a-Diner.

a temporary... something.

s.jovanovic

Deep tech house booming in the background, the smell of teriyaki ox cheeks in the air, and me sitting on a temporary scaffolding bar, surrounded by neon lights, in a Grade II listed building in the heart of Mayfair. A mouthful, I know, but I am unsure as to what to call this, perhaps a pop-up restaurant, or a pop-up art show, maybe a pop-up concert or even a pop-up cultural gathering?

They remain mere traces in our collective memory, and their real-time bespoke experience remains forever inaccessible.

"Pop-up" has become such a widely used term that its origin is quite muddled. The architecture that transcends history is more often than not considered to be the permanent one, the one still standing. Remembered less are the pavilions, spaces, and the events that began and ended in the past.

Now, in an age of rapid prototyping, advanced computer technologies, and an ever-prolonged global recession, competition to work in large architectural firms headed by contemporary starchitects is fierce. Gradually, the interest has begun scattering elsewhere, focusing on the design of the temporary and not the everlasting; the pop-up.

In a sense we could define all architecture to be essentially temporary, for while the form may sometimes appear permanent, the same cannot always be said of its function. What one begins to witness today is the form turning highly temporary as well.

Let us take Olivia Steele's definition of pop-up, as being anything under the span of six months, to be the first parameter. This reveals a wide array of structures constructed over the past decade, some that were up one day, and down the next...

It is also important to establish a hierarchy of terminology, firstly understanding the term pop-up to mean a temporary... something, as that is the most commonly used definition. The noun to follow could be almost anything that comes to

mind, the most popular ones being: installation, pavilion, exhibition, structure, stand, restaurant, or one of my favourites... "an urban intervention". Bear with me, there is a pattern emerging here.

There is also a new kid on the block, the global nomad — maybe just a synonym for something older. He or she is the one who (like the pop-up) is here today, gone tomorrow. So it makes sense that the constructed space is only catered to this individual's needs. Why buy a house when Werner Aisslinger has constructed the Fincube, a transportable home taken down and reconstructed wherever, and whenever?

Containers seem to be gaining popularity, like Adam Kalkin's Quik House or LOT-EK's temporary retail stores. Now you can not only live temporary, you shop temporary as well. If you wanted a night at the theatre, you might go to the Fuksas' stage sets at the Greek Theatre in Syracuse, or the temporary open-air tragedies by Ulysses Theatre on the Brioni islands, in Croatia.

Of course these pop-ups are less commercial than Pret-a-Diner, even less so than structures that genuinely deal with creating the ephemeral experience such as Coop Himme(l) bau's Pavilion 21, which attempts to 'materialize music into architecture' or Assemble Studio's Cineroleum and Theatre-on-the-Fly. The temporary structure, the pop-up, is becoming a brand in itself, hypothetically proposing an alternative to the monumental construction of the starchitect. Every temporary space has now unequivocally become the place to be.

What the pop-up offers is the consumption of the brand at any scale one could possibly desire. You can buy the object, you can buy the music, you can buy the food, you can buy the structure, and now, you can buy the total experience; so what can possibly come next?

Stefan Jovanovic is a second year student at the AA and has been Fulcrum's guest editor for this issue.



John Hejduk's "Collapse of Time" – built by AA students in Bedford Square in 1986.