

ADAPTIVE ACTIONS

EDITED BY JEAN-FRANÇOIS PROST

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(UK EDITION)

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Abandoned stairs hooked and stabilized to a tree. Located on the Mount Royal, close to a hospital. The existing staircase

possibly originated from a nearby building with similar black staircases and balcony railings.





Creating obstacles to traffic, artists take ambiguous, provocative or potentially liberating measures, such as building snowbanks ‘*impeding*’ traffic: are these merely sources of frustration, or a ploy to indulge in playful antics? They also perform free, benevolent deeds, such as a large drawing, on gossamer snow, of swirling loops gently illuminated by a skyscraper’s glass facade. The shovellers remodel park benches, provide renewed access to them, making the public garden more inviting and congenial.

As such, Jickling’s & Salez’s work questions the way in which the city ‘maintains’ itself. How do the municipality’s public actions and citizens’ individual actions coalesce

to alter the appearance and functioning of private and public spaces? The mere act of shovelling takes on a dimension where the commonplace city becomes the object of surrender, petitions, appropriation or negotiation. The space is thwarted, turned on its head, enhanced. Artists’ actions have unquestionably captured the public imagination and sparked a desire to re-experience a simple childhood pleasure, etched in our memory and our very souls. To personalize one’s space, express one’s otherness. Shovelling as a statement, a personal narrative, like an address to the other...



The shovellers’ stopover is a *dérive* of sorts within the microclimatic context of the city. They explore the landscape’s psychogeographic potential, atmosphere, emotions, as well as individual and collective, conscious and unconscious behaviour, primarily their own. Their work is inherently random and unpredictable, subject to the weather and other ambient conditions, their own personalities, their energy and that of others.

Julie Boivin, March 2005.

Translated from the French by Danielle Gauthier.
Part of DARE-DARE’s *Dis/location: projet d’articulation urbaine*.

TRANSFORM A CAR INTO A VERTICAL AXIS WIND TURBINE

Transform a machine that consumes energy into one that produces it...

Share construction plans and techniques. Devise wind turbines from automobiles. Produce energy to fuel any number of commonly used electronic devices, such as camcorders, laptops, radios, lamps, sound systems, game consoles.

The transformation must not cost more than the car itself, nor require any special expertise of the one performing it. The resulting wind turbines may be operated alone or linked together in a grid.

Grid-connected networks allow operators to satisfy their own energy needs while sharing their surplus with others.

The world's cars can potentially provide five times the current energy demand. Cities are overflowing with cars and the roofs of high buildings are perfect sites for setting up wind turbines.

The tested wind turbines operate very well in the chaotic, 360-degree wind conditions of the city and are protected from storms by an integrated breaking system.

Please feel free to share your experiences in transforming the cars into wind turbines.

You may also contact the instigator of this project to discuss methods of alteration and the energy potential of various types of cars: sedans, station waggon, 4-by-4s, Japanese, American, European. . .

List of tools:

A hammer, a nail, a wood chisel, riveting pliers, a saw, a big log.

List of materials:

1000 rivets, 1 car.

Specifications:

Construction time: 3 weeks

Setup: 2 hours

Electricity: 12 Volts or 115 VAC, 60HZ

Weight: about 150 pounds

Toolless assembly and dismantlement

Functions with wind speeds of 12 km/h or more

Integrated breaking system

Average dimensions: 7' x 5' x 5'

No maintenance

Clean, silent

Please see the You Tube video titled *Territoire non organisé 1* to visualize the transformation of a 4-door, automatic transmission NISSAN SENTRA 1992.

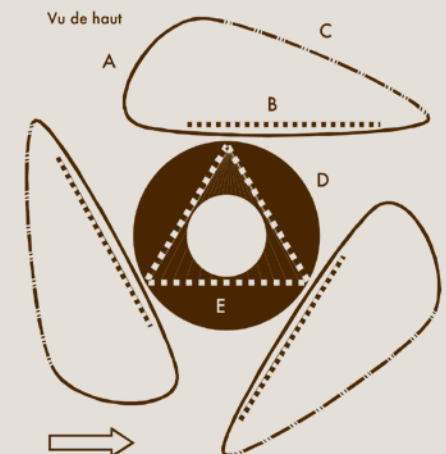
See instructions on the reverse side of this page.

Info: dg900@hotmail.com

TRANSFORM A CAR INTO A VERTICAL AXIS WIND TURBINE

- 1- Select a car.
- 2- Cut the sheet metal with the hammer and wood chisel while preserving the large surfaces.
- 3- Flatten the sections of metal with the hammer.
- 4- Create three large square pieces of equal size and weight from the cut sheets.
- 5- Assemble the three blades with rivets. Punch the holes with the nail and hammer.
- 6- Curve the three square sheets obtained in step 5 into the form of a "J" by hammering them around the log.
- 7- Cut out the side doors' protection bars, and place them as horizontal reinforcements (B) at the first and second thirds of each blade (A) in the right hand section of the "J." Curve the blades with the seat-belts (C) fastened to the extremities of the "J."
- 8- Deflate the two rear tires of the car. Saw off one of the wheels with its hub and unscrew the other.
- 9- Fasten the blades to the deflated tires using the sheet metal trimmings and break cables at the first and second thirds of each blade so as to form a cylinder. The first wheel with its hub must be placed above the wind turbine to form a vertical axis with the second wheel. Assemble the three blades around the deflated tires (D). The blades should be positioned such that, when seen from above, they look like the recycling symbol, and the cables must form an isosceles triangle above and below each wheel (E).
- 10- Inflate the tires (D) at a high enough pressure to tighten the cables (E) and lend rigidity to the turbine. Go slowly to make sure to position the blades

- 11- Remove the alternator from the car and fasten it to the turbine head assembly. Figure out a hub system—solutions will vary with car models—so that the drive pulley on the alternator can rotate on the upper wheel.
- 12- Rewind the coil in the alternator with thinner copper wire (use the car's audio and lighting cables) to increase battery charge at low speeds (wind). Refer to the document *Alternator Secrets*, available online, for this step.
- 13- Hang the wind turbine in a big tree, under a bridge, or in any other windy area.
- 14- Connect the alternator to the car battery to charge it with the electricity produced.
- 15- Sell the rest of the car to a scrap metal dealer to finance your future projects.



LIFE AFTER ARCHITECTURE

Architects often prefer photographing/showing buildings at the height of their glory: when the presence of time is imperceptible and user-trace absent. Some architectural agencies even control representation, allowing circulation and posting of approved images only. 'Now' is the *modus operandi* — priority goes to the image of the building in the present and very little concern to its progression, to the future. Much emphasis is given to what must be photographed, honoured, recorded and published in magazines rather than to users' adaptation of space and appropriation in various forms. Very little importance is given to post-conception and post-production, to a building's post-construction life cycle, structure or landscape.

Adaptive Actions operate on a shift in focus from representation and aesthetics to programming and built environments' possible uses. By observing, revealing and sharing resident adaptive actions, this project aims to encourage others to act and to engage with their environment, as well as to inform designers of possible programme extensions.

Can perceptions be altered and change pioneered through simple actions, images and ideas? Can the identification and representation of realities, which have to date been perceived as improbable or absurd, lead to new urban concepts and construction processes? The ongoing *Adaptive Actions* throws light on these questions. It explores alterations in the workplace, the

home and public spaces in general. The project lends creative voice to marginal causes and alternative urban lifestyles whose up-growth is otherwise precarious. Imagination and personal creativity's potential for impact on daily life is emphasized, particularly within public spaces. Thus, it indexes and reports existing actions in the city and encourages renewed activity, such as adaptation of architecture, landscape and objects unfolding in several stages.

SINGULARITIES

In order to document and create an inventory of existing urban alterations, an ongoing survey, an open call for collaboration is conducted through the Web and printed documents. It should be noted, however, that these undertakings occur on a small scale and are often only known to a limited number of locals. The request for postings accelerates the process. Collaborators register and log in as actors on the website and submit actions directly and instantly online, adding links, text or comments if desired. By offering a space in which to share experiences, ideas, types of actions and specific accomplishments, *Adaptive Actions* creates an inventory of alterations rarely available to the general public.

The website's objective is to collate a variety of actions of a popular, theoretical or scientific nature expressing conflict and cooperation, opposition and composition. The presentation of projects will create a vocabulary through which the collective imagination may express itself through the use of existing structures and will encourage the growth of similar actions.

ASSEMBLAGE AND COOPERATION

A programme of events, workshops and round tables in various localities on specific topics creates links, associations between actors and actions. The aim, as Maurizio Lazzarato would say, is not to neutralise differences but, conversely, to enrich the concept of commonality through these differences¹. As he argues, the challenge is to find ways to retain this multiplicity, to embrace heterogeneity while maintaining disparity.

Some proposed actions are conceptualised and carried out collectively. Our shared knowledge and expertise is applied towards accomplishing a creative project whose aim is to modify the intended use of architectural and urban elements². This communal project could, for instance, emphasise one existing and documented action to give it more resonance, a stronger impact. Some actors might wish to pursue, reinterpret, extend or carry out variations to existing adaptive actions³.

RELATIONAL SHIFT

Adaptive Actions initiates a relational shift. Resident collaboration is an essential part of the process, which involves the hybridisation of conventional and unusual urban realities, disseminating such novel notions as deghettoisation, as well as the use and assertion of public spaces through site-specific interventions. This relationship with residents in itself constitutes the first element of this action-research project and is critical to its success. While the instigator still intervenes in public spaces, he rather acts as catalyst. Relationally, the focus is on the concepts brought forth by the instigator rather than strictly on the end result. It is no

longer a question of infiltrating public space, but of penetrating the collective imagination. Consequently, the actors themselves become encompassed within the infiltration and act as agents of it. For the relational shift to occur, it must be an expression of the people as an integral part of the context.

The role of the instigator in this particular situation is to encourage a different attitude, initiate a new practice, exchange ideas, share knowledge and skills. This project explores, promotes and encourages daily actions, ways to stimulate active and committed participation and to challenge organized space as well as imposed movement patterns, by creating positive tensions, measuring and testing the limits of tolerated appropriation. A multiplicity of actions — such as displacing and leaving a chair in an unforeseen place⁴ — can have an impact on our urban lives.

INTERSTITIAL EXPERIMENTS

In Liverpool, one is struck by the quantity of urban plots zoned as *public land* but designed to remain in disuse, fenced off. A project with benches undertaken there, entitled *Public Loitering Area*⁵, and aimed at adding an additional element to the fenced-off property is a good example of a one-off space-activating micro-action. The project offered local residents the opportunity to participate by placing a bench on site or by proposing an alternate location. After launching this urban action with several benches, others joined in and installed many other benches on yet more sites, an initiative that continued for several months following the end of the Biennial⁶. This project and other adaptive actions are most commonly micro-actions and constitute

one form of resident participation complementary to conventional or non-conventional ways of building or to various-scale interventions. Micro, interstitial actions are needed to complete and activate large structures incapable of, and not conceived for, adaptation to constantly changing local realities. They give flexibility to large structures subject to increasingly complicated regulations, legal obligations, etc.

PLACES AND NON-PLACES

In Montreal, Canada, in the late '80s, a Portuguese plaza was designed to commemorate and mirror the character of a local neighbourhood. Today, virtually all Portuguese residents have relocated and this very specific cultural space is left as a strange relic that in no way answers the contextual uses of current residents. In this case and many others, citizen appropriation or actions represent an interesting alternative to adapting buildings to the flow of changes and enable activation and meaning to many different public spaces. Increased mobility and population movements, as well as acceleration phenomena, displace people in places which have no personal memories or personal connections to desires... Current and frequent displacements entail the need for personal appropriation in order to bring character and singularity to spaces which may be too generic or, conversely, too specific to foster a sense of belonging.

OPEN PROCESS AND ARCHITECTURAL APPROPRIATIONS INTEGRATED TO FUTURE BUILDING:

The submitted action *Atwater*⁷ — bird feeders installed on the balcony of a large repetitive concrete tower — reveals

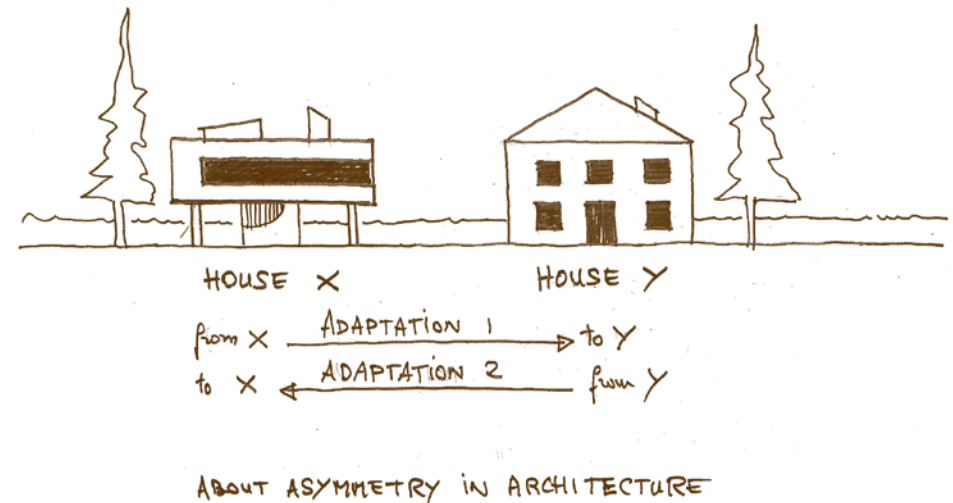
an interesting addition, a (possibly) missing element in the conception of this important twenty-five-floor, 150-metre-long residential project. Environmental studies have proven that similar towers in urban centres have a negative impact on bird life: they create barriers, disrupt flight patterns and reduce sources of food. This revealed action, the initiator of which is unknown, could serve as an indicator, a sign of an unfulfilled need, and be integrated into a new architectural project and programme.

Through similar documented actions, *Adaptive Actions* explores and gives value to non-linear, continuous construction processes with phases (conception, production, post-production, management...) where distinctions are attenuated and transitions less brutal or even non-existent. As Stephen Wright states about art in a broad sense, it's about thinking 'in terms of its specific means (its tools) rather than its specific ends (artwork).'

⁸

This new scenario generates non-existent transversal links, accelerated cycles, changed attitudes and roles. Buildings, like cities, are living entities, change constantly in unpredictable ways and need to be constantly rethought through all these cycles rather than simply built and demolished. All buildings are initially biased and adhere to a programme. Buildings would thus be constantly observed, monitored, rethought and reworked. Residents, through intuition and observation, may suggest actions that, with more means and further discussion, could progressively materialise.

Text continues next page...



Residential development in Pessac (Gironde, France) has demonstrated that Le Corbusier's architecture is quite flexible — occupants can reintroduce roofs, 'real windows' etc., in order to obtain a 'classic' house. But it does not work reversely, as seen in the drawing above: *The Asymmetry in Architectural Transformation*.

TRANSFORMABLE AND AUTOMATED ARCHITECTURE

To facilitate appropriations and allow adaptations, many flexible and mobile attributes are presently being explored and integrated into structures. The conceptualisation of such devices raises many issues and challenges. To what extent should or can objects or devices be contextualised to changing situations, users and new parameters? Moreover, to what extent can they answer the distinctive needs of users, of a programme or specific event? To that effect, various strategies for context-adaptation of devices can be introduced: positioning and setting modes, designs with component-modification or collapsible functions, dimensional variations... However, many transformable devices or construction elements have never been tested or instigated by users and many mutative possibilities are vastly deemed symbolic. Many difficulties arise in using units conceived with transformable and adjustable devices. Changing elements are often not instigated for various reasons: overly complicated or non-functional, too time-consuming or unnecessary, or simply not corresponding to the real need for change. Most mutative attributes are utopian and offer little individual innovation coefficient.

There are effective risks related to transformation-based aesthetics, to device concepts with no real potential for use; for instance, pillar-shaped billboards (Morris) are unusable due to the impossibility of modification, inoperable mobility and great complexity, rendering permanent that which was supposed to be temporary. In the research project *Adaptive House*⁹, adaptation is, conversely,

effortless. Hundreds of sensors survey movement and behaviour, and a central computer hub analyses and stores the data and then creates patterns of uses. Programming is done and adjusted by computers. Temperatures are adapted to body activity: higher temperatures if inactive, lower if very active... To counter current building inefficiencies, architects are presently inventing and exploring a new self-referential and self-mutating digital and automated architecture that could maintain constant dialogue with its environment and the human body; it would necessitate little human participation, input or activation. These buildings pre-programmed for change, which constantly survey and analyse users and context (in relation to the body rather than the intellect), will report and implement adjustments accordingly. But how and when will this new environment be implemented, and to what degree will it be ethical and respect privacy rights or, most importantly, forecast desired changes?

NO END IN SIGHT

Not all future transformations can and should be anticipated and integrated in building production and design. Rather than being planned, they should be given a space, a structure to grow, to expand, to take shape. By leaving undetermined and un-programmed spaces in buildings, architects could contribute to their development. Funds could be allocated to future programming of events and possible transformations that could be coordinated by a group of citizens. However, the possibility of buildings changing progressively, more organically, without resorting to traditional grand schemes and gestures, necessitates an ideological shift. As long as representational

space continues to dominate innovation and exploration, little change can occur. The predominant emphasis on aesthetics over experience, ideas or uses is certainly one of the biggest obstacles to creating a new and alternative architecture. This architecture is less oriented on the final product and more on the 'use value'¹⁰ and what Anne Querrien calls the building 'enunciation'¹¹. The interest and desire are there, but academic, professional and media pressure limit and control explorations, and stifle inspiration and creative possibilities. How can we get beyond mere curiosity and amusement and actually begin to implement these changes?

Adaptive actions are often seen as individualistic, personal, fragmentary and spontaneous. Since these actions are unplanned, rarely thought through globally — i.e., in relation to the building as a whole and the city — they are often considered undesirable, of little value and unconstructive. Uncoordinated resident adaptive actions can negatively alter the overall visual force of expression of a building by creating unplanned additions. However, many user adaptations are positive, a normal evolution to construction as a nuance or critique of a building, and should therefore in many cases be encouraged and reviewed before they are removed¹².

Of course, input from a mediator or coordinator can balance the needs and requirements of all parties, recognizing the value of aesthetics, materials, urban and building design, as well as taking into account a crucial element of all such aspects: usage, which is undoubtedly more efficient upon consideration of the users' perspective. Very little thought and time are given, and budgets

allocated, to post-production, in order to pursue, improve, implement and adapt constructions for various and changing users.

Resident adaptive actions prolong the life of buildings by progressively adapting their environments in a number of small, sustainable stages, thus avoiding accelerated or premature dilapidation as well as the need to resort to large-scale urban-renewal projects.

Jean-François Prost, 2008

1 Yves Citton, *Puissance de la variation*, Maurizio Lazzarato, *Multitudes* 20, pp.187—200 and book: *Puissances de l'invention. La psychologie économique de Gabriel Tarde contre économie politique*, also published at *Les empêchements de penser en rond*, 2002.

2 A series of 'open houses' and workshops were organised at SPACE (London) to discuss several proposed actions or context of intervention—see Olympic walks and suppers following the *All Aboard* action (www.adaptiveactions.net/action/46/)

3 Such as Gewuerfel's action *Building the Future?* which reused the *All Aboard* action paint to erase pictures taken by this urban photographer of the past and lost Lower Lea Valley in London (see p.38).

4 Also such as the *All Aboard* action (see p.32)

5 *Adaptive Actions* is the continuation of prior research initiated at the Liverpool Biennial 2006 — *Public Loitering Area* (see p.38)

6 A new phase of this project is being initiated as we speak by a Liverpool resident on new proposed sites—for news and further detail, visit the *Adaptive Actions* website.

7 See: www.adaptiveactions.net/action/71/

8 Stephen Wright, *The future of the reciprocal readymade: an essay on use value and art related practice*, Parachute 117, p123

9 For further detail: *Adaptive house* at www.adaptiveactions.net/action/67/

10 idem, Stephen Wright, p.123

11 Anne Querrien, *Fabriquer des seuils à une troisième nature*, in *Multitudes* no20, Spring 2005, pp.13-22

12 Such as the housing project by Le Corbusier in Pessac, France, transformed by residents and currently being restored to its original state.

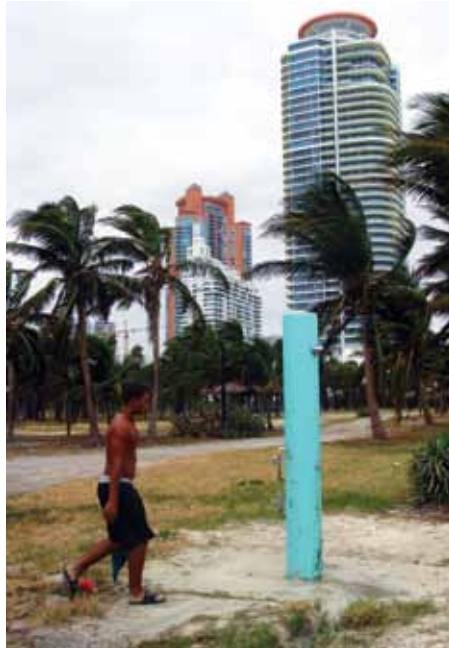


May 11, 2001 The surveillance camera (and similarly, the idea of the camera) creates a virtual topography where movement is influenced and, in a sense, re-constructed to conform to social codes of behaviour and unspoken rules of transaction. The way we express our desires through touch, the way we relax or tense our bodies, the pace of movement, the way we gaze, are influenced, pre-supposed and reinforced by surveillance mechanisms. Moments of deviance or the insertion of a 'lag-time space' exposes the constructed façade of efficiency and normality often resulting in security intervention and removal from the premises. Within the five performance vignettes, I reveal the concealment of surveillance cameras in the mall and turn the cameras into the subject of the performances. I am interested in finding ways to expose and re-imagine how the camera performs in the space of the mall and how the camera's performativity influences our gestures, movements and social cognition. My body, the surrounding architecture and a hidden sound apparatus worn inside of my clothes are used as the tools to highlight and re-contextualize the camera. Some questions I am asking

are: what happens when the role of the surveilled and surveiller is confused and the camera becomes the subject/object of investigation? How can I reconstruct the invisible and visible environment created by the camera before security guards intervene? And how can this altering of the visual and aural landscape in the mall immerse knowing and unknowing audiences in a momentary experience that rests somewhere between the poetic and the potential for an alternative physical embodiment of space?

Part of the *Art Action Actuel*







*'How one manoeuvres in the systems,
determines what size + kind of space
we work and live in'*
Gordon Matta Clark

The city and surrounding spaces are in a state of constant flux.

We walk the streets and the cities that do not belong to us. The curb to the park green is not yours to play on; whilst the long road which you pay tax for is also not yours. The water falls from the sky, it belongs to the sea and its rivers and streams, but we still have to pay excruciating prices for bottled water and water-rates because despite the fact that you can never own water, philosophically, it still seems to belong to someone. Engaged in a critical yet ironic humour, these primarily public works are a communal debate against gentrification. In regeneration public space is often slowly reshaped and taken away from us. By intervening on the public sphere we

can visually see how little public spatial engagement we have. This affects us overall, by stifling the creative or personal engagement with the city, the street and ultimately the community and its environment around it.

The action is emotive, forging some debates amongst the public both art world and not. Just as significant, it represents a possibility, a re-construction of collective artist-groups before it and brings to the table a well-deserved question of the transgressive nature of social-political resistance in art and its public sphere.



BLUE WALL

Adaptive Actions programming at the London 2012 Olympic site: observations, actions, open houses, workshops, walks and suppers.





TINY REVOLUTIONS AT THE BLUE FENCE IN EAST LONDON

URBAN ACTS: WHO BUILDS CITIES?

The Docklands in the 1980s and 90s, King's Cross from the 90s to the present: the Lower Lea Valley in East London, especially Stratford, Hackney Wick and over to Dalston, where a new transportation hub complete with monumental residential, business and shopping centre is being built to be completed before the opening of the Olympic Games in 2012. Little by little the so-called metropolitan 'eyesores' are physically, infrastructurally and demographically regenerated. However, the often rapid changes resulting from large-scale urban and social regeneration draw increasing criticism. There is talk of a purely economically oriented tabula rasa principle which totally ignores the historical, ecological and sociocultural qualities of a place and

considers neither the knowledge nor the needs of local residents. Furthermore, complaints are being voiced about the disappearance of heterogeneous zones and the increasing impossibility to appropriate urban space apart from existing patterns of action. While some are profiting from the 'upgraded' areas and can fulfill and reflect themselves in them, others are forced to quietly disappear or are brought face to face with the loss of familiarity and identification. Between the profiteers and losers an ever increasing field of actors is opening up who are demanding alternative strategies to such more and more investor-oriented urban planning activities. Just as during the golden age of urban criticism of modernistic paradigms of progress (from Guy Debord to Jane Jacobs and Richard Sennett), one demands the democratic right to the city and public participation in the shaping of urban spaces.

Never before were there so many transdisciplinary urban projects intermediate between art, architecture and theory, some already well integrated, devoted to a 'bottom up' approach to urban development. In view of the increasing pressures of transnational capital interests which now frequently form partnerships with local governments (keyword: private public partnership), demands for civil rights are once again on the rise, participative models are reconsidered and local instruments of active participation are put to the test. 'Urban Act' is a publication that provides detailed insight into the latest international developments. It presents groups, initiatives and projects in the field of alternative urban development, discusses strategies and tools, indicates problems and limitations, and strives for the formation of local and

international alliances. Numerous examples from different cities are given ranging from playful interventions to the development of powerful participative instruments. Common denominator is the search for new ways of urban action with clear emphasis on existing power relations and basic structural conditions. When the actual effectiveness of these 'new' ways of urban action are clearly questioned, reflexivity not naivety is called for: 'Are they temporary or lasting? Are they only critical, confrontational, oppositional? Or could they also be transformative, proposing something else, while radically questioning the existing laws, rules, policies, models and modes of working and living in the city?'

ADAPTIVE ACTIONS

For several years, the Canadian architect and artist Jean-François Prost, a member of the 'Urban Acts' platform (PEPRAV, European Platform for Alternative Practice and Research on the City)¹, is devoting himself to these questions. *Adaptive Actions*, his latest project, has brought him to the Blue Fence in East London. Like many other artists and architects, he was both fascinated and irritated by the aesthetic and symbolic force of this blue architectural security structure. Apart from predefined instructions, can such a controlled area, planned using a strict 'top-down' approach, provide opportunities for the appropriation of space? This was the question that Prost investigated both empirically and practically, on his own and through collaborative efforts during his six-month stay as artist-in-residence (from September 2007 to March 2008) at the renowned art institution SPACE² in London. He researched local traces of subversive appropriation of space

and documented graffities, prohibited practices and other anonymous statements of protest and dissent. At the same time, he initiated *Adaptive Actions*: On one of his walks he found an empty can of paint which enabled him to determine the exact nature of the blue colour of the fence. He then purchased the same blue paint and started to paint components, plants and objects that he found in the immediate vicinity of the fence. To this day one can find occasional traces of his 'space-activating micro acts': blue-colour plastic chairs, rocking horses or ornamental palm trees, located in abandoned places within eyeshot of the Blue Fence.

For Jean-François Prost the area around the Blue Fence in East London was one of many urban settings for the project *Adaptive Actions*. In more than 20 other places from Amsterdam to Miami and Sheffield to New-York this professional architect investigated and tested strategies for the reinterpretation and reutilisation of existing spatial structures. The website contains a photo archive of activities that he either discovered or carried out himself: anonymous trails, improvised shelters under bridges, tents on the roofs of high-rises, openings in demarcation fences and other traces of individual conversions of architectures which were originally intended for other purposes. Documented using numerous pictures and only short comments, the simple urban anthropological law is thus made visually comprehensible: a city is not just buildings and plans, but develops through its people making use of it. People who do not necessarily adhere to the laws of design and construction, or aesthetic specifications, but may well adapt existing architectures to their own needs.

RELATIONAL AESTHETICS, OPEN SOURCE & STRUCTURAL EXCLUSION

In addition to photographs taken by the artist, this website also contains numerous entries from other 'adaptive actors.' His call for public uploads of found or personal adaptive alterations points to the central theme of Jean- François Prost's modus operandi: 'relation building' and 'resident collaboration.' Prost tries to involve as many local residents and interested people as possible and motivate them to discover or create other 'adaptive actions.' He posts open calls for collaboration and the submission of contributions, and arranges workshops, group walks and joint dinners at various localities. About 20 people participated in two workshops and an Olympic Perimeter Walk in London. For two days the group, consisting mainly of artists, activists, architects, theorists and local residents, was engaged in an intensive exchange to 'explore singular ways of thinking and activating disused, divided and controlled areas.' By actively involving both experts on urban matters and everyday lives in these discussions and actions, Prost tries to counter the predominance of autonomous authorship in arts and architecture with the formation of networks. In addition, both the physio-spatial work (*Adaptive Action*) and its visual representation (photography, video) are removed from the marketable copyright cycle. The temporary, transient actions at various locations remain anonymous while the photographs on the web are considered open source products and are thus accessible to all users. What sounds temptingly simple in the currently dominant discourse of 'relational aesthetics' (Nicolas Bourriaud) has its structural limitations in practice. In

spite of the open call and the strictly democratic, non-elitist standards, the participants were positioned in similar areas of social space. Although they came from different geographic regions, ranging from Japan and Finland to Austria, and had different professional backgrounds and motivations for participation, most had academic degrees and specialized knowledge about current urban discourses in general and about specific local situations. They used the same language, shared similar visual and verbal competencies and had read the same books. Most participants were also familiar with the field of contemporary art and had an extensive understanding of architecture. Current economic, political and social power relations and their physical and symbolic manifestations in urban areas were critically analyzed. While issues involving social exclusion and gentrification were intensively discussed in the context of 'urban regeneration', the social homogeneity of the group was taken for granted. Nobody was surprised about the structural exclusions of social actors who were not familiar with the discourses and institutions of contemporary art and architecture.

INSTITUTIONS: SPACE!

The structural and institutional setting for the project *Adaptive Actions* / London was the renowned art institution SPACE located in the Olympic borough of Hackney, about 2 km from the future Olympic village. SPACE was founded in 1968 by a group of artists around the op-art painter Bridget Riley in the then unused but now completely gentrified St. Katharine's Docks, northeast of the Tower Bridge. To this day the initial

intention of SPACE to adapt empty buildings to provide artist studios is still the most important mission of the now 40-year-old institution. SPACE calls itself 'the leading provider of studios for visual artists in London.' Affordable studio space in 18 buildings is rented out to up to about 600 artists. Most studios are located in empty industrial and commercial buildings in East London. In addition to providing studio space, SPACE also plays an active role in the cultural life of Hackney. It administers a gallery, an artist-in-residence programme providing living and studio space, and a collaboration programme especially for the integration of marginalized local residents. Since 2005, SPACE holds *Legacy Now!*, an event which aims to 'address the need to consider the impact of the Olympic Games and redevelopment on the East End.' The 'Olympic Artists Forum,' which is also closely associated with SPACE, is defined as 'an information and events platform for artists and creative practitioners engaging with the Olympics and the changing cultural landscape of London.'

From the very beginning of Jean-François Prost's stay as artist-in-residence, urban regeneration, art and Olympic Games was the omnipresent theme at SPACE. It is therefore not surprising that his attention was directed toward the Olympic Park and the Blue Fence. At the end of his stay Jean-François became directly involved in the Olympic activities of SPACE: During the 3rd Olympic Artist Event in March 2008, he presented a video documentary of his *Adaptive Actions* project in London which was very much liked by the official representatives of London 2012. Although Jean-François Prost and the participants of his workshop were looking

for counterstrategies to official spatial and visual policies in the vicinity of the future Olympic Park, they ultimately became a legitimized and much appreciated part of them. How the integration of numerous micro revolutions can result in a powerful bottom-up movement against economically oriented top-down planning remains to be seen. From today's perspective the numerous 'tiny revolutions' at the Blue Fence seem to be more than romantic, playful or defiant responses which can now symbolically comment on the prevailing system of rigorous demolition.

Judith Laister

Translated from German by Harald Keller.
First published in Gat webmagazine, February 2008

1 www.peprav.net/tool

2 www.spacestudios.org.uk





The Olympic blue wall erected in September 2007 around the building site, measures 11 miles long creating new boundaries and reducing access to outlining areas. Existing roads, bike paths have been blocked. Londoners and mostly nearby residents must often travel several additional miles to reach the other side of the enclosed area. The chosen colour, the opaqueness and sheer size of the wall have attracted a lot of attention and criticism. Graffiti and stickers appear regularly on the surface of the wall. To remove these frequent and various forms of visual expression — of protest for the most part — from the surface, several employed workers regularly inspect and repetitively strip and repaint the 10-foot-high wooden barrier.

Creating extensions to the Olympic Blue Wall by painting objects found in the vicinity.

Through this repetitive activity, imitating a similar action done by others — walking around the Olympic perimeter and painting in blue — I progressively discover the life around the site, its concealed aspects. *All Aboard* is an action which questions the status and character of the wall, the relation of things to context, the making and maintenance processes. It is meant to reflect on what is missing, on what was done, and initiate thought on what could be done through alternative ways in the present and the future. How can structures, even those restricting access, become permeable to change and accept



existing realities, appropriations and support expression? Can the Olympic wall become more than what it currently is, i.e. less about self image, but, on the contrary, a representation of the outside, where Londoners currently live? How can we give meaning to important periods of transitions such as the four-year Olympic construction site — which, even if temporary, defines our experience and memory of the city, is part of the legacy of the games? While much needed reflection has been given to the life of Olympic structures after the games very little attention has been given to the present and the four previous construction years that are an integral part of the Legacy of the Olympics which does, indeed, start today, now.









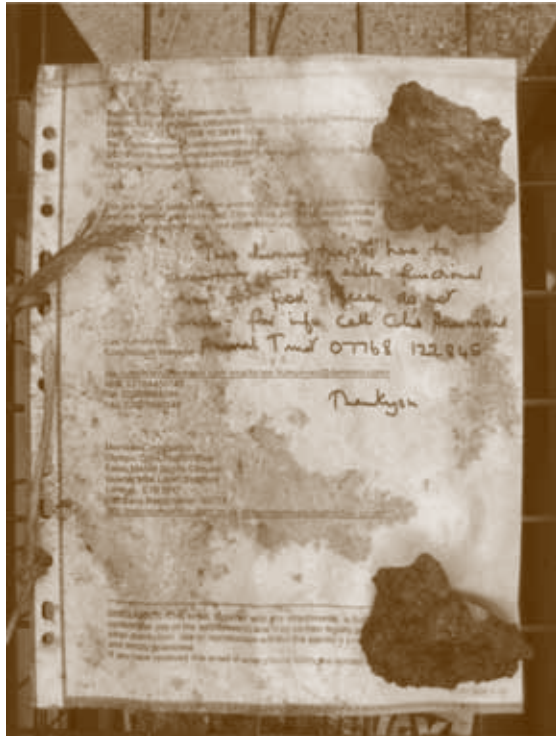
Open-House participant Gewuerfel proposed to pursue and interpret the *All Aboard* action through her own photographic work of the Olympic site. AA

2070B is a critical take on the Olympic Delivery Authority's (ODA) approach 'Demolish. Dig. Design' by transforming the blue fence into a temporary exhibition space. Past images of the

future sports venues from the inside of the fence are being displayed and later on erased; whatever has existed previously is being demolished. Blue paint takes over. The ODA's attempt to erase the past of the Lower Lea Valley will leave a bleak space behind, which cannot be filled by constructing a futuristic Olympic Park.







2012 OLYMPIC STADIUM CATS RESCUE

'The Trust was contacted on the 9th July 2007 by the London Development Agency to remove four kittens that were trapped in one of the empty units on the Olympic site.

The site was due to be handed over on 10th July to the Olympic Delivery Authority who would not accept the site with cats in the buildings. We attended the site to rescue the four starving kittens which were living in a pile of pallets stacked inside the building. Whilst we were there we noticed approximately 15 other cats on the site, two of which appeared to have recently had kittens. They were going in

and out of the buildings on site, many of which had open windows. We were told by people from the adjoining unit that the number of cats was approximately 20 to 25. We offered to rescue the rest of the cats and asked to be given enough time to rescue the remaining cats. While we were there we were approached by various builders and people working on the site who told us that there were many cats roaming all over the Olympic site.'

Animal Trust website





Made in late February 2007 *The Games* is a 15 minute film that involves staging a condensed and surreal Olympic games amid the East London sites of the future 2012 Olympic Park, poised on the brink of total transformation. Through a guerrilla choreography and scenography (collaboration on set design with The Office for Subversive Architecture) strange Olympian sporting activities take over an area filled with junk and rubble, factories, allotments, construction workers and multiple communities. A commentary guides the way through these Olympic Games — from a diminutive torchbearer's arrival in derelict streets to a final award ceremony. *The Games* harks to the post war 1948 Olympics, echoing the 'making do' and 'getting by' attitude and celebrating the classic British underdog making it against the odds.



Olympic Walks
 W01 xxxxxxxxxxxx
 W02 - - - - -







DETROIT

A baffling, unsettling experience for any newcomer, arriving in the city of Detroit comes as a shock. Indeed, no amount of reading up on the city or knowledge of a few statistics can prepare you for being met with a huge, abandoned train station on arrival. This strange feeling only grows on discovering an impressive and near-appealing series of boarded-up buildings, but becomes disquieting on encountering the first burned-out shells of houses and yellow-painted Ds on those slated for destruction.

Ravaged by daily fires—houses, cars, trash cans—the City of Detroit has lost more than 200,000 homes in fifty years, covering an area almost equivalent to that of Montreal. Although Detroit's plight is all too easily compared to

post-apocalyptic devastation, the fact that it escapes all logic gives it a tragic character. Despite several attempts at revitalization centred on the Renaissance Center—a monolithic mirrored-glass building complex parachuted into downtown Detroit—the city's social and urban fabric continues to unravel. Since the post-industrial era, globalization, the civil-rights riots of 1967, the exodus of half the population—mostly whites—Detroit's population now hovers below a million—85% African-American—and continues to decline, while the surrounding suburbs continue to thrive. Indeed, the population keeps growing in the outlying suburbs, among the wealthiest in the country continued to thrive until recently. All too palpable, the chasm between the inner city and the outskirts is that much wider in that it results from the lack of any collective vision.



DOTS

Since 1986, artist Tyree Guyton has been progressively taking over vacant houses in his neighbourhood with the Heidelberg Project. Here, the home is the medium of expression used as a means of affirmation and social critique using an idiosyncratic visual language that is both playful and trenchant. Disconcerted by the project, the city of Detroit twice bulldozed (in 1991 and 1999) several Heidelberg houses, including one belonging to the artist).

To challenge the sometimes arbitrary, sometimes strategic demolitions, Guyton painted coloured spots throughout the city on homes that, though uninhabitable, were not slated for destruction. These spots question the logic behind the placing of the numbered Ds for destruction. The artist's subjective action puts that of the city into perspective, rationalized by

so-called safety and health standards. Guyton thus lays bare one of the major factors of uncertainty in the face of municipal decisions and the obstacles to citizens' involvement.

Icon of decline, the Detroit house has, over the years, become the seat of resistance, the ultimate means of personal expression and social protest.



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In June 1998, during the *2 Jours Brefs Symposium* in Saint-Félicien (Lac-Saint-Jean, Québec), Martin Dufrasne offered his services as a domestic 'Little Fisherman' fountain to beautify the front lawns of the small village. The price was simply set: 15 minutes of immobility in return for one fishing story.

AA: Through this action, an existing fountain-sculpture in a public park popular with the village becomes a soft monument: living and mobile, participatory, an element of desire, sociability and negotiation.



Reverso was my first experience in public spaces. I decided to work on the street walls, changing its hard texture with a material from another universe allowing another possible perception of the city. So I covered Mr. Roque Medina's façade with strong fluorescent pink synthetic fur and perfumed it with cinnamon and vanilla scents. Roque Medina works as a *cartonero*, making a minimum wage, collecting cardboard and plastic on the streets, and then selling it.

Therefore, I broke the building code, breaking up its texture, color and usual smell. The constructed order was placed out. This new wall called to mind certain emotions: childish, lovely emotions, home, and comforting scents. It was a very poor house, but a happy one.

Inside, many things that Roque Medina collects, what other people discard. Roque's power lies in transforming those things that are no longer valuable to anybody else into new functional objects for his own use and into the money he needs for living. Modifying the grey texture of urban aesthetics. Putting the accent on what capitalism considers miserable lives. As things are not what they seem, Roque's house turned into the brightest, the prettiest, the tenderest. Trading power, prestige and social recognition roles.

Pretending to bring a different paradigm, a different experience of perception, with no answer but lots of questions.





A MICROPOLITICS OF USES

Can a use become an active presence in our surroundings, in the same way as buildings and installations? We are using the descriptive term of use, not user. Too often, critics are tempted to apply the term 'use' to the single subjectivity of the user and to draw a simple deduction from this. Summarised in this way, use would simply concretise and materialise the intention of the user or of a collective of users. We, however, believe that it is possible to question the presence and action of a use (though without neglecting those individualities who, we can assume, have initiated or formulated these actions). This hypothesis opens up two perspectives.

On the one hand, it invites us to consider use as an agency, which follows its own logic, independently of those subjects that propel, traverse or contradict it. Therefore, we can assume, that a use makes use of a 'constitution' ¹ that is specific to itself, made up of realities that are material, or imaginary, relational or spatial, intellectual or affective... If use is as much an active figure within the city as buildings, public spaces or traffic infrastructure, then use too will leave its own trace, 'objectively' leaving its own trace. This hypothesis prompts us to retrace or relate these uses through those fragments of speech or those fragments of reality that these uses reveal. Unlike buildings or spaces, use often eludes the work of mapping; so it becomes vital to chronicle, to tell the tale of these uses — to construct a story from them, with them, without these

stories becoming bound up within a single interpretative frame. Use takes form imperfectly; it cannot be reduced to a single way of being used. The 'constitution' of a use is inseparable from the multiplicity of accounts that it gives room to (of sociologists, photographers, fictions, conversations), it is indivisible from this insistent murmuring that bears witness to the presence of use.

On the other hand, this hypothesis leads us towards an 'ecology of signs'. Necessarily, a use produces a sign, whether sporadically or inadvertently. Each sign offers a partial view, a temporary glimpse through which it is possible to approach a reality, a particular moment, of a given situation. Each sign opens up a path of sorts: something foreseen, offering a view, drawing attention. Can we grab hold of this opportunity? In what ways are we receptive? Open, available? What is it that catches the attention of the passer-by, of the sociologist, of the architect or the video artist? This is real micropolitical defiance, being able to discover, to experiment, to build on this sensibility. This ecology of signs, this micropolitics of sensitivity², prevents the observer from simply reading reality through its most obvious, most accessible, its loudest, most visible forms.

This article is a response to an invitation from the creative-initiators of the *Adaptive Actions* project, via Jean-Francois Prost — an invitation to learn about their initiative and to extend, displace, re-shape, from our perspective, a sociology of activity. It would have been out of the question for us to take on the

overriding position of commentator, in relation to the countless urban experiments that have been taking place within the framework of this initiative. It would have been utterly inappropriate for us to try to theorise or conceptualise a project that, on its own terms, is perfectly sufficient in itself. Instead, we place ourselves firmly alongside Gilles Deleuze³ in considering that our sociological work isn't a commentary on the initiative of itself but a way of engaging with those questions and theories that are raised or embodied within these actions, or in any case, embodied within those actions that caught our eye. For us, *Adaptive Actions* assumes the role of a 'release' 'pivot' or even of a 'catalyst'. *Adaptive Actions* forces us, as sociologists, to explore through our own words and concepts, theoretical perspectives and practices that are opened up by this initiative.

THE POLYVALENT TACTICS OF USES⁴

Buildings and spaces are never entirely confined to the function that is assigned to them by their builders. They are immediately confronted by that inaugural and transgressive event that is its use (any use). Necessarily, a use or a utilisation is an event. They happen. They emerge and reveal admissible and acquired modes of operation. Buildings and spaces are, therefore, permanently exposed to the risk of transgression, diversion, overspill; or, to put it another way, they are inevitably confronted by those multiplicity of uses which every day emerge out of them, among them, but which are, all the same, deployed in opposition, against them. What they (these buildings and spaces)

initiate or awaken (a use, a utilization, a mode of employment) is inclined to turn against them and, in turn, to disturb or to contradict them. What their reality destines them to (to be used, to be put into practice) equally determines that which unsettles and challenges them. A use represents, simultaneously, that which actualizes the function of any given building and space and that which, at the same time, comes to frustrate it. A use is made up of this duality, it is set within this duality. It is firmly inscribed within the functional and utilitarian framework that is implied within any installation or building without admitting reduction or assimilation. It can work towards the functional renewal of the existing as a way of calling into question. Implied within this mode of operation, without being subjected to it, is a use that is equivocal and reversible. It is what we term, after Michel Foucault, as the 'polyvalent tactics of uses' — a principle that follows the same use (to use, to practise, to utilize), a use which 'can be put to service to a variety of ends, within confrontations, among adversaries, each and every one.'⁵ We are all too familiar with those rich reserves of ingenuity that urban politics resorts to in order to contain and force the use of a city into a functional optics: invasive aesthetication, the over-signification of urban marketing, the super-saturation of places with programmed and labeled initiatives. How is it possible then, on this same ground, of uses, to demolish these influences? To adopt a different perspective? To work these vital torsions and diversions? A use is necessarily disputed, contested, controversial — a struggle (in Michel Foucault's formulation). But a dominant urban politics will often

take up — take up these uses — without even having to struggle for them, for lack of any protagonists who might challenge and contest on this same ground. The adept skateboarder is one of those rare non-submissive breeds of the city centre — or hyper-centres. They elevate this 'polyvalent tactics of uses' to an altogether different level. Skateboarding can take place in any type of built environment and where most urban environments and their 'furnishings' which ordinarily block or prevent the free use of public space, for the skateboarder this represents, by contrast, a wonderful opportunity to experiment with tricks and moves. This undisciplined art resists — despite the will of the 'decision makers' to assimilate this into a sport and to relegate it, to peripheral zones, to skateparks. The truth is that there is no use that cannot be reclaimed or instrumentalised.

AN INSISTENT BANALITY⁶ THAT STARTS TO UNDERMINE THE NORMAL ROUTINES OF SPACE AND PRACTICE

A use never imposes itself as a single will: it travels, progresses, traversing the gravitational pulls of the everyday, often running up against norms of operation. This insistent banality is a sign of its strength. This quiet tenacity helps it persist. 'Even when, or rather above all when, these exceptional acts have been created, it is necessary to return to everyday life to verify and confirm the validity of its creation [...] It is therefore this, everyday life, which measures and gives rise to changes that operate "elsewhere".'⁷ Use meets the everyday

where it disperses, fades, alters itself. It is proof of the everyday that it affirms its own autonomy. It is through the mediation of small initiatives, that recur and repeat, that freedom is made manifest. How many times has a landscaping project brutally reconfigured a space, without the least consideration for the pedestrian's use of a place, requiring the 'countless pedestrian'⁸ to deviate from their path. But use resists: barriers are broken, lightly trodden fields are, on certain days revealed as a path furrows its way again in its place and makes visible the persistence and stubborn nature of a use. It is this insistence, humble and murmuring, that represents, truly, the polemical resources of the weak. It also represents the polemical resources of the dominated. What can it oppose? Its obstinate presence. Its never-ending presence. Its presence that makes its presence felt, immediately. Its practice which says exactly what it does⁹, which it restates, over and again. That which renders it menacing and improper, surprisingly so. Why does the presence of youngsters hanging about on an estate, why is this so disturbing? Because their presence has become too insistent, their daily familiarity now becomes too threateningly everyday, their language too insistently 'murmuring'? These youngsters serve to remind us, however simply, that the right of sociability is for us to render ourselves present to one another, to sustain regular encounters in spaces that are common to us. If this/their 'blatancy' irritates us, is this then a sign that the everyday as it appears to us now has become unbearable? What does it mean when the everyday practice of an everyday use becomes so troubling to us that it forces

us to discipline, to regulate, to dislocate, to aestheticise, in a way, to keep at a distance? Urban politics redoubles its efforts to ensure that the city is not caught in its own ordinarieness. It equips, makes eventful, renews, embellishes, animates. Foucault invokes the lives of infamous men. Nowadays, we would say that uses become scandalous insofar as they become familiar, absorbed into the everyday, that moment when they become common, or common to use, the point at which they render themselves obvious, needing neither intermediary nor intercession. Their insistent banality, renders them as emblems that are truly present—and it is this powerfully affirmative character that ‘upsets’.

BETWEEN ADDED-ON EXISTENCE AND A REALITY DEFICIT

A use builds on its own dimensions, on its own fixtures, within those spaces and buildings in which it makes itself manifest. It grafts a new perspective onto these spaces. It intersperses and puts modes of operation out of order. It ascribes from the outset an additional life of sorts, that is unexpected, pressing, sometimes unwanted. A use breathes new intensities of life: of astonishment or irritation, of tensions and pleasure. Sometimes it seems so improbable that these views just surface, suddenly. Their disconcerting character can discourage attention too; seeing avoided out of fear of being compromised. A use can, therefore, persist on the threshold of visibility and legibility. Too maddening to actually be seen. Too strange to be appropriated and deciphered. Just because it is there, present and active within a

situation, does not mean that it will attain a whole and complete reality. As Michel de Certeau emphasises, a society is made up of ‘certain exorbitant practices, organising normative institutions, and countless other practices, that remain ‘minor’, in spite of non-organising discourse, it maintains those premises or those lingering hypotheses (institutional, scientific), different for this society as for others.’¹⁰ Reality is always a hasty unification, which makes certain theories redundant and neglects many other traces of life and activity. Which is why it so often remains in deficit, falls short of itself, in relation to those life forces that it activates within itself, those experiences that it traverses. To curb this kind of logic, which proceeds by denial or dismissal, it is necessary to assume a form of ‘constitutive critique’ which grabs hold of that which, in a given situation, outlines and makes clear, to organise what remains obstructed, to unfold what has been blocked, hidden, solidified. It is not about making a use say more than it states, or to have it reveal more than it shows. There is a singular arrogance in the critic who presumes that they have the power to reveal what the protagonists were unaware of, that they have access to a meta-language, granting them the capacity to read and to see from above what the actors themselves say or see. ‘Too often in practice, sociologists—and in particular, critical sociologists, behave as if they were reflective and distanced observers, confronted by protagonists who are naïve, uncritical, unreflective. [...] Protagonists are entirely capable of proposing their own theories of action, in order to explain how forms of existence reveal themselves’¹¹. When

confronted by a use that is unexpected or extraordinary, the observer (artist, architect, sociologist, passer-by, inhabitant) engages with unpacking and arranging it. The observer tries, perhaps, to connect these uses to other phenomena that they have observed in this place. The observer starts to contextualise. Perhaps they are led to refer this situation to previous experiences. In any case, they assign this use a supplementary reality; contributing to its realisation, by giving it form, making sense of it, even if this is arrived at only partially or uniquely through their own singular point of view. This use then starts to generate a reality for the observer, even if this occurs in ways that are noticeably or radically differently to those of the protagonists, particularly if those who act do so largely silently and discreetly, in different temporalities even. Sometimes a use is only noticed as the mediation of a trace that is left behind, a pile of rubble left in the staircase which draws attention to an opening leading out to something only to be guessed at, a mattress and a couple of blankets left behind, in retreat, in a street which reminds us that someone lives in this place, a stack of fossilised wood on a beach making room for the festive occupation of this space once the holidaymakers have gone. Consequently, a sociological account, a photograph or a video footage can help retrace what is left behind, as small points, or in helping to assemble those things that are present in a dispersed fashion. The work of observation actually proceeds through the mode of a ‘constitutive critique’ which measures the existence of a use and tries to assemble and unfold it. Like the work of the laboratory technician—analyzing DNA through the amplification of a tiny sample.¹²

MULTIPLICITY THAT IS INTERNALLY DEPLOYED

‘For the pedestrian, the city can be thought of as a strategy of proliferation, from the point of view of the driver, as a strategy of connection; so that where for the former different roads are effectively all the same (the journey from one point to another can be organised in different ways from the shortest to the most convoluted journey), the latter generally find themselves caught up in an organisational system that is channeled to a far greater degree.’¹³ The user of public transport, for their own part, expects that a journey will limit them in terms of timetableing, and route; but what is lost in autonomy of movement is gained through the addition of other possibilities: to read, to chat, to escape. The most limiting strategy holds an extraordinary potential for liberty, the condition for freeing oneself from a primary use (here, of movement), to invest in other activities, to shift into different levels of reality (thinking, dreaming, exchange)... A use is therefore a heterogeneous agency around which it is difficult to set down a priori limits. Use is not defined as itself, as such. It does not embody within itself an irreducible logic that can be applied to any context, adapting itself equally to every situation. It does not include its own operation. A use represents above all else, a way of relating to oneself and to others, to one’s own way of life and to the life contexts of others. It is endlessly, revived and stimulated by those interactions to which it adapts, or to which it is opposed. It is permanently connected to a multiplicity of ‘exteriorities’ which confront its resources and potential. Is it capable of modifying a situation? Bifurcating it? Exceeding it? What can it rely on? What can

it discover within itself, as resistance, as adaptation, when a challenge confronts its environment? When functional constraints harden, does it immobilize in face of this, in a sterile and inhibiting encounter, unable to start up those lines of flight or contortion? Or is it possible to revisit the situation from a different point of view, in order to drive new perspectives out (of hiding)? If a use, however, is strongly exposed to several exteriorities that challenge and obligate it, it is there all the same precisely because of its interiorities, because of those multiplicities that are deployed in itself: desires, habits, familiar objects, rituals, schemes of action... it is therefore doubly exposed: it refers to, is connected with, combines with the outside as much as it does to the inside, to innumerable 'entities', whether material or symbolic, relational or functional. It is activated as much by that which would prevent it from acting. This is what lends it its profoundly ecosophic¹⁴ character: a use is above all a mode of inter-relation, a way of playing out one's relationships with the environment. If we borrow a technological term, we would say that a use is made up of several 'plugins'¹⁵, plugins that it is prone to discover, to capture, to intercept¹⁶ and which it will eventually implant and acculturate. This could be some found material on a building site re-used for the construction of a shelter. It can also be an 'opportunity' —to grab hold of and that will, in turn, contribute to the consolidation of a project, of a practice.

Pascal Nicolas-Le Strat, October 2008

Translated from French by Sophie Handler

1 In *Il faut défendre la société (Cours au Collège de France, 1976)*, éd. Gallimard, 1997, p. 173, Michel Foucault employs the term 'constitutional' in the following way: 'it is about finding something that has both consistency and historical context; something that is not so much about the order of the law, as the order of force; something that is not really about the order of writing, so much as the order of balance. Something which is constitutional, almost in the way as understood by doctors, that is to say: as power struggle, equilibrium and the play of proportions, stable asymmetry, congruent inequality'

2 See the work of David Vercauteren (edited with Thierry Müller and Olivier Crabbé), *Micropolitiques des groupes (Pour une écologie des pratiques collectives)*, HB éditions, 2007.

3 In cinéma 2 — L'image-temps, les éd. Minuit 1985, p. 365. 'Film theory is not about film, but rather about the concepts raised by film'

4 We transpose, onto this area of uses, the well-know formulation of Michel Foucault 'La polyvalence tactique des discours', Michel Foucault insists on the 'complex and unstable game where discourse can, at the same time, be both the instrument and affect of power, but also obstacle, block, point of resistance and the point of departure for an oppositional strategy', *Histoire de la sexualité 1 — La volonté de savoir*, éd. Gallimard, 1976, p. 133.

5 Phillipe Artières, Mathieu Potte-Bonneville, *D'après Foucault (Gestes, luttes, programmes)*, éd. Les prairies ordinaires, p. 348.

6 We borrow this term from Judith Butler, *Humain, inhumain (Le travail critique des normes)*, éd. Amsterdam, 2005, p. 57.

7 Henri Lefebvre, *Critique de la vie quotidienne — II. Fondements d'une sociologie de la quotidienneté*, L'Arche éd., 1961, p. 50.

8 According to Michel de Certeau's formulation

9 Michel de Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien — 1. Arts de faire*, coll. Folio, 1990, p. 122.

10 Idem, p. 79.

11 Bruno Latour, *Changer de société — Refaire de la sociologie*, éd. La Découverte, 2006, p. 82-83.

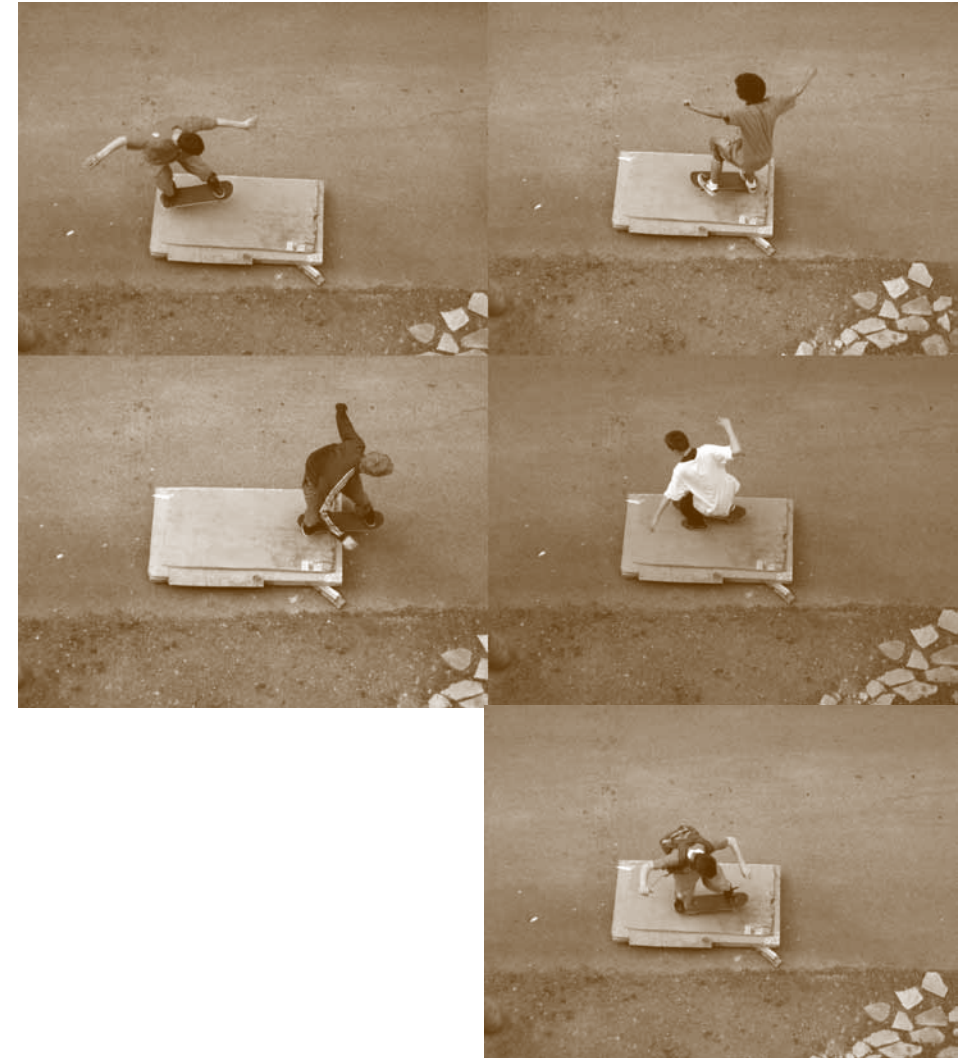
12 Idem, p. 198.

13 Emmanuel Belin, *Une sociologie des espaces potentiels (Logique dispositive et expérience ordinaire)*, De Boeck Université, 2002, p. 242.

14 Félix Guattari, *Les trois écologies*, éd. Galilée, 1989.

15 In data processing a plugin is a 'small' piece of software grafted onto a programme to support and supply it with new functions.

16 This metaphor is borrowed from Bruno Latour, op. cit., p. 303-304.





We first noticed one of these anonymous bikes all coated in white paint somewhere close to Houston Street in New York City. Initially, we thought these were ephemeral street artworks, until we encountered another one on a late night with an accompanying friend. He told us these 'ghost bikes' were created in memory of those who died of bicycle accidents, and were usually locked up on a post in the location where the tragedy occurred. The photo points out to one of these memorials across the street from where he was living, on the corner of Kent Street and McGuinness Boulevard in the Brooklyn / Greenpoint area. Liz Byrne's memorial had been there since 2005, and according to him, it was regularly maintained with fresh paint and adorned with flowers. We spent a few minutes around it, looking

out towards the deserted boulevard, as we could somehow relate to the sense of loss and the ongoing challenges of riding bicycles in cities. After a quick inquiry on the Internet, we realized this was a much broader initiative, with continuous care given to the memorials (usually made of stripped 'junk' bikes given by people or repair shops). These ghostly presences also keep on growing as a network of quiet reminders for the urge to ride on safer streets and create public awareness on the issue. But what ultimately stems out from this network is that it simply allows for adaptive uses of salvaged materials in creating significant vernacular memorials people can relate to through their own DIY maintenance.

Jean-Maxime Dufresne

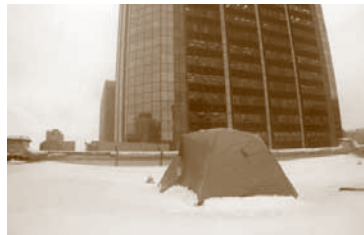


In Liverpool, many common lands, vacant sites demolished by the Second World War or by factory closings, are delimited by identical wooden barriers. These barriers limit access, create boundaries, and suggest that these sites are made to be looked at, but not to be used. While documenting these repetitive elements, I saw some that were burnt, torn apart and sawed, by residents, perhaps to give access or maybe to protest their presence?

These vacant land-separations in Liverpool reminded me of similar structures in my home town of Montreal surrounding derelict land or parking lots which have also gradually replaced demolished and burnt down industrial buildings. In Montreal, however, these barriers had flat rather than triangular surfaces, offering occasional,

informal and unusual seats. Near my loft in an old warehouse district, they often serve as temporary seats in an area where there is very little urban furniture, public parks. In Liverpool, the triangular positioning of the wooden barriers make them on the contrary very uncomfortable and impossible to use. These subtle anti-use design tactics, more and more frequent in many cities, are often invisible until the moment we decide to use a specific element or space, before discovering is impossible. One thing that surprised me in Liverpool was the scarce number of seats in the city and how existing, official and elaborate ones where placed in the least inviting, intimate and desired spaces: on a slanted slope, on windy sites... with high visibility but little comfort or intimacy.

Intervention initiated during the CITY BREAKS? event, Liverpool Biennial, October, 2006



'The two artists, visiting from Montreal, chose one of Edmonton's chilliest weeks to go camping on the rooftops of the six commercial buildings. Case point: by setting up their little tent and spending the night on a space that rarely, if ever, is used by humans, the duo hopes to draw attention to the massive expanse of unused rooftop space in the city. Their goal is to make people think about public space in a different way, and to make sure we don't get used to ignoring parts of the city's physical fabric. 'We produce that shock that happens when you get the reappearance of human activity in a space that's usually empty and not being used by people,' Prost says. To him, it's disturbing that Canada has so much empty space, yet there's so many homeless

people. 'we even had one homeless person approach us during our stay and try and get us off the roof into a more sheltered place he knew of'. Deconstructing the speed and purposefulness of urban life was also part of their urban camping experiment. In particular, the duo only allowed themselves to go indoors in a very limited array of public places—coffee shops, malls, the library—and circumstances: to get warm, to use the washroom (no sheltered allowed over one week) or to eat or grab a coffee. Unlike other busy downtown workers though, their stays were often much longer—a fact that wasn't lost on coffee shop employees.'

Gilbert A. Bouchard, Edmonton Journal.

With Latitude 53 Contemporary Visual Culture



Parking Lot Live Dining was an action that took place in Edmonton Alberta, during the Performance Festival — *Visualeyez 2007*.

Taking place in a parking lot, participants meet at Latitude53 (artist-run centre) and pick up various objects —like chairs, eating utensils, and cultivated plants for seeding. Then all walk in a procession to the parking lot a few blocks away. Nicole Fournier instructs everyone where to set up the table, chairs and planters, and shows participants the different kinds of eatable plants in the parking lot, which everyone is invited to harvest. The action of harvesting from wild plants is called foraging and existed before agriculture in nomadic cultures. Soon a pile of green eatable ‘weeds’ is on the table. Nicole invites all to cut, chop and cook with

an electric stovetop, the foraged plants, and cultivated plants and food brought to the site. ‘We occupy the parking lot (a private space) while we cook and eat. As part of the ritual of dining we also drink wine- an illegal form of conduct. A police officer drives up to the group and asks, ‘what is going on?’ Juliana tells him that this is part of an art festival and invites him to join us for dinner. Many of us strike up a conversation with the police officer for about 20 minutes and we talk about the current housing crisis in Edmonton—which he says is media hype. The cop soon realizes that we are not trouble, asks us to stop drinking and then drives away. We keep eating (and drinking) until everyone is full and then return to the gallery.’

Tagny Duff, edited by Nicole Fournier.



At the seaside, I wrote words in the sand. Though I did not witness their disappearance, I was not surprised by their fate. Should I attempt to reconstruct them without writing, but by reassembling the selfsame grains of sand as before, all my senses would clearly be unequal to the task. The soil has been forever steeped in words.

NARRATIVE BREAKS

Take a city, any city. Walk its streets and take in its architecture, infrastructure, its citizens in motion... By thus exploring a city, its planned, codified organization is mentally reconstructed, though incompletely, as is/are the community/ies targeted by the Establishment. This mental reconstruction is akin to a narrative framework that becomes increasingly complex or expands with the years and economic, social, technological and other changes. And this so-called official 'narrative project' is developed by bringing facilities and expected patterns of use into play. It is made up of paradigms (architecture, street furniture, roadways, public/private/unused spaces, uses and users) linked to syntagms (industrial activity, movement, public/private life, synergies and uses)—all of which are defined and limited by the standards, conventions and forces that govern a given society. Yet all are concurrently open to the possibilities of redefinition, of de-limitation, by submitting to a set of combinations and permutations, which—when in the hands of actors who do not necessarily work in tandem with organizational powers—often gives rise to narrative breaks. That is to say, it produces 'accidents' in the narrative project by diverting paradigmatic or syntagmatic expectations. *Adaptive Actions*

invites us to embark on this enterprise. Fostering narrative breaks, *Adaptive Actions* highlights the programmatic contribution of people who stand out, whether instinctively or consciously, as observers, thinkers and players anchored in the moment. For if these actions are born of varied realities and serve as means to different ends, their underlying intention is to reify the present. A relative present, to be sure—the adaptive action's life cycle is uncertain, indeterminate, since it is essentially an unplanned addendum that fills a void in the predominant narrative framework. It can meet a specific need (see *Window Treatment* and *Passage* action series); call into question certain conventional practices (*Dining* series and *Use 01*) or certain social realities (*Dots vs. Demolition D* or *Sea Oats vs. Humans*¹); or again, function in a playful or satirical manner (*Prank, Drawings*). But this classification is arbitrary, merely based on the observer's perception. The values of the actions and consequent uses arise less from intention than the inscription of a moment within the narrative framework.

It is indeed striking. Whatever the manner in which it operates or the city in which it is carried out, the adaptive action has a temporal dimension: the hallmark of a user's fleeting presence. For the user

is well and truly the leading player here. It is not a question of the user's intrinsic identity—just as it is not a question of the intended action and uses—but of the user as the city's prime mover. Whether or not his or her action results from reflection or conceptualisation is irrelevant. He or she simply acts. The author of an adaptive action is an empirical actor. Through their actions, actors not only act, but say they act, creating a new, personal, unsigned narrative space—a manifestation of individuality within an impersonal environment that escapes the continuum of predominant narration.

The unexpected drives urban life. There lies the dynamic behind the *Adaptive Actions* project: recording actions that break away from programmed functions (or anything related to them) but help maintain a balance between popular ideology and the actions of communal users, with a view to compensating for certain 'functional weaknesses.' Nevertheless, adaptive actions—most of which are unquestionably ephemeral—and the programs instituted by decision-makers seek to achieve the same goal: to move from an undesired state to a desired state. Now, a system is generally considered to comprise greater combinations of undesired than desired states—to always lean toward greater entropy. The infosphere fuelled by *Adaptive Actions* promotes the reduction of entropy by spotlighting the actions that target desired states, not simply through archiving or as instigating projects, but by developing a collective consciousness that influences our perception of the world. In fact, a number of participants are not initiators of actions, but observers,

'recorders,' yet nonetheless actors within the framework of the project. '[Desire] is neither limited to nor satisfied by objects, but is the energy that leads human society to develop its own form².'

Adaptive Actions proceeds differentially—that is to say by the plurality of discrete (mathematically speaking), personal one-off actions, but only meaningful when considered within a larger framework. The project does not eschew what is programmed, but rather highlights the potential of citizen actions in the development of programs, allowing our environment to evolve within the scope of an ever-renewable present.

Frank Nobert, November 2008

Translated from French by Danielle Gauthier

¹ The latter, operating in the linguistic world, perfectly illustrating this paradigm shift.

² Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, Princeton University Press, 1957, p. 106



Adaptive Actions initiated in London in 2007 explores alterations in the workplace, the home and public spaces in general. Identifying the variety of these personal and found alterations in the city as different forms of adaptation creates a vocabulary for the expression of the collective imagination, through the existing urban structures therein. These ‘actions’ modify and activate the intended use of architecture and enhance the character of urban environments. They create positive tensions that test the limits of tolerated appropriation. Can these simple actions, images and ideas, such as the hybridisation of conventional and unusual urban realities, infiltrate our collective imagination to promote feelings of identity and a sense of cultural belonging? *Adaptive Actions* points to how urban phenomena impact on residents’ perception of the environment and their relation to it. By offering a space to share experiences, ideas, forms of actions and specific accomplishments, *Adaptive Actions* creates an inventory of alterations rarely visible to the public. Printed documents and organised events are being planned to increase visibility of the selected actions to the public eye and build affiliations and communal thinking.

ADAPTIVE ACTIONS

EDITED BY JEAN-FRANÇOIS PROST

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An author and translator, **Frank Nobert** has for several years been exploring the manifestation of sociolinguistic phenomena in various disciplines, as an author, teacher, organizer and translator in a number of fields, including children's literature, theatre, film and the visual arts. His work conveys his marked interest in the particular nature of the spoken language and the relationship between literature, philosophy and the sciences.



SPACE has hosted the Canada Council for the Arts International Residency program in London since 2003. The program allows two Canadian artists a year full use of a SPACE studio and a place to live for the duration of the six month period. Alongside SPACE, the artist plans a programme of activities, talks, visits and social events providing valuable opportunities to meet London based artists and gallerists, helping them to promote and distribute their work internationally. Founded in 1968, SPACE produces dynamic environments where individuals and communities can engage in creative processes. SPACE supports artistic production by developing and managing studio space, widening participation in visual arts & media, and fostering the creative potential of individuals and communities.

Jean-François Prost, artist and architect; his keen interest in new urban research territories — neglected, undetermined spaces, and those overcontrolled, with no apparent specificity — has brought him to question the city, architecture and urban material in a non-disciplinary way and through alternative practices. Act of constructive resistance, state of mind, device to enunciate and exchange ideas... Prost's work activates and promotes social engagement, defends the presence of 'art' everywhere and at any time. His individual and collective work with SYN— (co-founder, 2000) has been shown by many galleries and at international events: 3rd Biennale de Montréal, Liverpool Biennial 06, and at the Canadian Centre for Architecture. The collaborative research platform *Adaptive Actions* initiated by Prost in 2007 will be the subject of a series of actions/exhibits in 2009-10, including at Madrid Abierto, base for the upcoming second publication (Spain edition). Long-time board member of DARE-DARE Art Centre in Montreal, he is working on the ongoing Dis/Location project for emerging urban practices and a mobile gallery. www.jean-francoisprost.blogspot.com

For further information on, and links to every action and specific location, go to adaptiveactions.net and see 'actions', 'actors' and 'locations' rubrics.

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