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

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

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 form[2]."

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.

by Frank Nobert, November 2008
translated from French by Danielle Gauthier

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