

Architecture and Participation

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Losing control, keeping desire

We think any society is defined not so much by its contradictions as by its lines of flight, it flees all over the place, and it's very interesting to try and follow the lines of flight taking shape at any particular moment.

Gilles Deleuze, 1995

Lignes de fuite

The expression *ligne de fuite* – line of flight, of escape, leakage line – is borrowed from Guattari and Deleuze's vocabulary to help us avoid the usual clichés about issues of participation in architecture.¹ Rather than searching for major lines of historic relevance, our text flees away from the central ground towards minor case studies, to a project in progress with which we are directly involved in a small neighbourhood in Paris:

atelier d'architecture autogérée / studio of self-managed architecture (*aaa*) is a non-profit-making association founded in 2001 whose activity is focused on alternative strategies of urban regeneration in the La Chapelle area, to the North of Paris.² It is an interdisciplinary organisation including architects, artists, landscape designers, urban planners, sociologists, students and residents living in the area. Together, we conduct research into participatory urban actions. This collective practice allows for the reappropriation and reinvention of public space through everyday life activities (gardening, cooking, chatting, reading, debating, etc.) understood as creative practices in urban contexts. The aim is to create a network of self-managed places by encouraging residents to get access to their neighbourhood and to appropriate and transform temporary available and underused spaces. This strategy valorises a flexible and reversible use of space and aims to preserve urban 'biodiversity' by providing for a wide range of life styles and living practices to coexist.

The starting point was the realisation of a temporary garden made out of recycled materials on one of the derelict sites belonging to the RFF (the French Railway company) located in the area. This garden, called *ECObot*, has been progressively extended into a platform for

¹ This chapter pays homage to Deleuze and Guattari's thinking. By choosing to follow their schizoanalytic line, we have chosen to move away from the established field known in the Anglo-Saxon world as 'community planning'. We have chosen also to escape a certain French genealogy of the question by taking a line other than Lefebvre's, whose theory has until now been preferred to inform issues of participation and the everyday in architecture. Deleuze and Guattari's thinking has been widely adopted in contemporary architectural theory and practice (especially in the Anglo-Saxon world), but more for its formalism and its direct design application and less for its political critique and practical engagement. In addition to Deleuze and Guattari's reference, this chapter is based on the work of *atelier d'architecture autogérée* (Constantin Petcou, Doina Petrescu, Denis Favret, Giovanni Piovenne, John Roberts) and the contributions of some residents of La Chapelle and external collaborators of *ECObot*. Their contribution is quoted in the chapter. Some of the authors in this book (Anne Querrien, Teresa Hoskyns, Raoul Bunschoten, Francesco Carreri, Marion von Osten, Liza Fior, Peter Blundell Jones, Jeremy Till) have also inspired this text through discussions and exchange of ideas before and during its making. A number of concepts and quotations have been borrowed from contemporary activist research practices within the *aaa*'s links and network.

2

La Chapelle is one of the areas in Paris with the highest immigration rate (more than 30 per cent of its 30,000 residents are 'foreigners'). Geographically, it is an urban island, bordered by the major train tracks of the Gare du Nord and Gare de l'Est, and the ring road of Paris that isolate the area and constitute a real break within the city. A number of abandoned industrial buildings and left-over spaces (*friches* or *terrain vagues*) are also located in the area. They represent a reserve for potential urban development, but at present, because of their degradation, they are perceived negatively by the residents.

3

The lines of flight are a metaphoric construction issuing from the critical analysis of the capitalist system drawn by analogy with schizophrenic behaviour. It is what Deleuze and Guattari have called schizo-analysis. They consider that 'schizophrenia is undissociable from the capitalist system, itself conceived as primary leakage (*'fuite'*) and exclusive malady. The capitalist economy proceeds by decoding and deterritorialization: it has its extreme cases, i.e. schizophrenics, who decode and deterritorialise themselves to the limit; but also it has its extreme consequences – revolutionaries.' 'Capitalism, a very special delirium', in Felix Guattari, *Chaosophy*, New York: Semiotext(e), 1995, pp.72-73.

4

'There is a third type of line, even stranger than the first, as if something were carrying us away, through our segments but also across our thresholds; toward an unknown destination neither foreseeable nor pre-existent' G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *On the Line*, New York: Semiotexte, 1998, pp.70-71.

5

G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*, London: Athlone Press, 1984. was written just after the events of 1968 and published in 1972. Guattari was a political activist at that time and was personally involved in the organisation of May 1968 in Paris.

urban creativity curated by the *aaa* members, residents and external collaborators, catalysing activities at the level of the whole neighbourhood. The garden became as such the metonymy of the whole *aaa* project, functioning as social and cultural space, both utopian and real, nomadic and multiple, through a continual process of fabrication and self-redefinition according to its users' desires. The root *eco* is used here in its original Greek sense of *oikos*, that is 'house, domestic property, habitat, natural milieu'. ECObox is a tool for making the city habitable without domestication and control through official policies or private bodies, but by desiring, claiming, making its memory and its inhabitants' imaginings more intimate.

Guattari and Deleuze's 'lines' challenge the usual designer thinking about lines. They are an abstract and complex enough metaphor to map the entire social field, to trace its shapes, its borders, its becomings. They can map the way 'life always proceeds at several rhythms and at several speeds'. They map individual cracks and collective breaks within the segmentation and heterogeneity of power.³ The 'line of flight', *ligne de fuite*, is defined not only as a simple line, but as the very force of a tangle of lines flung out, transgressing thresholds of established norms and conventions, towards unexpected manifestations, both in terms of socio-political phenomena and in individual destinies.⁴

By choosing to follow 'lines of flight' rather than mainstream examples, we propose a schizoanalytical reading of this type of approach and take an unusual, abnormal, deterritorialising path that flees from the usual framing of a neo-capitalist architectural practice.

The 'line of flight' occurs in Guattari and Deleuze's work soon after 1968.⁵ May 1968 was itself such a line of flight: a non-historical manifestation of a heterogeneous 'Outside' – the eruption of 'a pure becoming', within the social field.⁶ It is around 1968 that the participative approach emerges also as a 'line of flight'; not as a historical accumulation, but as a becoming, a 'revolutionary' drive of a critical practice, searching for a new freedom within the architectural profession.⁷

*'Ce qui se construit dans la temporalité et n'est pas là pour rester.'*⁸

Desire and bricolage

A schizoanalytical approach to 'participation' should start with desire, by considering the participative process as a way of assembling a collective economy of desire, articulating persons, gestures, economic and relational networks, etc.⁹ The participation process

6
 'Becoming isn't part of history; history amounts only the set of preconditions, however recent, that one leaves behind in order to "become", that is, to create something new. This is precisely what Nietzsche calls the Untimely. May 1968 was a demon-stration, an eruption, of a becoming in its pure state.' G. Deleuze, 'Control and becoming', in *Negotiations*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.

7
 For more details about the English context of the 1968 events and the emerging of participative approaches in architecture and urban planning, see Peter Blundell Jones's chapter in this book. See also Ben Franks 'New right/new left: An alternative experiment in freedom', in S. Sadler and J.R.T. Hughes, *Non-Plan: Essays on freedom, participation and change in modern architecture and urbanism*, Oxford: Architectural Press, 2000. In France also, there is a link between the 1968 events and participation in architecture, for former revolutionary students were involved in the first participative projects in the 1970s such as the 'auto-rehabilitation' experiences in the Saint Laurent district in Grenoble, the 'ateliers communautaires d'aménagement du cadre de vie' in Cergy Pontoise or the reconstruction of Alma-Gare neighbourhood in Roubaix that is discussed by A. Querrien in Chapter 6 of this book. Nevertheless participation was not the main concern of the French radical practices, who were more concerned after 1968 with the deconstruction of institutions that exerted a centralised control over practice. They sought the introduction of a regulatory competition system in architecture in order to guarantee a democratic access to project commissions, and also the reorganising of the professional education system. Many of these French radical practices were started during a period of research and experiment when, under the Situationist influence, they refused to build; but by the late 1970s and early 1980s they were building a lot, and frequently leaving behind their former interest in working with users. This is the case with Roland Castro, Antoine Stinco, Christian de Portzamparc, Paul Chemetoff, etc. Amongst the few exceptions are Yona Friedman, Paul Virilio and Michel Ragon, who continued in their concern with questions of self-management and participation of users in decision-making in architectural and urban planning processes.

depends on participants' desire.

But if this desire doesn't manifest itself, how can one make it visible? And if it is visible, then how does one welcome it? How could different desires coexist and operate together? And above all, how should we think about desire, about the concept of desire itself, within a participative process?

If we understand participation as a process, as the 'labour of desire', it is because desire itself is processual. There is no desire, says Deleuze, that does not flow into an assemblage of desires, and for him:

Desire has always been a constructivism, constructing an assemblage (*agencement*), an aggregate: the aggregate of the skirt, of a sun ray, of a street, of a woman, of a vista, of a colour... constructing an assemblage, constructing a region, assembling.¹⁰

Desire always relates to the 'multiple', the 'different', and the 'other'. It is:

A collaging process that seeks to include and to affirm as a way of multiplying possibilities and thus power. It stems not from a lack but on the contrary from an overflowing plenum. Desire is a 'production'; it 'creates situations'... Desire is an energetic bricolage that uses whatever is at hand in perverse ways: transvaluating the context, letting its parts fly free to connect in diverse ways. To desire is to collage one's collage onto another collage.¹¹

*'Cela me donne une force qui me fait sortir de chez moi...'*¹²

Driven by desire, participatory design is a 'collective bricolage' in which individuals (clients, users, designers) are able to interrogate the heterogeneity of a situation, to acknowledge their own position and then go beyond it, to open it up to new meanings, new possibilities, to 'collage their own collage onto other collages', in order to discover a common project. As in bricolage,¹³ in participative projects, the process is somehow more important than the result, the assemblage more important than the object, the deterritorialisation more important than the construction of territories.

ECObbox is a bricolage project resulted from an assemblage of desires. From the very beginning, the collective production of desires has been understood as a process shaping the project. The project started in June 2001 with a consultation on community spaces and a Post-it board where 'gardens of words' were drawn by inhabitants of

'That which is constructed in the temporary and is not there to stay', excerpt from a discussion on urban interstices, ECObox, June 2003.

'Pleasure' has been a trend in the discourse on participation and non-planning in British (avant-garde) architecture. Even now, it is still a central issue for some creative practices: eg. 'the pleasure of architecture' (Tschumi), 'the pleasure of uselessness' (Jonathan Hill), 'pleasure in public', (The Architectural Foundation) 'pleasure principles: rules for urban design' (Muf), etc. Deleuze articulated his difference with Foucault, precisely by acknowledging his interest in 'desire' versus Foucault's discourse on 'pleasure'. I'll somehow follow Deleuze here, and construct my arguments around participation as driven by 'desire'. I also think that this idea of a productive activity of 'desire' (the unconscious as factory) reveals possible parallels between Deleuze and Guattari's project (expressed mainly in *Anti-Oedipus* and *Thousand Plateaus*) and the Marxist approach of Lefebvre.

'D-comme Désir', in Pierre-André Boutang (ed.), *L'Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze, avec Claire Parnet*, Paris: Vidéo Editions Montparnasse, 1996. In fact, Deleuze and Guattari give 'desire' a central place in their theory. Cf. G. Deleuze, 'Desire and Pleasure', trans. Melissa McMahon. French version 'Désir et Plaisir', in *Deux régimes de fous*, Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 2003.

'Desire', an article submitted by John Landau on 24 October 1997 as a contribution to *deleuzeguattarianary*. (<http://cs.art.rmit.edu.au/deleuzeguattarianary>)

'This gives me the power to step out of my routine...', inhabitant of la Chapelle, speaking about her project at ECObox, January 2004.

different ages and cultural origins. Many people wanted places for children, green spaces, sports fields... Following discussions, a collective garden programme has been negotiated as a tactical start. It is a generous enough metaphor for a transversal practice that includes complex assemblages of activities... Children in La Chapelle call the ECObox 'the gardening' to mark a difference with other gardens in the area. 'The gardening' was perceived as an unfinished garden, a garden-in-progress defined by its very process of fabrication and becoming: a garden-process rather than a garden-object. 'The gardening' was the place where plants were grown, but also cultivated personal and small group projects of all kinds, and with them, relations amongst people; new desires were becoming.

*C'est justement peut-être très important, de mon point de vue, qu'ils puissent revenir, même sans leur parents. C'est en tout cas une vérité qui est aussi très belle que de voir venir uniquement des enfants tourner autour de ce jardin qui est aussi comme eux: jeune, sauvage, pas très stable, en devenir.*¹⁴

Molecular revolutions

A participative approach challenges the configuration of power relationships within a project expressed through planning policies, institutions, and design protocols. It should normally question who exerts power and how this power is distributed through the project, aiming to empower both users and clients to play an active role in the decision-making and the creative process.

Deleuze places desire *before* power because, as he says, 'power is an affectation of desire'.¹⁵ In a participative approach, the possibility of expression and evolution of participants' 'desire' is the precondition of their empowerment.

But desire can also play a subversive role within the established power structures of a project. It is always an agent of change, always 'revolutionary' and, according to Guattari, 'all the dramatic social changes will be absolutely un-dissociable from a multitude of molecular revolutions on the level of the economy of desire'.¹⁶

The participative practices in urban planning and architecture should be driven by such molecular revolutions at the level of economy of desire. The economies of cities should be understood as contiguous with the economies of desire of those that live and work in these cities. A revolutionary reform in urban planning cannot be initiated solely by centralised structures and governmental bodies. It should include these 'microscopic attempts' at the level of collective and individual desires of clients and users in micro-social units: neighbourhood associations, informal teams, squats and other self-managed organisations, experimental institutions, alter-

¹³ We use here the term 'bricolage' in the sense developed by Lévi-Strauss in his well-known anthropological study *La Pensée Sauvage*. Lévi-Strauss argues that the preferred materials of bricolage are not concepts (the materials of scientific theories), but signs – the bricoleur has the privilege over the scientist of being able to define a block of wood alternately as material, support, extension, chopping board, hammer, and so forth – each potential use representing a distinct signification. In this sense, the bricoleur 'interrogates all the heterogeneous objects of which his treasury is composed to discover what each of them could "signify" and so contribute to the definition of a set which has yet to materialise, but which will ultimately differ from the instrumental set only in the internal disposition of parts.' C. Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p.18.

¹⁴ 'It is very important, in my view, that they should feel able to return even without their parents. It is beautiful to see children alone enjoying this garden which is like them: young, wild, not very stable, in process of becoming.' association (des pas), collaborator of *aaa*.

¹⁵ Deleuze, 'Désir et Plaisir', p.113.

¹⁶ F. Guattari, *La Révolution moléculaire*, Fontenay: Recherches, 1977, p.29.

¹⁷ 'Although I am against the illusion of a step-by-step transformation of society – "small reforms which make up great transformations" – I believe that microscopic attempts at creating communities – setting up analytic groups among militants, organizing a day-care centre in a university – are crucial.' F. Guattari, 'The best capitalist drug', in *Chaosophy*, New York: Semiotexte, p.223.

¹⁸ F. Guattari and G. Genosko, *The Three Ecologies*, London: Athlone Press, 2000, p.66.

¹⁹ For comments on similar issues, see Teresa Hoskyns's chapter in this book.

native spaces etc...¹⁷ It should create 'new poles of valorisation' that will promote 'existential values and values of desire' rather than commercial values.¹⁸

aaa experiments with a non-centralised, non-specialised type of planning, starting with a micro-political attempt at taking direct responsibility for the place where one lives. It suggests the possibility of passing gradually from 'gardens' to other self-managed and collectively created places. Issuing from an idea of 'direct democracy' rather than 'representative democracy', this transformation affects both places and people, who start to change their roles from mere users to citizens, from mere residents to interventionist residents.¹⁹

Urban actions

... a revolutionary organization must be like a war machine, not like a state apparatus, it must respond to desire, not just provide an external synthesis.²⁰

The urban protest was a kind of social movement that emerged in the early 1970s, just after the events of 1968, in the context of deteriorating urban conditions and increased control of the public sphere. At the same time as organised protests, other minor practices emerged based in everyday life: 'urban actions'.²¹ These are 'the precondition of life on the streets', and the activist groups and leftist alliances started to consider them in their attempt to establish a relationship between the street and the academy, the neighbourhood and the political scene.

New urban practices emerged out of this encounter between forms of activism and urban actions. For example, many of the community gardens in New York City in the 1980s emerged as a consequence of Green Guerrilla's activist actions in the 1970s. These actions started with illegal planting, continued with occupation of land, and then grew into community protest actions to preserve the created gardens against private or public expansionist policies of development.²² In France, such community gardens started in the late 1990s and their specific status ('jardins partagés') has only recently been recognised in law.²³ Paradoxically, this happened in parallel with the decision by the City of Paris to fence off the last open spaces, small as they are. Collective gardens have become a means of preserving free public space in the post-capitalist city.

ECObot challenges the role of a community garden and extends its functions further. The 'lines of flight' initiated by the ECObot strat-

20

F. Guattari and G. Deleuze, 'Capitalism: A very special delirium', in *Chaosophy*, p.66.

21

The term is introduced by Jochen Becker in 'BIGNESS? Size does matter', in *Image/Politik: Städtisches Handeln. Kritik der unternehmerischen Stadt*, Berlin: b_books Verlag, 2001.

22

See www.greenguerillas.org

23

As soon as they gained recognition in law, their definition was reduced to a stereotype. 'The shared garden (jardins partagés), animated by associations which develop gardening activities for the public (aiming for education, insertion, creation of social relations of proximity: cultural animations, intergenerational encounters, etc...)'. Excerpt from 'Main Verte' chart issued by the City of Paris to supervise and support the creation of community gardens.

24

For example the urban catalyst project that explores the role of temporary use in the contemporary city. See note 53.

25

'DIY was an ethic born in reaction against a dominant society that considers culture primarily in terms of a profit-generating, commercial enterprise... The key in all of this culture is participation. If you don't participate, it doesn't happen. Reclaim the Streets is a protest that only works if everyone participates. This is true not only for the organisers who create sound systems, train with tripods, build props and compose info sheets, but also for those who just show up on the day of protest in costume, with radio, drums, or fire-breathing apparatus, and ready to dance. An RTS action is like a pot-luck dinner. RTS secure the space and provide the music and the postprotest support, but what happens at the action depends on what people bring with them and what they do once they are there.' S. Duncombe, 'Stepping off the sidewalk: Reclaim the Streets/NYC', in B. Shepard and R. Hayduk, *From Act up to the WTO: Urban protest and community building in the era of globalization*, London: Verso, 2002, p.220.

egy organise mobile, multiple presences in different places and connect dispersed desires. Rather than a garden, we should speak about an agency. This agency started with neither official recognition nor financial support. It started with desire and no power. It began as a micro-political attempt to create community-run spaces. As such, 'gardening' became a tactic for both occupying and preserving spaces, resisting pressure for development and experimenting with methods of urban management that allow a more democratic access to decision-making, creation and use. These 'temporary and mobile gardens' are perhaps the visionary precursors of other self-managed spaces to come, that will prove to be more and more necessary, to make our increasingly gentrified cities sustainable.²⁴

The bricolage logic of these desiring practices is the driving force both for participative ethics and for aspirations towards autonomy. In the Anglo-Saxon context, the DIY activist culture has created new forms of direct participation, based on principles of self-management and self-production.²⁵

'A quoi on participe?'²⁶

ECObbox is a DIY urban practice. It is 'bricolage' applied to materials, urban politics and social relations. It creates a new practice that responds to the needs of the neighbourhood and at the same time reinvents itself inside the professional context.

It resists pre-existing forms and policies of participation, enabling inhabitants to participate directly, to decide how they want to organise themselves, knowing that sometimes community desires will be different from the public or private interests. Community desires are geared neither to profit-generation nor for urban functionality, but to something else that is not predictable and constructs itself every day with everyone participating. How then can we sustain this long-term participation-in-progress? Defining itself as both a professional structure and an activist group, *aaa* is a new type of architectural practice that has chosen not to work within the model of an office, an enterprise or a capitalist company but as a non-profit association, whose economy functions in solidarity with its projects. Both residents and professionals become equal members in a 'bricolaged' structure: 'what happens depends upon what people bring with them and what they do once they are there'. This kind of structure also preserves a certain economic (and political) independence in the negotiation process with both private and public bodies. But at the same time, it is a structure which takes risks, because nothing can be taken for granted when everything depends on the presence

of all those involved. Sometimes this presence is conflictual, for people's desires change along the way, and one should learn how to deal with tensions, contradictions, oppositions and failures. A heterogeneous participative structure cannot be always consensual. Sometimes it is time to stop and then to start again, in another way.

It was important that beyond being a practice, ECObox defined itself as a place, a laboratory, a 'civic laboratory' an 'agency for urban bricolage'. It plays the role of a symbolic marker in the area and serves as an element of visibility and continuity within the whole process, showing its temporal dynamic.

The small scale enables a certain autonomy within the process. Guattari has stressed the importance of sizing the critical scale of an experiment, like the one in the La Borde clinic, and of exposing the mechanisms that would enable economic, political and social autonomies.²⁷ ECObox activates at the scale of a neighbourhood, which gives visibility to most of the actors and originators, knowing at the same time that such a neighbourhood, in a metropolis like Paris, is always traversed by regional and global dynamics that exceed the local condition. These broader dynamics constitute the very mechanisms that contribute to a wider integration of a geographically and socially isolated community. The ECObox has developed cross-over networks and encouraged participation from outside; thus activists, artists, and specialists from different affiliations and cultures periodically organise events and run activities such as a library, a language workshop, or a series of debates. At the same time, inhabitants such as former immigrants are also operating with cross-connections between their culture of origin and their present culture; they are concerned with economies and networks at a global scale, and these contribute to processes of heterogenesis and connectivity within the neighbourhood.

Transversal participation

*'On découvre en tant qu' élu qu' il y a aussi des désirs très conformistes...'*²⁸

The existing frameworks of (both governmental and local) participative programmes are always organised in the same way, without taking into account the particularity of each situation. There is a difference between 'organised participation'²⁹ which is also somehow 'preformed' and under control, inducing the same symptomatic reactions, and a 'transversal participation' (issuing from 'transversality' as a method) which transverses different social strata, which is neither hierarchical (vertical) nor symptomatic (horizontal), and generates unexpected and continually evolving

30

'To make the public space to exist as speech manifestation', Excerpt from a discussion on urban interstices, ECObox, June 2003.

reactions. How to organise a 'transversal participation' is a real architectural question... 'Faire exister l'espace public en tant que manifestation, prise de parole...' ³⁰ An independently organised participative process does not always tend to achieve agreement with all participants, but it should also retain the possibility of *being in conflict* with the organised nature of 'normal' politics. A participative approach should not seek total efficacy but remain open to unexpected conclusions.

ECObox has become a critical observatory of urban politics in the area and as such, has sometimes entered into conflict with the existing programmes (and public bodies) for criticising the formalism of the consultations organised in the area and the manipulation of their results. These consultations, for example the one for ZAC – Zone d'Aménagement Concerté (Area of Concerted Development) in Pajol, have been conducted so as to legitimate pre-existing decisions. Within the programme of renovating Pajol's industrial buildings, the residents contested the ostentatious location of a new office building and asked instead for a garden and community spaces, but the City completely ignored their desires as revealed by the consultation, instead carrying on with their pre-chosen solution, having gained the approval of local officials. In this context, ECObox became a protest site and an information agency where inhabitants could learn about the consultation results and the possibilities of continuing their opposition.

31

'The official dialogue is organised in order to solidify spaces.' Excerpt from a discussion on urban interstices, ECObox, June 2003.

'La concertation officielle est organisée pour figer des espaces.' ³¹

Participation is also 'creating space' by creating space for discussion, liberating speech. The problem of the existing consultation procedures is that they are preformed, already oriented towards a certain expected functionality. ³² The way the space of participation is organised has consequences for the results of the discussion. Rigid discussion spaces produce rigid conclusions, and liberated speech can liberate space as well. What would this space be like that does not freeze speech and does not solidify the space produced by it?

32

The few edited 'handbooks' or 'toolkits' for community planning, whilst having many qualities also have the large defect of being too directive and introducing preformed tools and assessment forms, which rather than liberating, tend to control the participative process.

ECObox works with particular enunciative and spatial devices to encourage free speech, creating vacuoles, to use Guattari's term, which are meetings where 'nothing special is expected other than that things just happen and that what is important is said'. ³³ ECObox defines itself as a discussion space in which participation is organised along with 'vacuoles'. Urban decisions can be taken during informal meetings, whilst cooking and laughing together.

33

A. Querrien, email exchange with aaa.

'Transitional devices' for liberating desire

34

'There are spaces which allow events that public space does not allow at all'. ECObox, discussion.

35

'Liberated desire means that desire escapes the impasse of private fantasy: it is not a question of adapting it, socializing it, disciplining it, but of connecting it in a way that allows its process not be interrupted in the social body, and its expression to be collective. What counts is not authoritarian unification, but rather a sort of infinite spreading: desire in the schools, the factories, the neighbourhoods, the nursery schools, the prisons, etc. It is not a question of directing, of totalizing, but of plugging into the same plan of oscillation'. F. Guattari, 'Capitalism, A very special delirium', p.62.

36

The first part of the garden was constructed within the framework of a live project run conjointly by sixth year architecture students from the University of Sheffield and the *aaa* team in October 2002.

37

For more detail on the 'free access' ideology and a thorough research on alternative and autonomous economies, see the Tangential University archive: <http://utangente.free.fr>

38

The memory of the place was marked by one of the most important political protest movements in the late 1990s: the *sans-papiers* movement. Three hundred African people fought for more than two years to obtain regular permits and documents from the French authorities. Their action began with the occupation of the Church of St Ambroise in Paris. The current ECObox location at 22, Rue Pajol, was one of the places that were occupied for a few months by a group of *sans-papiers* in 1996. See <http://bok.net/pajol>

*'Il existe des espaces qui permettent ici ce que l'espace public ne permet pas.'*³⁴

Rather than just a leisure place, this first garden was conceived as a platform, or rather a 'plateau', a zone of articulation of intensities, flows and desires: a place of encounter for different populations, caring for different temporalities, different individual and collective rhythms '*plugged into the same plan of oscillation*'.³⁵

The surface of the garden is a platform containing a multiplicity of holes, a 'hollowed surface' like a new habitable ground. It is the floor of a green living-room constructed on the additive principle of horizontal growth. The individual lots are shaped together with the collective surface, so, in order to construct an individual lot, one has to construct a bit of common ground. It is a physical manifestation of the democratic functioning of the ECObox. 'The labour is individual and the fruits are collective', as Mary-Line, one of the residents, says. The garden continues to function while being extended. It changes size and form continually: it is not an established garden but one always becoming, an open-ended process. No social engineering, no urban expectation, but a reversible process in which a minimal welcoming structure is created by people who come to transform the project together.

The surface, made out of recycled pallets, allows for both continuity and diversity within individual and collective actions. It alters its topology in order to host multiple activities and to shape places for flexible use: steps, greenhouses, tool storage, compost bin, water collection – all made from materials that one can get for free. The students who initiated the construction of the garden also made a user guide for its continuation, indicating convenient construction techniques and places where free construction materials (pallets, plastic bottles, gravel, etc.) could be collected in the area.³⁶ Not only the ecological recycling but also the new economies and politics of the project are supposed to constitute a 'free access' space.³⁷

Holes have been made in the outside wall as well, to open the hidden space of the garden to the curiosity of passers-by. Boring pipe-holes in the wall was both a DIY action and a community event, celebrating the visibility of the garden to the public eye. It was also a symbolic gesture of making visible the invisible – i.e. the memory of the place, the garden but also the gardeners – anonymous users, sometimes former immigrants, used to invisibility and confinement. Gardeners have chosen what views of the garden they want to show and realised the pipe-holes by themselves. The garden's breath can now be felt in the street...³⁸

Co-produced participation

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'Collective thinking should construct itself along with the events.' ECObox discussion, January 2004.

'La pensée collective doit se construire au fur et à mesure des événements.' 39

Not all participative processes are liberating experiences. Participation is not a liberating technique in itself. Control can be exerted through participative approaches as well, and this is one of the problems with compulsory participative programmes.

In France, the Law of Solidarity and Urban Renewal enacted in December 2000 imposes compulsory public consultations and transparent procedures for the elaboration of urban planning documents (SCOT, PLU Cartes de Commune) at all stages. Both the organisation of public consultation and the final report are left to the local council. According to the SRU law, it is for the local council to decide also about the method of consultation. Nevertheless, this law, which is based on a number of democratic principles such as decentralisation, transparency and participation of the residents in the decision-making, creates the political framework of a new form of urban governance but does not guarantee the real and effective participation of the citizen. In reality, the different urban planning documents are usually elaborated by experts without any previous participation, and the consultation goal is somehow to only confirm and legitimate these documents. In consequence, the consultation is organised only to record supporting attitudes for the expert proposals and to avoid or calm any opposition. In general, the consultation consists of inviting residents to participate in public debates (in which they are allocated short time slots to communicate their positions) or to leave suggestions in a mailbox, without being given the tools and the framework to elaborate and communicate their own ideas in a pertinent way. The final decision is made by the local council in most cases without any risk-taking, on the basis of the supposedly supportive reactions.

As such, the law of participation is formally applied but the main roles are played by the experts, the state and the administration officials. The residents are only consulted on a carefully prepared documentation in which they can still have their say, but in fact are not really able to participate in the different structural stages of the planning process such as diagnosis, expertise, programming, representation, etc. The public consultations are organised to pay lip-service to the law, rather than to provide critical tools for an effective community planning process.

The ECObox strategy proposes a different understanding of the participative approach in which residents play the central role: a site-

based planning process involving neighbourhood residents working in self-organised teams (that could eventually include experts of their choice). They are supported in this way to express their own individual and collective desires, to identify priorities and elaborate their own proposals, by being offered planning tools and assistance with information, technical knowledge and representation techniques. These collective proposals, issuing from real consultation and creative work, inventive and well-informed, constitute a real participative contribution and a realistic base for further negotiation with the official partners, aiming for both sustainability and social creativity.

Democratic access to decision-making is not granted by an imposed participation. Participation should be understood as a progressive and evolving process that constructs itself inferentially, by both integrating and adjusting its aims according to the newly created situations. Participation is performative, it is 'to collage one's collage onto another collage', it cannot work through preconceived models. This is also because

Democracy itself cannot be conceived within an intangible legitimacy; in fact collective thought must be built progressively along with the events and not be the captive of former results or representations. A neighbourhood can change its opinion according to what happens, and it is for 'technicians' to find the means to represent it by incorporating this change as a sign of progress or as a question.⁴⁰

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A. Querrien, sociologist, collaborator of *aaa*.

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'The attraction of co-production is the fact that one could learn.' Excerpt from a discussion on urban interstices, ECObox, June 2003.

*'L'intérêt de la co-production c'est le fait qu'on apprend...'*⁴¹

Participation is also a formative process. Residents are initiated through dialogue and interventions into becoming an active part of their immediate surroundings. They start to shape their own policies, to articulate their own voices and preferences, to organise themselves independently. By facilitating this process, we might manage to pass on tools that will allow them to re-shape their world. We learn together to 'make do' with the available resources. This energy generated through people acting out in their own environment should lead to a network of support, a critical reading of one's own surroundings and an involvement within the changes taking place.

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'An experience of negotiation between competency and incompetency...', François Deck, artist, collaborator of *aaa*.

*Une expérience de la négociation entre compétence et incompétence...*⁴²

ECObox is a learning and doing platform organised through a hetero-

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Guattari defines heterogenesis as 'processes of continuous resingularisation... Heterogeneity is an expression of desire, of a becoming that is always in the process of adapting, transforming and modifying itself in relation to its environment.

Whereas the State works by homogenizing (macro-political consensus), it is always already defeated by heterogenous formations whose singularities cannot be represented (micropolitical disensus).'

See Guattari and Genosko. Op. cit.

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Such programmes have been organised until now in partnership with the University of Sheffield, École d'Architecture Paris Malaquais and École Nationale de Beaux Arts de Grenoble.

genesis of levels of praxis.⁴³ 'Knowledge' and 'space' are produced at the same time and by different participants: professionals and researchers, users, institutional representatives, teachers, students, children, etc... Pedagogical and research programs are conjointly conducted by the *aaa* team and different institutions (live projects, workshops and participative studios).⁴⁴ ECObox became a formative structure that draws co-productions and participatory action research, involving both professionals and users of all ages. It creates a shared learning environment in which forms of personal knowledge co-evolve through group interactions.

Participation in the ECObox is effective not only within the production of spatial objects but within spatial practices as well, within the invention of new tools for multiple and flexible use. For example, a series of modules of mobile furniture have been co-produced by *aaa* members, eco-designers, residents, and students to function as urban catalysts and mobile extensions of the ECObox garden: these include an urban kitchen, a ludothèque, a mobile cinema, a library, a seed bank, a fountain/rainwater-collector, and a drawing office. They generate infrastructure and networks, stimulate desire and pleasure at the scale of proximity. Inhabitants can use them for different activities to appropriate space within the city. They enable a *tactical practice*, in the sense of Michel de Certeau, formalising a type of urban 'resistance' through techniques of infiltration and *détournement*. They empower minor cultures, minor languages and minor urban practices to validate local traditions and personal abilities to resist the dominant forms of knowledge, institutional control and prescriptive ways of living in the city.

Autonomy and subjectivation

A participation process should also enable users to constitute themselves as active-reactive subjects, as subjects in transformation. Participation should concern not only the realisation of sustainable spaces but also what Deleuze and Guattari have called *subjectivation processes*, creative understandings of the subjects themselves in relation to their environment and the ways they inhabit it. The outcome of a subjectivation process cannot be planned, cannot be referred to any pre-existing or projected form of knowledge and power. The subjectivation process is as unpredictable as an event:

There are various ways individuals and groups constitute themselves as subjects through processes of subjectivation: what counts in such processes is the extent to which, as they take shape, they elude both established forms of knowledge and the dominant forms of power. This is of value even if they in turn engender new forms of power or

become assimilated into new forms of knowledge. For a while, they had a real rebellious spontaneity.⁴⁵

Autonomy within a community will not be realised by disciplinary regulation imposed by power, but by internal displacement, shift-ings, settings and dissolutions that constitute a process of self-composition: the self-regulation of a living society.

The architect-user/the user-architect

Within a *real* participation, which is a self-regulation process driven by the rebellious spontaneity that Deleuze speaks about, the architect is no longer granted the role as master of the project. In participative approaches, the architect should accept losing control. Rather than being a master, the architect should understand himself/herself as one of the participants.⁴⁶

Clara Greed in her article 'Can man plan? Can women plan better?' makes a distinction between public and professional participation within the current regeneration schemes and criticises the current 'public particip-ation' exercises organised on 'hit and run' practices. She speaks about the necessity of a planner acting as 'a broker of ideas, an organiser or advocate, rather than as a "master-planner"'. She asserts a feminist position (that we subscribe to) according to which 'it is better to work for a community within the voluntary sector than to work for local government', becoming a member of the 'planned', better to seek to implement policy by means over and above, or apart from, the mainstream planning system'. See Sadler and Hughes. Op. cit., p.166.

ECObbox began with a group of architects who started to work where they lived, in their own neighbourhood. They manifested an immediate political concern and civic engagement with their own surroundings, acknowledged themselves as architect-residents, architect-citizen, architect-users... This position, blurring traditional borders between the architect and the user, also invites its reversal: the user-architect, the citizen-architect, etc... A whole permutation of roles is initiated...

Design-action

For an architect-resident or architect-user, 'use' is no longer separated from the design process. Such a position takes critically Jonathan Hill's assumption that 'architecture is made by use and by design'.⁴⁷ The practice of such an architect-user could be called design-action, by analogy with what we have called urban action. Like urban action, design-action is based on the critical contribution of users who start to be considered by activist design groups in their attempt to establish a relationship between the everyday and the academy, the neighbourhood and the political scene. Design-action goes beyond academic disciplines and standardised practices.

In a design-action there is no border between design and use... Creativity is present in use, where one continually has to find ways of adapting and reinventing everyday life contexts... Design-action is inclusive and accessible: it prepares for new aesthetics resulting from a mix of the designer's and the user's aesthetics. Design-action works with the concrete logics of bricolage rather than with abstract concepts, with presentations rather than representations.

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An example of design-action is the Urban Parkfiction project, in Hamburg, a radically participatory planning programme of a self-organised park that developed in reaction against a development project that was blocked by the inhabitants. The Parkfiction project addresses issues of accessibility and inclusion: 'The main issue is to develop strategies for shaping a planning process in such a way that it becomes accessible for people who, due to cultural and social preconditions as well as their experience in life, are usually excluded from actively designing the public sphere', (www.parkfiction.org).

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The 'politics of location' is a trend with the recent feminist project that considers the difference between discursive subjects by taking into consideration various determinations (geographic, ethnic, cultural, libidinal, etc.). R. Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and sexual difference in contemporary feminist theory, gender and culture*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, p.268.

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The term belongs to Raoul Bunschoten and has been issued within Chora's methodology. A number of architects and artists have borrowed the 'urban curating' technique and applied it in different ways. (Jeanne van Heeswijk, Meike Shalk, Helena Matson, Kirsten Wilein, etc.).

Design-action is interventionist design. It takes political positions and catalyses social processes.⁴⁸

Cuisine urbaine is an urban device that articulates the memory of places, individual tastes, cultural backgrounds, personal narratives, know-hows, inventions and lucky finds. Together with the very act of cooking, other informal practices take place around the kitchen: meetings, discussions, testimonials, storytelling, exchange, play. It is a tool for concocting food, the community and the city. The kitchen can be used by one or several persons, adults and children outside and inside of ECObox. Principles of material and energy economy, recycling, self-sufficiency, autonomy, participation and multiculturalism have been considered in its construction. The shape and scale of the urban kitchen vary according to its users' desire. Tools and accessories (dishes, carpets, cushions) are collected in the neighbourhood. Beyond its role of urban catalyst, the urban kitchen is an informal economy generator.

This is not so much a bottom-up approach, but one 'in the middle', as Deleuze would say. It is an approach that places the architect and the user in the middle of a creative architectural process. In feminist terms, one could speak of a 'politics of location',⁴⁹ the strategic way one places him or herself in the architectural profession, as well as the way one may try to operate with situated knowledge in design and urban planning. In many ways, this is a location in the middle, this 'middle' which, for Deleuze, is the place where lines and politics acquire their speed.

Urban curating

Urban curating is a new planning tool, discussed and experimented with by a number of contemporary architects by analogy with current practices in contemporary art.⁵⁰ An architect who acts as 'curator' defines their professional location in the middle, in between institutions, clients, and users. Rather than a master, they are a mediator:

As an independent cultural worker, she escapes what we would call limitations, the 'myth' of the artist-architect whose authority is based on professional judgement and authorship, institutional bureaucracy that is founded on the building law and abstracted knowledge, and economic limits that are determined by the developer and the market. The curator moves in between. Official instruments for urban planning are strict and not especially flexible. There is need for interference, which may take different faces, and which

⁵¹ Meike Shalk, 'Urban Curating', www.soc.nu/urbancurating

⁵² Meike Shalk, 'Urban Curating', (see also Raoul Bunschoten's chapter in this book).

⁵³ See Marion von Osten's chapter in this book.

⁵⁴ One of the best-known proximity centres is *Centro Sociale Leoncavallo*, founded in Milan in 1975, (www.leoncavallo.org).

⁵⁵ A. Membretti, 'Centro Sociale Leoncavallo: The social construction of a public space of proximity', www.republicart.net

must be constantly redefined. We felt strongly that a curatorial practice could make a difference here.⁵¹

The curator draws on others' creativity: on that of users or clients who provide frameworks for its fulfilment. He or she is a caretaker and a connector of people, things, desires, stories, opportunities, 'a person who scans and lays out a new field by making new readings of "things", which s/he identifies and contextualises'.⁵²

What is changed when 'participation' is part of a curatorial practice, rather than part of the mainstream planning process? This form of participation reinserts principles of connectedness and heterogeneity in urban planning and draws into question existing institutional frameworks by creating new readings and interfaces with creative practices and uses.⁵³ Before regenerating the city, one needs to regenerate the frameworks within the regeneration programmes, the institutions and the bodies that run these programmes. One needs to reconsider the way the projects are represented, to rework the very mechanisms of participation and of the production of subjectivities.

Public space of proximity

New autonomous, self-managed, institutions, cooperatives including both production, education and collective 'lifespaces', start to emerge. Their value consists in the inventiveness they show outside the established frameworks. An example of such autonomous institutions are the 'proximity centres' in Italy resulting from the radical left activism and the squat culture in the 1970s.⁵⁴ These centres survived over the years and evolved into institutions but retained their political agenda about individual rights to self-determination. They are experiments in creating a 'public space of proximity':

Real public space seems to be distinguished by being territory that is fought for, which is always in danger of being subjugated to privatised or bureaucratic control. A symbolic, identitary and complex territory, where the social sphere overlaps with the political, cultural and the economic sphere. A space in which these elements are newly composed again and again within diverse and fragile communities in permanent dialectic with an increasingly global society. A public space of proximity is, in other words, where the discourse on the collective good is rooted in everyday social practices in a common material space with its multifaceted meanings.⁵⁵

The ECObox garden is a self-managed space. Through a permutation of roles and different levels of praxis, several activities and

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Guattari and Genosko, p.51.

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'... A contract with the other in a network of places and relations.' Stephane Tonnelat, urban designer, external collaborator of aaa.

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Through a critical approach of Foucault and Lefebvre, Mary McLeod theorised these 'other spaces' in both senses: as 'spaces of others' and as 'other kind of spaces'. Other architectures, and as such other designs and other uses, are the potentials in these 'other spaces'. M. McLeod, 'Everyday and other spaces', in D. Coleman, E. Danze and C. Henderson (eds), *Feminism and Architecture*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996. Cupers and Miessen in their recent book *Spaces of Uncertainty* define these 'other spaces' as an alternative to the public space, which is more and more structured, programmed and controlled. These 'other spaces' are also spaces of encounter with 'the other': the non-consumer, the old, the poor, the restless, etc. 'Public space – with its mechanisms of control – has its other, situated in the fragility and indefiniteness of certain spaces and activities. It is both these atmospheres that influence us in the way we live, the way we communicate, and finally the way we think. How ambiguous are our desires, dreams and projections? Is it only the sterile places with clearly defined use that we can enjoy today? Is it the designer shops, the fancy cafes, or the commercial promenades, that provide our satisfaction? What about the social public spaces in the back of our heads? Do we still consider the possibility of diverse encounters with the non-consumer, the other? What about the young, the restless, the old, the poor, and the ones having been excluded from contemporary public space and therefore removed from society?'

K. Cupers and M. Miessen, *Spaces of Uncertainty*, Wuppertal: Verlag Müller, 2002, p.151.

policies run alternatively: i.e. a participative urban laboratory, a self-managed gallery, a workshop for self-productions, an exchange platform between internal and external actors. Economical, intellectual and emotional productions are managed together. The 'participative urban laboratory' is nested in the garden where discussions, protest meetings, design workshops, object fabrication, gardening and other types of material and immaterial productions are proposed by inhabitants. The usual participation framework is reversed: officials and institutional representatives are invited to participate in what is proposed and elaborated in situ, by inhabitants. The 'laboratory' creates at the same time autonomies and alliances within the framework of a public space of proximity. Design is demystified and the project is co-produced without mastering and control but with a new reading. Nevertheless, the typical modalities of self-organisation, in other words horizontality, and the corresponding absence of formal hierarchies of a vertical type, often end up in conflict, so solutions have to be found.

In his book *The Three Ecologies*, Guattari discusses 'other contracts of citizenship', about ways to enable 'the singular, the exceptional, the rare, to coexist with a State structure that is the least burdensome possible'.⁵⁶

'Other spaces' – leaving space for others

*'Un contrat avec l'autre dans un réseau de lieux et de relations.'*⁵⁷

The ECObox strategy is based on the temporary appropriation and use of leftover spaces and urban interstices. These spaces are (sometimes) the waste from the real-estate market or due to the temporary neglect of the urban planning policies. They are 'other spaces', the other of what constitutes the planned city.⁵⁸ Studies have demonstrated that in big cities they function as an alternative to conventional forms of public space that nowadays are more and more subject to surveillance and control. The leftovers are spaces of relative freedom where rules and codes could still be redefined. The quality of these leftover spaces consists in their resistance to stable and homogenous appropriation. These 'spaces of uncertainty', to borrow Cupers and Miessen's term, are the very opposite of the functional spaces in the city. They define 'public space' as heterogeneous, fragile, indefinite, fragmented and multiple.

Public space and urbanity have always been connected to disorder, functional heterogeneity and diversity. The most meaningful char-

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Cupers and Miessen, *Spaces of Uncertainty*, pp.151-2.

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'The temporary is something which relates to life.' Excerpt from a discussion on urban interstices, ECObox June 2003.

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Among attempts to reopen the debate on strategies and tools of planning, we should mention 'Urban Catalyst', a research project that investigates the potential of temporary uses as a motor of urban change. Coordinated by 'Studio Urban Catalyst' at the Technical University of Berlin, an interdisciplinary network of 12 partners from five European metropolises – Helsinki, Berlin, Amsterdam, Vienna and Naples – has developed models of action and strategic planning tools by integrating the potential of temporary uses into long-term urban development. They have formed a unique archive which is now available to architects, planners, municipalities, developers, property owners and temporary users. (www.urbandcatalyst.de). The Italian group Stalker speaks also about 'urban catalysis' in the context of their work with the Kurdish community in Campo Boario in Rome. In their case, 'catalysis' is defined as the transformation issued by differentiated forces working together; professional, social, economic and also geopolitical differences are considered. See Stalker's chapter in this book.

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'A dynamic which is sustainable by temporary presence.' Excerpt from a discussion on urban interstices, ECObox, June 2003.

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The term 'definitively temporary zones' has been borrowed from sociologist Federico Rahola. F. Rahola, *Zone definitivamente temporare: I luoghi dell'umanità in ecce homo*, Verona: Ombre Corte, 2002.

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The Taz is a 'guerrilla operation which liberates an area... and then dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere'. Hakim Bey, T.A.Z.: *The temporary autonomous zone, ontological anarchy, poetical terrorism*, Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1991, p.101.

acter of the metropolis lies in this multiplicity beyond physical borders. The urban public sphere can therefore be based on the model of confrontation and instability, as it is characterised by encounters and confrontations between people.⁵⁹

The status of these spaces inspired the ECObox strategy, whose main aim was to leave space for 'others', others than the usual actors of the urban planning process, visible and less visible users, through a process that would enable them to get involved in the decision-making and take control over spaces in the area where they live. It is a political process. The problem is how to avoid freezing functions in these spaces while conserving their flexibility, their programmatic uncertainty, their fragility and indefiniteness. How can we maintain 'otherness' as a rule within both planning and use?

Urban catalysis

*'Le temporaire est quelque chose qui relie à la vie'.*⁶⁰

Being based upon temporary use of temporary spaces, the ECObox project is itself 'temporary'. An economy of temporary interstices creates new project paradigms: temporary agencies, nomadic devices, urban catalysts.⁶¹ The ECObox strategy tries to manage the different temporalities, politics of use, ownership status and proposes temporary inhabitations that create new usages and new urban functions in the area. The temporary condition supposes mobility and multiplicity. The mobile furniture modules – that act as urban catalysts in the area – generate temporary agencies and form progressive networks of actors. We can speak about a sustainability of processes rather than objects or places... As the aims are continually evolving according to the new spatial opportunities, participation becomes itself a process-in-progress. Usually, the participative process is solidified as soon as the goals are met: when a contested space is occupied, a project is built, etc. The role of these temporary agencies is to keep the use of space and the process of decision open...

*'Une dynamique qui est durable par des présences temporaires'.*⁶²

The ECObox strategy is an experiment that could be extended into broader planning strategies and politics of use that preserve permanent areas for temporary use in the city. 'Definitively Temporary Zones'⁶³ – by analogy with Hakim Bey's TAZs⁶⁴ – could be imagined

as self-run spaces in which there are no functions but only managements, agencies, catalysts. The continual participation of users will be the key element for the existence of such spaces.

Nomadic planning and rhizomatic participation

These moving spatial configurations within a multiplicity of sites and temporalities, of funding sources, and social actors challenge the norms of planning. They create lines of flight. Because, as Deleuze puts it, 'to think multiplicity means to draw escape routes or "lines of flight" away from closed and fixed structures or codes that restrict and constrain the movement and connectivity of thought and action'.⁶⁵

The aim of nomadic, rhizomatic thought is to promote micropolitics, to foster the decoding of codes, the deterritorialisation of desire, language, thought, and practices, in favour of a 'molecular' or micropolitical transformation of experience. Micropolitics are not only local politics but could be rhizomatically extended at a bigger scale to confront with challenges raised by the global order. The forms taken by the alter-globalisation movements (World and Continental Social Forums, WTO and G8 parallel summits) based on global scale assemblages of local groups and civil society organisations from all over the world, are a good example in this sense.⁶⁶

Participating in the imaginary production

*'Comment à partir de presque rien, des populations peuvent se mobiliser dans la co-fabrication?'*⁶⁷

In order to sustain a process without making it repetitive, in order to avoid homogeneity and recurrence of the same, one needs to reinvent it continually. For a truly creative participation, one needs to go beyond the pragmatism, and the almost compulsory reflex of using participation mechanically, of standard regeneration programmes in deprived areas of Western European cities. Instead, participation is needed everywhere where there is a need for real public space... Rather than just solving environmental, economical and social aspects of planning, a sustainable approach should also sustain a creative way of living. If, according to Appadurai, imagination is 'a collective tool for the transformation of the real, for the creation of multiple horizons of possibility',⁶⁸ then it should be a tool in planning and design processes as well. Planning is not only for transforming places but also for transforming the imagination of those who live in these places. Participation could play the role of a stimulator of diffused creativity and imaginary production.

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G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p.8.

66

See Teresa Hoskyn's chapter in this book.

67

'How, when starting with almost nothing, can populations mobilise themselves into co-fabrication processes?' Excerpt from discussion on urban interstices, ECObox, June 2003.

68

Arjun Appadurai, 'The right to participate in the work of the imagination', in *Transurbanism*, Rotterdam: V2_Publishing/ NAI Publishers, 2002, p.34.

69

Franco Berardi Bifo, 'What is the meaning of autonomy today?', www.republicart.net

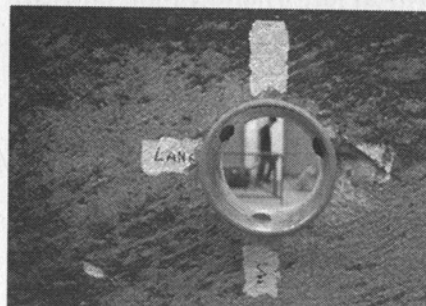
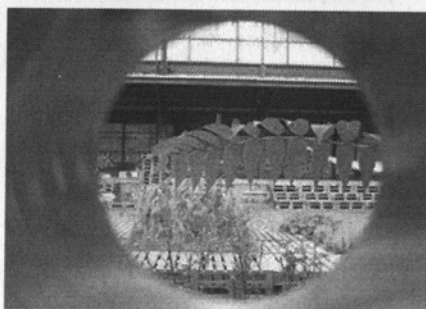
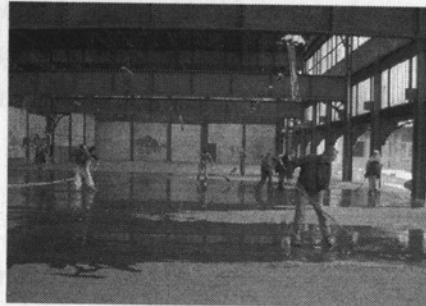
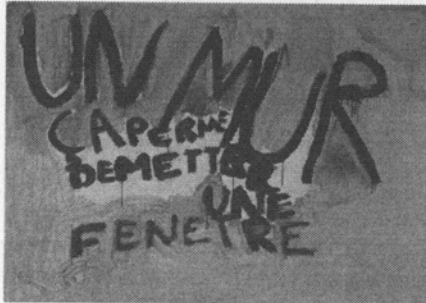
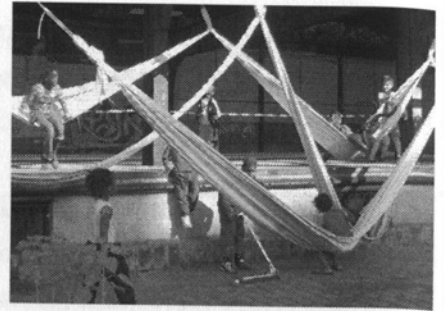
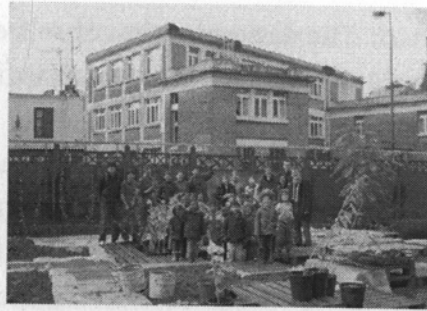
'The dissemination of self-organised knowledge can create a social framework containing infinite autonomous and self-reliant worlds.'⁶⁹

Because ultimately, the imaginary is the most accessible category of a participation process, anybody of any age and from any place in the world could contribute to it. The aim of a nomadic, rhizomatic participation is to sustain this diffused creativity across boundaries and limitations, 'across thresholds of established norms and conventions, towards unexpected manifestations' within both sociopolitical phenomena and individual destinies, towards autonomous and self-reliant worlds forming multiple and diversified networks.

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B. Holmes, activist theorist, collaborator of *aaa*.

*'Seizing the power of the imaginary, reinvent a taste for freedom...'*⁷⁰



Top row, left to right: 03.01 – *Gardens of words*, consultation Place Torcy, La Chapelle 2001; 03.02 – Children from rue Pajol, and students from the University of Sheffield on the construction site of the Ecobox garden, 2002; 03.03 – Hammocks installed by the group Stalker in the Ecobox garden as part of their project Via Egnatia, 2003.

Second row, left to right: 03.04 – 'A wall is the support for a window', mural poster realised by children, Ecobox, 2003; 03.05 – Mopping up with the residents of La Chapelle, Ecobox, 2003; 03.06 – One of the debates within the community urban observatory hosted by Ecobox, 2003. Third, fourth & bottom row: 03.07–03.17 – Pipe holes in the enclosure wall, Ecobox, 2003.



Top: 03.18 – The mobile kitchen in the Ecobox garden, 2004. Bottom: 03.19 – Questions translated into the different languages spoken in La Chapelle. These questions are issued in the debates organised at Ecobox and displayed on the enclosure wall of the garden, 2003 (installation by Marie-Charlotte Moreau).