

ACTING SPACE

Transversal notes, on-the-ground observations and concrete questions for us all

Constantin Petcou and Doina Petrescu, Paris - November 2007

The crisis of space in a capitalistic society

Capitalist means of spatial production and territorial management are more than ever undergoing a crisis. Global capitalistic space is polarised between the North and the South, furrowed with unprecedented flows (of money, resources, people, etc.) for the most part in one direction. Certain cities are undergoing uncontrolled growth or decline, whether they are globalised under the control of mafias or obscure interest groups (religious, economic, political) in the South, or under pressure from economic mutations such as shrinking cities in the North. From an ecological standpoint, the modes of territorial occupation and exploitation are evolving into a planetary stalemate: every day the surfaces of natural land diminish, making way for concrete, implicitly contributing to the decrease of biodiversity. After years of study of the « planetary garden », landscape architect, Gilles Clément, overtly criticizes the modes of space anthropisation and underlines how unspoilt spaces play a role of protector. In this line of thought, he specifies how revealing it is that the IFLA (International Foundation of Landscape Architecture) assimilates industrial wastelands to « endangered landscape ».

In the same way, sociologists and political scientists are trying to understand the major changes linked to this global territorial management: changes in the modes and temporality of labour, dislocation of traditional sociability forms, trivialization of violence in an urban setting and, by counter-reaction, privatisation of public spaces and the drive towards a multiplication of gated communities. For Arjun Appadurai, it is due to a gap between contemporary cultural realities and the shapes that must insure an acceptable level of social cohesion: the failure of the nation-state to bear and define the lives of its citizens is perceptible through the increase in parallel economies, private and semi-private police armies, secessionist nationalisms and non-governmental organizations that offer alternatives to the national control of subsistence and justice. »²

At a micro scale, capitalistic space is drowned under promotional pressure that is continually carried out by all communication means and media (mail, telephone,

¹ Gilles Clément, (1985), *La friche apprivoisée*, in *Où en est l'herbe ? – Réflexions sur le Jardin Planétaire*, éd. Actes Sud, Paris, 2006, p. 24.

² Arjun Appadurai, (1996), *Après le colonialisme – Les conséquences culturelles de la globalisation*, ed. Payot, Paris, 2001, p. 261.

television, internet) transforming the home into an absolute centre of a consumerist culture of the ephemeral. All objects are disposable; they are no longer recycled or repaired by oneself. Marketing studies perfectly include family temporalities in order to reach their different targets, at very specific hours, in their specific vulnerability (greedy children, solitary unemployed, beloved animals, curious students, retired people in good health, couples in love, etc.).

On a larger scale, capitalistic space is ever more limited and controlled: by a permanent decrease in the field of possible actions within an urban space, by the superimposition of numerous regulations and norms. In his attempt to imagine the possibility of an ecological balance between environment, social issues and subjectivity, Felix Guattari denounces the impoverishment and homogenisation produced by the capitalistic control of the media and of public space: « productions of « primary » subjectivity (...) are spreading on a truly industrial scale, especially by media and infrastructure »³. This impoverishment of urban space can be seen via the gradual disappearance of space devoted to public uses and that of space likely to be appropriated for informal uses based on responsibility and reciprocal trust.

Referring to Jane Jacobs' analysis, and singling out the inherent contradictions that capitalism creates on space, in his book devoted to the production of space, Henri Lefebvre underlines the abstract character of capitalistic space “which acts as a tool or domination”.⁴ The methods and scenarios which try to be “creative” and “attractive” (by offering Theme Parks, Urban Renewal Zones, “City Branding” operations etc.) are often a failure because space is above all considered in terms of financial yield and its subjects are manipulated to accomplish just that. Capitalist economy continues to create desubjectivated, consumerist and abstract urban spaces.

How is it possible to regain ownership, to resubjectivate the city? How does one act being a professional of space issues; by what approach and by what political measure? How is it possible to act being a regular inhabitant?

Desubjectivated space

For most of us, we react by simply following the same lifestyle since we lack instruments to act; and by waiting for decisions to be made by high decision-making bodies, decisions which are difficult to materialise because of the divergent interests put into play and the macro-economic, geo-political unbalances which overlap evermore at all levels.

What some of us, the most politically active, are able to do, is to react by criticizing, by organizing demonstrations, signing petitions and publishing alarming information on internet. But these reactions stay at an abstract and discursive level even if the discourse sometimes « takes to the streets ». Acting « in the streets », in public space and on a large scale is important and necessary, but sometimes leads to no outcome and to no constructive proposals. And when there is an outcome, it is recovered by the dominating power, often excluding those who, being concerned, articulated and asked for those changes.

On the actual daily level, this barrier is due, among other things, to individuals being reduced to roles which are void of any critical and active social position. Giorgio

³ Félix Guattari, *Les trois écologies*, ed. Galilée, Paris, 1989, p. 52.

⁴ Henri Lefebvre, (1974), *La production de l'espace*, 4^e édition, éd. Anthropos, Paris, 2000, p. 427.

Agamben points at the contemporary state which acts like some kind of « desubjectivating machine, like a machine which blurs all classical identities and at the same time, and Foucault states it very well, like a machine which recodes, juridically speaking especially, dissolved identities. »⁵ Agamben goes on to underline that the ground for this resubjectivation « is the same which exposes us to the subservient process of biopower. Thus there is ambiguity and risk. Foucault demonstrates: « the risk is that we re-identify ourselves, that we invest this situation with a new identity, that we produce a new subject, very well, but a subject subservient to the state, and from there we carry on, despite ourselves, with this infinite process of subjectivation and subservience which is precisely the definition of biopower. »⁶ The crisis related to space is doubled by the crisis of individual and collective subjectivation.

If in our action we limit ourselves to a criticism of the institutions, that of the state and of Capitalism, there is little hope for change. Acting to build « another world » will continue to have limited impact as long as we don't give ourselves the means, individually within our reach, to reinvest urban space collectively, ecologically and politically; as long as this space stays desubjectivated by our absence.

For the past few years and through a series of practical experiments begun with the *self managed architecture workshop*, we've been trying to develop, without ado, with the means at our disposal and by associating anyone wishing to get involved, an approach, which starting at the micro level, is able to provide another vision of the city.⁷

Acting in the interstices

When new people come to these spaces we've initiated, very often they ask if they can do such and such activity. And, before answering, we ask ourselves if this activity could be done again by others later on, insofar as not to hinder the project. We've come to understand, together with the users of these spaces, that the freedom of each person to act in a mutual space is conditioned by the necessity to not hinder someone else's freedom nor that of the whole project as a collective one. This way of acting allows for the spatial coexistence of a "multitude in movement".⁸ It's a way that gives the most autonomy and at the same time spatial coexistence of subjects, which can

⁵ Giorgio Agamben, *Une biopolitique mineure*, entretien réalisé par Stany Grelet et Mathieu Potte-Bonneville, Vacarme n° 10, hiver 2000

⁶ G. Agamben, *ibid.*

M. Foucault dénonce le pouvoir qui "essaie de régir la multiplicité des hommes" par les techniques du biopouvoir : "un ensemble de processus comme la proportion des naissances et des décès, le taux de reproduction, la fécondité d'une population, etc.", in Michel Foucault, *Il faut défendre la société – Cours au Collège de France. 1976*, éd. Gallimard / Seuil, Paris, 1997, p. 216.

⁷ Par le biais de l'*atelier d'architecture autogérée* nous avons développé depuis 2001 une pratique alternative de projets micro-urbains, notamment à travers une série d'espaces autogérés par des habitants ; aaa est une plate-forme collective de recherche et d'action autour des mutations urbaines qui fonctionne à travers un réseau inter- et extra-disciplinaire ouvert à de multiples points de vue : architectes, artistes, étudiants, chercheurs, retraités, politiques, chômeurs, militants, habitants et tous usagers concernés. Voir aussi notre article autour du projet ECObox, initié en tant qu'architectes et habitants du quartier La Chapelle, Paris 20^e, "Au rez-de-chaussée de la ville", in *Multitude* n° 20, printemps 2005.

⁸ En évoquant la construction d'un projet de la multitude, Hardt et Negri précisent que ce projet est possible par la création de "relations et des formes sociales à travers des modalités de travail coopératives." Michael Hardt et Antonio Negri, *Multitude – Guerre et démocratie à l'âge de l'Empire*, éd. La Découverte, Paris, 2004, p. 121.

manifest their differences in a « permanent heterogenesis ». ⁹ By the human complexity put into play, « spatial acting » teaches us to manage the contradictions that space contains. Inevitably these spaces will be contradictory by their content.

Acting spatial takes time. It is necessary to allow enough time for actively reinvesting space; to spend time on location, to meet other people, to reinvent uses of free time, to give oneself more and more time to share with others. Common desires can thus emerge from these « shared moments », collective dynamics and projects to come. Patiently, we had to rebuild practices in spaces void of use, which are no longer suited to anyone. Lefebvre clearly distinguishes the difference in nature between space produced by a bottom-up process, set-up by concerned users and space decided by domineering mechanisms: « the user's space is experienced, not represented (conceived). Referring to the abstract space of skills (architects, urban planners, planners), the space of tasks that users accomplish on a daily level is a tangible space. Which means subjective. It is a space of « subjects » and not of calculations... ». ¹⁰ Therefore, we are looking to set the conditions of a non-predetermined experience, of a subjective experience which produces a collective narration of urban space through daily activity.

In the space smoothed over by capitalism, we must imagine other spaces to invest: grooves, cracks, breaches, loop-holes. We must multiply the modalities to act on the edge, the margins, the borders. In permaculture, we refer to the « border effect »; the « margin effect » and Clement reminds us that there is more life where environments meet and overlap: « limits –interfaces, canopies, borders, thresholds, outskirts- in themselves comprise biological layers. Their wealth is often superior to the environments that they divide ». ¹¹ In the spaces of « biological depth », energy is concentrated and intensified by difference, by the encounter with other species. Likewise, in his quest for a definition of democratic space where we are not just tolerant, indifferent of difference, but precisely where « those who differ are those who matter », Richard Sennett refers to the multi-functional margin of the agora (*Stoas, Heliata*, etc.). ¹² He also talks about the difference between limited space and fringed space, between « limit » (boundary) and « edge », « margin » (border), defining the edge as something simultaneously resistant and porous. This double and contradictory characteristic « resistant and porous » mirrors the intensity and contradiction that characterize the paradoxical condition of the « edge ».

Like a metonymy of what happens inside, the limits and the enclosures of shared spaces that we've built to this day always find another function, parallel and contradictory: to let the view go through, to let the plants grow over, to expose, to play, etc. In this way, a limit between two spaces is transformed into a space of exchange; the separation is transformed into an interface for dialogue. We've replaced existing opaque enclosures with neighbourhood enclosures, library enclosures, pierced enclosures, gardened, lit...

⁹ Dans son analyse des « territoires existentiels », Guattari considère qu'une praxis du contexte se construit à travers une énonciation composée "d'éléments hétérogènes prenant consistance et persistance commune lors de passages de seuils constitutifs d'un monde au détriment d'un autre", in F. Guattari, *o.c.* p. 50.

¹⁰ Henri Lefebvre, (1974), *o.c.* p. 418.

¹¹ Gilles Clément, *Manifeste du Tiers paysage*, éd. Sujet/Objet, Paris, 2004, p. 48.

¹² Richard Sennett, *Democratic Spaces*, in Hunch N° 9, Summer 2005, Berlage Institute, p. 40.

Alterotopical spaces

By looking for urban spaces available for “acting”, we’ve invested cracks and “in-betweens” that are also spaces that concentrate energy, are contradictory and porous. Clement describes them as spaces that allow a stronger ecological wealth than well-defined landscapes. In an urban setting, the “in-between” is most often a neglected area between two buildings, a hollow between two wholes. Clement tells us that these cracks form a “tiers paysage” –“third landscape” which comprises “a territory for the multiple species which find nowhere else to be.”¹³ It is the shape of space shared with another: alterotopy. Foucault spoke of “heterotopias” as spaces that have “the power to juxtapose in one real place many spaces and locations which are by themselves incompatible,” “spaces of the other”.¹⁴ But the spaces we’re interested in, “alterotopias”, are other spaces as much as spaces of “the other”, and spaces built and shared “with others” with “those who differ from us and who are important to us”.

Acting spaces become spaces to question daily life, its potential, its barriers, its imposed temporalities. By blaming the stereotypical mechanisms of conformed spaces, these acting spaces can become spaces to dis-learn uses that are subservient to capitalism and to relearn singular uses, by producing a collective and spatial subjectivity proper to the invested subjects. Through the daily weaving of desires, these micro-practices in space introduce other temporalities, other dynamics (longer, random, collective and sometimes self-managed) thus comprising spaces, which undergo continual transformation, “auto-poietical”.¹⁵

By investing the “on our doorsteps”, we create interstices, differences, in a homogenised and abstract city. By overcoming the anonymous condition that we usually find as soon as we leave the house, we can contribute to resubjectivate space. From these spaces, proximity can acquire a familiar character; we meet familiar faces, we say hello to some passers-by, we exchange words and phrases with neighbours. Acting “at one’s doorstep” allows one to find a local anchorage. At a certain moment, there is the risk to settle for this rediscovered social dimension and to limit oneself to a local and closed-in social circle. Indeed, the acting spaces that we develop stay open to transit, to intersecting with other subjectivities and dynamics from elsewhere; stemming from the local, we work to set up spatial trans-local networks and make them operational.¹⁶

By a functional and pragmatic mixture of spaces that would “normally” not intersect, through a neighbourhood community that is active and permanent with “the other”, this weaving of scales and trans-local positions enables a spatial alterotopic production. It is a *realistic utopia*, such as Jacques Rancière describes it in his analysis of the political project: “not the dazzling utopia of the distant island, of the nowhere land, but the imperceptible utopia which consists in having two separate

¹³ G. Clément, *o.c.*, p.19.

¹⁴ Cf. M. Foucault (1967), *Les espaces autres*, in Michel Foucault, *Dits et Ecrits*, vol2, éd. Gallimard, Paris, 2001, p.1577-1578.

¹⁵ ² La notion d’auto-poiesis a été proposée en 1971 par H. Maturana et F. Varela pour nommer les qualités d’un système qui engendre et spécifie continuellement la production de ses composants. Voir aussi Francisco Varela, (1979), *Autonomie et connaissance*, Paris, éd. Seuil, 1989.

¹⁶ La notion de translocal est centrale chez Appadurai : “dans cette nouvelle sorte de monde, la production de voisinage tend à se réaliser dans des conditions où le système des États-nations est le pivot normatif pour la production d’activités locales et translocales.” in A.Appadurai, *o.c.* p.259.

spaces coincide.”¹⁷ Through this practice of trans-local alterotopias, we can reintroduce “the political dimension” in everyday space.

“agencement jardinier”/ gardening assemblage

For years, the children of families of African origin who regularly frequent ECObox named the garden “gardening”. At first we thought it was some kind of infantile slang or a linguistic error. Listening to them speak about the project as a place where they can play, ride their bikes, garden, draw, play music... where they can do anything, we came to understand their term. They had grasped the active character of space, the permanent transformation of the project according to those who invest in it. It was their way of defining acting in an auto-poietical space. The “acting” is always an assemblage. What is important is the quality of this organisation, its “how”.

Gardening offers a model for a certain type of organisation, which takes into account the singularities, implies patience, availability and the unexpected.

Auto-poietical “acting” enables the setting up of a daily ecology via “agencement jardinier”/gardening assemblages: organisational dynamics by neighbourhood communities, conducive to exchanges, mobile, tolerant and cyclic. These are schemes that come close to ecological dynamics whilst being adapted to an urban environment, to small scales, to daily uses and practices. This mode of action by « agencement jardinier » /gardening assemblage can, in time, produce a constituent space for modes of collective processes and for a local political acting.

“Gardened space” contrasts to “modern” space produced by and experienced through a pragmatic cut-out, which separates all heterogeneous elements: functions, users, scales, etc. Because of these cut-outs, which bring about homogeneous, monovalent spaces, without contradiction, when superimpositions of heterogeneous environments and functions do occur, they are accidental and lead to conflict.

The gardening assemblage teaches us, via the different environments, to go from one space to another, to change locations and to come back. Little by little, we were able to link the heterogeneous spaces that we were building, together with their users, by bringing about unusual encounters, bits of dialogue, doing and making together, letting contradictions arise gently, learning about politics via heterogeneous temporalities, dynamics and content. More than verbal and deliberative forms, gardening assemblage encourages physical, visual, non-verbal practices; an incorporated democracy, living together as a common body.¹⁸

Nevertheless, investing in spatial acting must enable one to stay free in his/her action, free to change, to stop, to pass on. To be free of his/her acting can also mean to hand over (a project, an action, a movement...) but also the possibility to interrupt, to suspend, to introduce a (self)critical interval in his/her subjective journey.

Some of our projects introduce continuous temporary assemblages, based on the mobility of the architectural devices (palette garden, mobile modules, constructions which can be disassembled), that can move and be reinstalled many times, depending on the spatial opportunities. They demonstrate that we can forge durability with the temporary, from repetition and ritornellos that allow for a certain continuity (therefore

¹⁷ Jacques Rancière, *Aux bords du politique*, éd. La Fabrique, Paris, 1998, p.30.

¹⁸ Cf. R. Sennett, oppose l'exercice d'une démocratie délibérative et celui d'une démocratie associative, en comparant le fonctionnement des deux espaces publics de la ville grecque : le Pnyx et l'Agora.

a reinforcement) and at the same time for a reinstitution. Each time, it is just as much the space that reinstitutes itself as it is the subjects that resubjectivise in gardens, debates, exchanges, parties, political projects formulated collectively.

Synaptic subjectivity

Rancière noted that the group enables the appearance of a subject that thinks itself in relationship to others, “the formation of a one that is not a oneself but a relationship of a oneself with someone else”.¹⁹ The relationship with the other, the multiple possible relationships within the group, enable the appearance of a multiple and differential subjectivity.

The investment in a group project always goes through a strong initial motivation; group spaces and projects that we’ve experienced “from the inside”²⁰ allow transversal and hybrid activities (a fluidness of spaces and a mobility in the organisation, that by parallel uses makes it possible to cook and to participate just after a debate or to do handy work and listen, in the same space, to a concert, etc.). To frequent a diversity of activities and skills allows, at a certain moment, for a shift towards other implications, something unexpected, brought about by collective dynamics; people who at first come to garden can, little by little, get involved in political dynamics.

These heterogeneous and porous subjectivities, specific to “in-between” environments allow each person to have multiple transits and successive and temporary adherences within different cultural, professional and social contexts.²¹ Thus, as Rancière states, “the possibility, which is always open, of a new emergence from this ecliptic subject”, which by “the renewal of actors and of forms of their actions” constitutes the guarantee of democratic permanence.²² The social assimilation of this intermittent condition must generate subjectivity that is continually organising itself through multiple transversalities; constituting a “synaptic subject”, that is which functions like a synapse: a body that receives and transmits flow.²³

Synaptic subjectivities adapt to and manage interstices that comprise situations conducive to the practice of democratic writing and for practicing the permanent negotiation of the “democratic undetermined”.²⁴ The undetermined character of these interstices is structural, by including each person’s specific differences and availabilities and by allowing anyone to actually get involved in democratic

¹⁹ Jacques Rancière, *o.c.* p.87.

²⁰ Au sujet de la reconstruction interstitielle de la ville « de l’intérieur par l’intérieur », voir la contribution de Pascal Nicolas-Le Strat au projet de recherche que nous avons initié autour des Interstices Urbains Temporaires, contribution publiée en partie dans ce numéro de *Multitudes*. Pour plus d’informations, voir les sites www.inter-stices.org et www.iscra.fr

²¹ Les pratiques spatiales interstitielles doivent, par leur nature, négocier en permanence avec des données physiques et subjectives contradictoires, ce qui nous rapproche des fondements d’un espace et d’un exercice politique, car, comme dit Rancière, “l’essence de la politique réside dans les modes de subjectivation dissensuels.” J. Rancière, *o.c.* p.184.

²² J. Rancière, *o.c.* p.82.

²³ Nous sommes proches des <embrayeurs existentiels> proposés par F.Guattari, cf. *Cartographies schizoanalytiques*, éd. Galilée, Paris, 1989, p.61 et des “devenirs moléculaires de toutes sortes, devenirs-particules. Des fibres (qui) mènent des uns aux autres, transforment les uns dans les autres, en traversant les portes et les seuils”, cf. Gilles Deleuze et Félix Guattari, *MillePlateaux*, éd. de Minuit, Paris, 1980, p.333.

La synapse (du grec. *syn* = *ensemble*; *haptain* = *toucher, saisir*; c’est-à-dire connexion) désigne une zone de contact fonctionnelle qui s’établit entre deux neurones, ou entre un neurone et une autre cellule (cellules musculaires, récepteurs sensoriels...). Elle assure la conversion d’un potentiel d’action en un signal. (wikipedia.org)

²⁴ Cf. J.Rancière, *o.c.* p.80.

territoriality projects. These places can become the catalysers of “local democracy” rebuilt and updated; then they can initiate connexions with other local projects, introducing networks that carry a “trans-local democracy” and the birth of a large scale collective subjectivity, while staying locally anchored; “a rhizomatic collective subjectivity”. The construction of this rhizomatic subjectivity demands spatial micro-devices that can be inserted in sterilized metropolitan contexts thus initiating the resubjectivation processes. At the same time, these devices can contribute to rewriting a different urban and political discourse.

Guattari pertinently noted the role of architecture among other instruments of Integrated World Capitalism.²⁵ Our tangible experiments showed us that any initiative to adopt these devices by their users is essential for any political or societal project. “Architecture is not only the walls, but especially the people that act within and between these walls.” said a local participant in the ECObox project as he commented on City Hall’s initiative to renovate the Pajol Market in order to put forward a “beacon” project at the same time as the administrative services wished to evict, without discussion, the collective practices that had developed there.²⁶

Biopolitical creativity

If the metropolis has lately become, simply because it is “inhabited”, the privileged place for biopolitical production²⁷, it is “on one’s doorstep” that should be the new factory’s cafeteria, the interstice within the space of production from whence a political reconstruction can begin. But once started, this reconstruction is not void of conditions. Just like any ecological space, these places are reversible; by loss of interest, insufficient investment, they can quickly disappear, be adopted in unfair or discretionary ways, become counter examples, and carry false discourses. In order to preserve them, we must invent an ecological, molecular, collective and daily political policy.

The metropolis is also, according to Negri, “biopolitical creativity”’s ground, acting at all levels: social, cultural, and political. It is not necessarily visible because, being modest in means and appearance, biopolitical creation swarms at the border of the capitalist city in industrial wastelands, squats, “Centri Sociali”, encounters on the corner of the street and street parties, temporary occupations, “TAZ”, “participative platforms” and syndications. New practices are being invented in the cracks of

²⁵ Cf. F.Guattari, *Les trois écologies*, éd. Galilée, Paris, 1989, p.41 : “je propose de regrouper en quatre principaux régimes sémiotiques les instruments sur lesquels repose le CMI [Capitalisme Mondial Intégré]: - les sémiotiques économiques (...), - les sémiotiques juridiques (...), - les sémiotiques technico-scientifiques (...), - les sémiotiques de subjectivation dont certaines se recourent avec celles qui viennent déjà d’être énumérées mais auxquelles il conviendrait d’ajouter beaucoup d’autres, telles que celles relatives à l’architecture, l’urbanisme, les équipements collectifs, etc.”

²⁶ Les projets d’ECObox (Paris 18^e) et de 56 rue St. Blaise (Paris 20^e) ont proposé une architecture qui, plutôt que des murs, construisent des relations. Les palettes et les modules mobiles d’ECObox se déplacent pour réformer l’espace en fonction des usages et des personnes. Dans le quartier St.Blaise, le moment de construction spatiale, le chantier, a été transformé en une expérience culturelle et sociale. Le temps du chantier a été dilaté pour y inclure un temps de sociabilité, formateur de groupes et d’usages. La construction de l’espace a été associée à une construction du sujet collectif. Une mise en acte et en corps du « construire ensemble » comme « se construire ensemble ». Dans ce type de projets, la créativité spatiale, sociale et politique sont indissociables. Nous ouvrons des espaces ; la vision d’une autre ville est construite par ceux qui les prennent en charge.

²⁷ Notes prises dans le séminaire *Métropole et Multitude* dirigé par Antonio Negri, Collège International de Philosophie, Paris, 2005/2006.

existing practices and skills, organisational forms, lifestyles and ways of doing...²⁸ Biopolitical creativity is at everyone's reach. As Appadurai said: "Even the poorest of the poor should have the privilege and the ability to take part in the works of the imagination." The question, he underlines, is if "we are able to create political policy that acknowledges that."²⁹

Today, occupying an empty and unused space to live in under certain conditions, is acknowledged as a legal priority over other criteria of spatial lawfulness; it is the winter truce. We also feel that it is a priority for the metropolitan inhabitant to have access to abandoned spaces for the length of their availability and open them for collective uses that reinvest territory, which is ever more desubjectivated. With this conviction, over the years we've opened a series of spaces that have been used by a large number of people: inhabitants, artists, unemployed, students, architects, retired men and women, researchers, activists, friends and neighbours. After two years of operation, 80 families from the La Chapelle quarter (in Paris) had the keys to ECObox; a few hundred people could therefore have access to a 2000m² plot at any time of the day and of the week, arranged in part as a garden and in part as a workshop. These projects show the necessity of a legal acknowledgment, to open private and public spaces for collective uses, and of a political recognition for the social priorities in the management of metropolitan space, which is ever more subject to market laws.

"Acting space" requires opening, working out, using spaces with "the other", refuges for social and political (bio)diversity, as well as the ecological care to keep fallow spaces and practices, to spot and preserve territories for the dreams of tomorrow, for *us-others*.

²⁸ Pendant la dernière décade, de nombreuses pratiques urbaines alternatives sont apparues, portées par des activistes, des artistes, des architectes, des interventionnistes, des hackers urbains, des media tactiques, des intermittents, des immigrants, des collectifs d'habitants qui réclament de l'espace dans la ville pour leurs actions et projets. Voir ATLAS dans ce numéro de Multitudes.

²⁹ Arjun Appadurai, *The Right to Participate in the Work of the Imagination*, in TransUrbanism, Arjen Mulder éditeur, V2 / NAI Publishers, Rotterdam, 2002, p.46.