

THE DE SIGN OF TAC TICS

Critical
Practices
Transforming
Public Spaces



Francesca Gotti
Jacopo Leveratto
Cristina F. Colombo

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Francesca Gotti, Jacopo Leveratto, Cristina F. Colombo

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Introduction

Francesca Gotti
Jacopo Leveratto
Cristina F. Colombo

This book presents the process and initial outcomes of a three-year investigation into the design of tactical interventions, participatory practices, actions, strategies, and other experiences for revitalising and enhancing the quality of marginal and neglected public spaces in contemporary European cities.

The initial impulse came from more comprehensive and multifarious research related to the notions of encounters between people and cultures in public realms, a study that developed as part of the EU-funded project HERA – *en/counter/points: (Re)Negotiating Belonging through Culture and Contact in Public Space and Place*. This three-year research project explores the perceived and actual impacts of participatory practices, interactive cultural activities, activism, and appropriations in and of public spaces on individuals, society, culture, and communal space. In this framework, a particular aspect of research related to the design of public urban spaces due to its impact on shaping or creating opportunities for human encounters, crossing life-worlds and cultures, and fostering practices of appropriation as well as feelings of attachment and identity. This topic, interpreted from a design standpoint, is central to all the essays collected in this book.

The Design of Tactics is organised in three parts. The first section retraces the dawning and theoretical framework of the *en/counter/points* European project in the form of storytelling, moving on to drafting a provisional manifesto on tactical architecture and place-making design practices that tries to contextualise the research in the broader panorama of international literature. The second part is primarily devoted to design experiences developed on the micro scale whose common purpose is to promote more socially inclusive, unifying, and equal uses of neglected urban spaces. All of this is presented through a series of seven interviews with some of the best known European groups specialised in these types of interventions — enriched by the account of a shadowing action — in which Construct Lab, Orizzontale, Atelier Mob, Colectivo Warehouse, Collectif Etc, Bruit du frigo, Gravalosdimonte and Raumlabor reveal highlights regarding the hidden processes behind their most important projects and the criticalities they faced.

The third section is then dedicated to summarising the factors that from a design point of view have proven particularly successful in triggering long-term processes of spatial appropriation from different social groups. These have been rendered in the form of a tentative catalogue and tested through the design of a specific tool. To verify the applicability and replicability of these design strategies, an international research-based call for ideas has been launched. Finally, after an in-depth analysis of the call structured as a set of instructions for comparable cases, the last section collects and comments on the results of the competition, illustrating the awarded proposals, and drafting some notes for a tentative tutorial on the design of tactical interventions.

en/counter/points

The *en/counter/points* Project is a collaborative research programme funded by HERA – Humanities in the European Research Area in 2019 coordinated by Dr. Susannah Eckersley from Newcastle University (UK) and involving four partners: Politecnico di Milano, Italy (Dr. Francesca Lanz) and Dr. Jacopo Leveratto, Warsaw University, Poland (Dr. Grazyna Szymanska-Matusiewicz); University of Amsterdam, Netherlands (Dr. Claske Vos) and Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung, Germany (Dr. Achim Saupe). The project has received funding from the European Union's research and innovation programme under the grant agreement no. 769478. The project is financially supported by HERA Joint Research Programme which is co-funded by AHRC, MIUR, NCN, NWO, BMBF and the European Commission through H2020. The team working at the Politecnico di Milano is led by Jacopo Leveratto (PI) and includes Francesca Lanz (Mar. Skłodowska-Curie Fellow at the School of Arts & Cultures, Newcastle University), France Gotti, and Cristina F. Colombo.



La Ville Passant

A Talk with Bruit du Frigo

Milan-Bordeaux, 10.04.2020
Skype

www.bruitdufrigo.com

The *Bruit du Frigo* approach was initiated in 1995 by Gabi Farage and Yvan Detraz, then architecture students in Bordeaux. The association loi 1901 *Bruit du Frigo* was created in 1997. *Bruit du Frigo* is an urban creation collective which gathers architects, artists, urban designers, mediators, and builders.

Bruit du Frigo creates artistic, participative and contextual projects on public space, combining urban installations, micro-architectures, collective actions, and cultural events. At the crossroads of art, territories and populations, our approach aims to promote the transition to sustainable, shared and welcoming cities by proposing alternative ways of imagining and building our living environment and exploring new forms of public space.

*The brief descriptive texts of the projects are taken from the website of the studio

FRANCESCA GOTTI: *Bruit du Frigo* works on a variety of spaces, but you deal especially with leftovers, in-between spaces and underdeveloped areas; a challenging dimension. Your projects trigger the perception of what we share in urban landscape, of what can be perceived as a sort of collective platform.

HOCINE ALIOUANE-SHAW: From our own experience, the dimension of public space is the space-time framework where we can encapsulate our interventions. All our interventions take place in civic places, where interaction can happen. What is common in all our projects of the past 22 years is the use of these spaces to interact with citizens, to attract the attention of people who normally do not get involved, and to interfere with planning processes. We try to design scenarios of what is usually called "tactical urbanism," where instead of delivering an already known process, we look for serendipity, crossing the unexpected, building profound matters on something that looks like intuition. Serendipity is only possible with interaction: we look at the city to transform spaces through bottom-up processes, nurturing these processes through people's desires and frustrations. Maybe to refer to in-between spaces we could use the term "**unimagined**" spaces, as opposed to planned or even over-designed spaces. These spaces participate in most of the dynamics happening in the city, but usually in a negative way. For us, instead they are the spaces of possibility: they are not over determined by functions or signification, so they are open for wandering and we can use them as mediums to involve people. People can look in a different way at their neighbourhoods, especially thanks to these places and the new meanings that our scenarios create: the problem is often a lack of representation, a lack of a sense of meaning. We don't want leftover spaces to be fully redesigned and exploited, but rather we want to use them as fields of thought, where we and citizens can feel free to build a collective narrative. We want to open up scenarios for people to act on their environment in the future. In one of our projects, we set up a series of **cabins** in Bordeaux's **suburbia**, connected to a network of tracking system: this idea is related to the master thesis written in 1995 by Yvan Detraz, the director of *Bruit du Frigo*. During one and a half years of research, Yvan mapped all the forgotten spaces in the periphery of Bordeaux (brown fields, abandoned factories), spaces that had been discomposed by a highway built in the '70s. He wanted to question what could happen

unimagined

Centurama, Paris-FR, 2017-2019
For 18 months, in the 13th and 20th districts, the *Centurama* collective, bringing together *Bruit du Frigo*, *Wagon Landscaping* (landscapers), Anne Labroille (architect, urban designer) and Laurent Becker (engineer), imagined projects and collaborative actions aimed at experimenting and prefiguring possible uses and developments on this exceptional site: installations punctuating the future route have been created as part of building sites open to the public, elements of furniture and signage giving walkers information about the route, the history of the place and its biodiversity.

cabins

Refuge périurbain, Bordeaux-FR, 2018 (now)
To improve the understanding of our cities, *Bruit du Frigo* built 11 suburban shelters in Bordeaux: artistic observatories of a constantly moving metropolis, all of them connected together by a network of paths and back roads. 11 works of architecture that relate to their environment, that invite the walker, the resident and the visitor, to take a fresh look at the suburbs. To rediscover the great outdoors on the city's doorstep, taking an innovative stroll off the beaten track.

suburbia

Suburban areas, peripheries, outskirts: everything that has been pushed out of the city, shifted away from the centre by urban expansions. And all that is linked to marginalisation, exclusion, immigration, lack of security, urban poverty, health and education issues. But also, the territory of the indefinite and diversity, of possibilities, encounter and new paradigms. (Hesse, Markus, 2010. "Suburbs: The Next Slum? Explorations into the Contested Terrain of Social Construction and Political Discourse." *Journal of Urban Research* [Online], Special issue 3. <http://doi.org/10.4000/articulo.1552>)



Casablanca

by connecting these places and how they could become the future public spaces of suburbia in the 2000's: this really questioned the notion of public space.

territorialism

"The territorialist approach considers some relationships with the material environment to be more appropriate than others. It tends to free them from the economism which curtails some of their semantic potential and to release them from the mechanistic-industrialist paradigm which sees places as 'mere lifeless props' for the production of goods. In any case, relationships with the material environment are considered to be 'ecological,' in the broadest sense of the word, as they are the basis for social relations (economic, political, cultural, institutional) even though they do not deal with them exhaustively." (Magnaghi, Alberto. 2011. *Territorialist's Society Manifesto*. https://110221b_draft.of.the.territorialists.society.manifesto.pdf)

FG: You mention participation and inclusion, and in 22 years of work you have experimented with different approaches, you have developed your own instruments of engagement and eventually these have changed through time. Do you recognise crucial elements of change?

HAS: Bruit du frigo has been using a wide range of activities but, in general, there is something which recurs constantly: there has always been an idea of using the knowledge we have, as architects, and putting it at the service of people who normally cannot have an impact on the environment they live in. The will which has been constant in our work is to express the needs of citizens and, furthermore, to co-think and co-build things with people. Some elements vary consistently each time we start a new intervention, and this especially depends on the team working on the project. We just came back from **Casablanca**, where we were working with students and people from a poor neighbourhood and there was an intense exchange between people: there, I realised once more that at the core of any project is the human dimension, the relationships and networking at all stages of an intervention. Most of all, we like to work with trans-disciplinary teams and this can take months of invisible networking as well, to connect with all the actors of a project. All the people, the associations and institutions for us are important resources of a territory, on a material and immaterial level. And, probably, what has allowed our practice to continue working for such a long time is the fact that we are investing constantly in the same territories: it is about **territorialism**, as defined by Alberto Magnaghi, a locally anchored approach, finding the means to identify people and structures within a community. We basically want to recall the dynamics of a community that got lost. And all the horizontal workshops we realise with people also require communication with institutions: to develop a bottom-up process, we first need to negotiate with those responsible for top-down actions (technicians and politicians), and only at the second stage can we bring them together. This is about governance: this is the step where we try to understand the decisional levels and reshape some administrative and intellectual barriers.

FG: And this management process supports the construction of the scenarios for future interventions.

HAS: After networking, we collect anecdotes, stories, souvenirs (that we would never find without interacting with local citizens), and that creates the narratives of our projects: in this phase, it is essential to have artists, cultural engineers and designers in our team. When we were working in **Mazières-en-Gâtine**, for instance, one blind lady told us "I dreamed I was walking in the middle of the street even if there were cars." That was the start of the project, just from that sentence, which came out of the work we were doing in the field. Obviously, working with a community doesn't mean interacting with each and every person, but with certain people identified as positive mediators. Networking, immersion, intimacy, local scale, resilience and resources: these are the parts of our philosophy that create practical tools, by mixing art and culture and co-learning; we teach by learning, putting ourselves in the middle of people, because citizens have knowledge and expertise too. And finally, there is always a notion of pleasure: it is through pleasure, through the bond we create with people over time and through intense experiences that we can create a long-lasting conversation. There is a moment in our projects where we build an artefact, like a micro-installation or a micro-architecture, something I would call a capsule: it exists both as time and space, and it is what gives us the acceleration to start working and bring out the best in people. Once we have all the information is when things become complicated. In projects of regeneration, what institutions often ask us to do is to disclose people's expectations and needs: we formalise it in drawings or writings, as guidelines, but the real problem comes when these are handed to designers or architects. What happens is that these professionals, without the knowledge of the community and the territory, simply design on the basis of what they think they have understood: in doing so, they close the dynamics of transformations, instead of opening them. For us, the project is about going through the entire process and revealing the potential of a place and its social transformations.

FG: You really live inside and with your projects, you stay with people. And this shows the importance of building an attachment to places, building a story, awakening a sense inside people: something that takes time. What happens in a place and a project where there is no sense of community?

HAS: To talk about this I would mention the project called **Cuyes**. It took place in a socially rundown

Mezières-en-Gâtine

by connecting these places and how they could become the future public spaces of suburbia in the 2000's: this really questioned the notion of public space.

Cuyes

"The territorialist approach considers some relationships with the material environment to be more appropriate than others. It tends to free them from the economism which curtails some of their semantic potential and to release them from the mechanistic-industrialist paradigm which sees places as 'mere lifeless props' for the production of goods. In any case, relationships with the material environment are considered to be 'ecological,' in the broadest sense of the word, as they are the basis for social relations (economic, political, cultural, institutional) even though they do not deal with them exhaustively." (Magnaghi, Alberto. 2011. *Territorialist's Society Manifesto*. https://110221b_draft.of.the.territorialists.society.manifesto.pdf)





