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**Interstitial landscapes as resources –  
A few thoughts about a tactical approach to urban intervention**

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Reducing the landscape to an idealised modality of nature or built heritage is to forget that its history is inherently linked to the progressive taming of the most inhospitable places. Forest, mountains, seas and deserts haven't always been considered as landscapes. Aren't the real territories to explore today the ones that we don't see simply because of our immersion in them – these extensive lands of the urban? At a time when we don't exactly know how to deal with the various phenomena that transformed the urban substance, the concept of landscape, as a cultural construct, liberates a zone of indecisiveness that allows us to think about the potentials generated by a multi-layered reality<sup>1</sup>.

It is from this perspective that the "interstitial landscape" draws our interest. In urban sociology the expression "interstice" is currently used to describe places of "otherness" and informal practices<sup>2</sup>. The interstice can also be defined as a space without precise use, located for an indeterminate period of time between functionally determined built configurations. The interstice speaks about porosity. The pore is both cavity and passage, a place propitious to the development of processes that escape control and contaminate normative representation. In a world more and more mediated and virtualised, the interstitial condition notably offers the possibility to learn from the experience of a new type of wilderness – the raw reality of an impure urban wilderness. In following this thread, the interstitial landscape constitutes a resource for experimentation and, in itself, an experiment<sup>3</sup>. This observation calls for approaches to urban intervention that focus less on imposing order than on inflecting the existing dynamics with a tact similar to the one of acupuncture.

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<sup>1</sup>See : Luc Lévesque, «Hyperpaysages: à l'affût de territoires réticulaires et mentaux», in *CV photo*, no 54, Montréal, 2001, pp. 5-6.

<sup>2</sup>See : Frederick M. Thrasher, *The Gang. A study of 1313 gangs in Chicago*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press (1927), abridged edition 1963, p. 20 ; Jean Remy et Liane Voyé, *Ville, ordre et violence*, Paris, PUF, 1981, p. 71; Nicolas Bourriaud, *Esthétique relationnelle*, Paris, Les presses du réel, 1998, pp. 14-16.

<sup>3</sup>See : Mirko Zardini, « The prevalence of landscape », in *Nuevos paisajes/ New landscapes*, Barcelone, Museu d'art Contemporani, ACTAR, juillet 1997, pp. 203-209; Ignasi Sola-Morales, « Terrain vague », in *Anyplace* (Montréal), Anyone Corporation (New York), Cambridge, Londres, MIT Press, 1995, p. 118-123 and *Architectures in Cities. Present and Futures*, Barcelone, UIA Barcelona, 1996, pp. 21-23, 266-309.

The tactic<sup>4</sup> of furniture punctuation constitutes an example of intervention which follows this path. What is specifically interesting about furniture is less the sophistication of its design than its capacity, through strategic positioning, to generate a field of interrelations and situations that may enrich urbanity<sup>5</sup>. Furniture as a minimal and potentially nomadic dwelling unit (as the French term "mobilier" expresses it more clearly by directly referring to the idea of mobility) seems to us indeed an interesting tool for taming the interstitial without denying its peculiarities or, as Paul Virilio puts it, to incite urbanites "to inhabit the inhabitual"<sup>6</sup>. Viewed from that angle, a simple generic picnic table can be the vector of unsuspected urban experiences. Thus, a moving network of picnic tables infiltrating the city's interstices could be an example of an alternative way to deal with the question of urban spaces in a context of incertitude and transformation.

The *Hypothèses d'amarrages* ( Mooring hypothesis ) project , initiated by SYN- and ongoing since May 2001 in Montreal, concretely explores this conceptual framework. Starting from the fact that many spatial residues are produced and abandoned by contemporary urbanisation, that a great number of them are not going to be developed in a near future, and also that a lot of these sites have spatial and landscape qualities propitious to temporary occupation, the first phase of the project has proposed using picnic tables to squat an array of selected interstitial sites of the Montreal metropolitan area. The intention is to exploit the potential of forgotten, banalised or underused spaces to offer to the urbanites new possibilities of interaction with the urban landscape. These are, for example, uncommon views toward the city, other kind of temporal and sensitive experiences, opportunities to tame fragments of the urban wilderness and chances to reinvent, more freely, urban attitudes outside preconceived representations and organised entertainment. Finally, the project *Hypothèses d'amarrages* uses an operational field inherent to the concept of landscape but often forgotten : the fact that an intervention can or could, in many cases, limit itself to almost nothing, that the existing conditions conceal potentials that can be made visible or accessible by discreet, almost immaterial, gestures.



See : [www.amarrages.com](http://www.amarrages.com)

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