

PROGRAMME: The scene is set in the heart of the 'garden city' of l'Abreuvoir designed by the modernist architect Émile Aillaud—one of those Parisian banlieues known as a 'sensitive neighbourhood'. The action begins with the arrival of the artist, hoping to stage an intervention involving the inhabitants, and unfolds over five acts around the construction of a crude bench made of rammed earth.

(1) **THE CLASH.** In which Mettler gets a harsh reception.

(2) **BONDING.** In which our hero attempts to get back on track with a hand from Michèle and her theatre company.

(3) **THE CIRCLE OF PARTICIPATION.** Showing how the residents take part in the construction, more or less.

(4) **THE RADIANCE OF THE CHARACTERS.** How the boulistes get stuck in....

(5) **THE POSE.** Where everyone poses for posterity in front of the finished work.

BANCBIGNY, 2013—

After the successful completion of the construction, a storm devastates the scene. In order to take stock of the drama and explore the contested issue of participation, the artist teams up with Thévenot, sociologist of engagement.

Surely some unsuspected truth can be found amid the debris of the wreckage?

IT BEGINS WITH DISCOMFORT

When Yves Mettler arrived in Paris in 2010, he had two things on his mind: finding a place to develop and think through his project on Europe Squares, and meeting with the aaa (*atelier d'architecture autogéré*, studio for self-managed architecture), who had done some exemplary work in the field of art at the intersection of participative urbanism and civic and cultural activism. The transdisciplinary CCC (critical curatorial cybermedia) course at the École Supérieure des Beaux-arts in Geneva had alerted Mettler to their work during his studies there (completed in 2002).

At the time, the aaa's flagship project was ECObox—their participative management of temporary gardens and community spaces on plots of land left vacant by 'the RATP' in the 18th arrondissement neighbourhood of La Chapelle. Mettler was interested in finding out more about the methods the studio had used to make participation effective, since he himself was looking to move his work in the direction of artistic interventions that would assemble an audience to participate in the construction of the city—and of Europe.

At the meeting with the aaa, he went straight ahead and offered his services to the studio to take part in one of their projects. At the end of the meeting, Doina Petrescu and Constantin Petcou suggested that Mettler go to see their most recent project, a community garden at Passage 56, opposite one of the capital's few *cités* built within the capital itself, in the 20th arrondissement.

In parallel with this, with the help of curator Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez, who had just been appointed as co-director of the experimental arts centre Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers in the banlieue nord, Mettler was admitted into the Masters in Theory and Practice of Languages and Arts programme at EHESS. This led him to situate his work in the context of academic research, joining the lineage of those artist-researchers who emerge out of the multiple intersections between the social sciences and the development of research through art practice.

A course on urban anthropology, directly linked to his interest in urban space and his artistic practice of writing and narration, completed the curriculum, for which he also had to choose two external Masters' seminars to attend. Having followed Marc Abélès's seminar on the anthropology of globalisation, Mettler turned, for the second, to Laurent Thévenot's sociology of action. Abélès's seminar had introduced some powerful tools for thinking about globalisation and constructing a theory of how cultures react to this process. But Thévenot's pragmatic sociology, attentive to the engagements of the individual ranging from the intimate to the public, seemed to respond directly to the questions Mettler was posing as to how a person's modes of participation could be evaluated. It was the remarkably fine-grained attention to the attachments involved in very different contexts (advertising, WWF round tables, urban parks) and the pursuit of a

language capable of speaking about such attachments, that made Mettler listen keenly to Thévenot's seminar at EHESS.

With these experiences helping him to consolidate his research, Mettler set out to visit Passage 56. This empty plot between two rental buildings, like a gap-toothed grin, is located in a working-class neighbourhood opposite a *cité* that is home to an immigrant population living in conditions of precarity. The aaa had created a community garden—a form that was in vogue at the time in many large Western cities—on the plot, within the framework of a project of urban regeneration managed by the arrondissement authorities. Work began in 2006 with a series of consultative meetings called LUPs (*laboratoires urbains participatifs*, participative urban laboratories), on the basis of which architects had then designed a plan for the garden along with the participants. By the time Mettler arrived in 2010, the garden and its associated structures were completed, and management of the site had been passed onto an association constituted around the garden.



Over the next few months Mettler edged closer, wandering the neighbourhood surrounding the garden, and lingering among the squares of cultivated earth and compost toilets at the end of the plot. Although moved by the air of hospitality and the attention that had been paid to the details of the Passage 56 garden, he found himself in the grip of a vague malaise resulting from his inability to find any way in—to establish contact with the residents of the site. This discomfort was accentuated by a public event, part of a programme organised for classes from the local primary school in the context of the *Fête de la Musique*. A play, was put on by the most active older members of the association, based on the artist's book 'Ouverture pour un inventaire' by Anne-Lise Déhé, herself also a member. Mettler felt an irrepressible sense of unease at the distance that separated the amateur actors on the stage from the schoolchildren and their families from the passage. A distance that was further accentuated by another event Mettler had coincidentally been invited to by the international artist Marietca Potrc, who he had met at Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers where she was artist in residence working on the creation of a community garden. The event in question was an LUP. Doina Petrescu had invited Potrc to give a presentation on her participative interventions. Under a marquee that had been cleverly integrated into the garden, with a projector set up in the vegetable patch, Potrc spoke in English to a handful of artists and other intellectuals about her intervention in the Amsterdam suburbs, while the residents tended the garden. Taking this discomfort seriously, Mettler decided to explore the myth of participation. Thévenot and his tools would help guide him on a foray into the attachments specific to Passage 56.



PARTICIPATION: AN ART UNTO ITSELF

In his work as a sociologist, Laurent Thévenot is wary of the notion of 'participation'. Not of the need for democracy or the idea of participation in itself—after all, isn't our task here on earth to participate in a commonality that makes us human so that we can differ politically, we who are so diverse and difficult to hold together? No, it is the illusion of participation that he warns against. Isn't it something that is often imposed upon 'participants'? At what price for them, and subject to what kinds of deception as to the 'part' they will actually be able to 'take'? These doubts are at their most acute in the case of art, with the notion of 'participation' being just as trendy among artists as it is in the social sciences and politics. Thévenot's dialogue with Yves Mettler, who attended his seminar at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales for a year, sprang up around this shared perplexity. For Mettler too had his doubts about the ways in which artists prompt people to participate. Extending Mettler's essay on his experience as an artist in a community garden—'community' in the double sense of 'common' and 'divided up' between various users—Thévenot used the sociology of engagement he has developed to analyse the tensions generated by participatory art interventions.¹

1 Y. Mettler, 'Un cheminement engagé dans l'art', report written for the seminar 'Sociologie pragmatique de la politique et de la morale', Masters in Sociology, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris, 2011, <<http://www.theselection.net/thelabel/EHESS/cheminement-56-2011.pdf>>; L. Thévenot, *L'action au pluriel. Sociologie des régimes d'engagement* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006), and 'Engaging in the Politics of Participative Art in Practice', in T. Zembylas (ed.), *Artistic Practices* (London: Routledge, 2014), 132–50.

Thévenot's brand of sociology lends itself naturally to dialogue with artists because of the importance it accords to the surrounding world, whether natural or artificial, and because it takes into account the plurality of ways of 'engaging' with it. Departing from the conventional understanding of the 'social', the cover of Thévenot's *L'action au pluriel*, the book in which he introduces his work, features a snapshot of the chaotic mess inside someone's desk drawer. From the greatest intimacy of bodies to the universality of standards of measurement and gestures of civic solidarity, by way of personal effects, functional utensils, and the currencies and official forms of nation-states, the various objects it contains indicate the diverse modes of engagement entered into by a person involved in various commonalities, each with its own geometry.

Thévenot was understandably attracted and intrigued by Mettler's plans for Bobigny. The artist was looking to extend an art project he had been pursuing for many years on the 'place of Europe' within the city, both in the broad sense and in

relation to specific 'Europe Squares', through a participative intervention. He had planned for it to take place on the Place de l'Europe in the suburb of l'Abreuvoir, a working-class area with progressive architecture which has, over time, become one of Paris's so-called 'sensitive' banlieues. He and his architect friend Pierre, together with the participation of local residents, would install something common—a new, shared meeting place to promote conviviality. At the same time, he would subject the project to scrutiny through a twofold critical perspective: his own on participatory art, and Thévenot's on participation in general.

During a [previous] stay in Copenhagen, Thévenot had visited one particular realisation of participative 'social art' instigated by the artist Kenneth Balfelt.² Brett Bloom celebrated this work in his contribution to the book *Art as Social Practice*, a chapter ironically entitled 'You're So Vain, You Probably Think the Art is About You, Don't You?'.³ Balfelt's project 'The City as Your Living Room? Urban Renewal with Room for Socially Marginalized People' brought the neighbourhood residents committee together with an architect, an urban sociologist, and the neighbourhood's heavy drinkers. It resulted in the construction of a public space (with a long curved bench) and an open-air shelter, the whole intended to serve as a 'rehousing' of the many socially marginalised people who, during recent works on the Métro, had been displaced from the public square and garden they had used as a community 'social welfare office' to help one another.

2 Danish Association of Architectural Firms (DANSKEARK), 'Accommodating Outdoor Living Space', <<https://www.danskeark.com/content/enghave-minipark>>.

3 Bloom contrasts Balfelt's work, which 'allows for embodied experience and empathy', to 'the superficial trappings of other facile representational constructs like "relational aesthetics" or "participation"' (B. Bloom, 'You're So Vain, You Probably Think the Art is About You, Don't You?', in M.H. Borello (ed.), *Art as Social Practice: A Critical Investigation of Works by Kenneth A. Balfelt* (Berlin: Revolver Press, 2015, 171–97).

As Kenneth Balfelt pointed out:

[P]eople with their own context of understanding can contribute just as much as professionals. The beer drinkers are 'super users' of this type of urban space. They sit there most of the day, year round. No urban planner, anthropologist, architect or local officer has the same experience in the public space. Our job was therefore to articulate this knowledge and translate it into physical and process-related solutions—and making them aware that they possessed this knowledge.⁴

4 Quoted in DANSKEARK, 'Accommodating Outdoor Living Space'.

Paving, painting, casting concrete, carving, cutting, digging and planting, they gained a sense of belonging and pride in the place. The whole

project was set out temporarily in a small public garden used by families and children which also contains a skateboarding area.



The exchanges Thévenot had with parents who were present confirmed the requirement, specified in the presentation of the project, that the diverse group of users of the urban park all felt safe and welcome. Thévenot himself, however, did not receive a warm welcome at first, because he was seen taking photographs. Were the users afraid that he might have bad intentions? That he was taking 'dirty photos'?



Superkilen, another park in Copenhagen, also caught Thévenot's attention as a participatory art project. Here, an initial consultation had gathered suggestions from residents of the multi-ethnic district of Nørrebro, home to inhabitants of more than sixty nationalities. Supported by the municipality and financed by the private philanthropic association Realdania, artists from the Superflex collective designed the project together with the renowned architectural firm Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG), who named it 'Participatory Park Extreme'. The idea was to bring together, for the purposes of sport and leisure activities, street furniture collected from cities of multiple nations. Understood in this way, the multicultural model consists not in the political representation of plural voices, but in the objectification of plural cultures on the basis of ordinary public space facilities made available to the multicultural users of the park.



Seats—and especially benches—are principal among the objects that had been brought in. Not only do they comprise a variety of decorative styles, they also demonstrate different urban seating arrangements, and therefore, varying models of urbanity. A 'bench' from Valladolid, Mexico, bears the title '*confidentes*', its label-specifying its origin as if in a museum. This particular piece of street furniture, which appeared during the reign of Napoleon III, consists of two seats arranged in an S shape and goes by various

names that reveal its different uses—'love seat', 'tête-à-tête', 'courting bench', 'kissing bench', 'gossip's chair', and 'conversation bench'. In contrast, far from favouring an urbanity open to intimacy, an example from Miami, Florida, whose label curiously refers to it as a 'bench' even though it is made up of separate seats, objectifies a powerfully individualistic and possessive liberal politics.



Brett Bloom had also written about Superkilen in an article which, this time, is rather cutting.⁵ He reinforces his criticism of the (red) asphalt pavement with a testimony from a representative of the community who had been involved in the consultation process and according to whom the BIG architects had refused the community's demands for green space, belittling such requests as too 'clichéd' for a park. The architects insisted that the design of this urban space had to be in continuity with the paved ground of the city.



Referring to Foucault's notion of governmentality, Bloom enumerates everything in the park that manifests control and self-policing, noting that a private firm has been contracted to remove graffiti within twenty-four hours of its appearance. He reports that in the park you experience an 'uncomfortable sense that you are walking through a warehouse of recycled urbanity. [...] You end up using a bench in this space in the same way you would a park just meters away that does not enjoy the same levels of branding and ideological mystification'.⁶

5 B. Bloom, 'Superkilen: Participatory Park Extreme!', initially published in 2013 in the Danish magazine *Kritik*, April 2014. An English version of the text is available on Bloom's website: <https://mythological-quarter.net/s/SUPERKILEN_Brett_Bloom_2013.pdf>.

6 Ibid.

MICHÈLE

runs the street theatre Fox Compagnie. The company has had its office and rehearsal space in the cité for a long time, under an arrangement with the municipal authority. She is incredibly energetic, though she sometimes gets tired, often due to dealing with administrative matters. When she arrived in the neighbourhood, she would sit with the women and listen to them. She made a play with them, built around their stories. She led workshops with the children, among other things to paint on the walls of the cité. She's well-known all over the neighbourhood. During our walk she asks questions, and remembers a mother with children and a stroller who said: 'At last we'll be able to walk in the park, before we couldn't because there was no bench to stop at, we had to go all the way to Bondy.' It is she who introduced me a group who meet to play boules on the mail. When we find these boulistes, she asks questions about the bench they made, the role of the bench in the cité, and the boules terrain. Michèle leads the benches project along with Pierre and myself, and in the file for the grant application she names the project 'Bench of Earth, Bench of Life'. On the day the benches are built, she gets hands-on, while at the same time playing a pastoral role, gently bringing in those who hang back at a distance from the action.



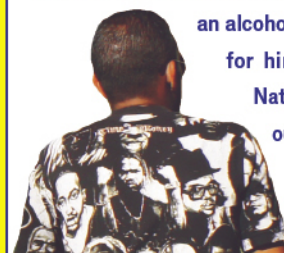
PIERRE THE ARCHITECT

is an all-terrain architect. He can intervene anywhere, and he believes that you can make architecture, and therefore meaning, everywhere. He is an enthusiast, online he goes by the name of 'rollingstone'. An ingenious thinker, it is he who, when he saw the site, suggested rammed earth as a material, as a technique, as a process. Bobigny intrigues him, it's an experience, the perfect context, an opportunity to go and see, and to try this technique that has long interested him. On the spot, surrounded by his tools and his formworks, he is in his element. He manages the construction site while also exploring, talking about masonry with the boulistes, and showing us how to compact the earth with the rammer.



THE LOUDMOUTH

is on duty on the Place des Nations Unies. There he is, often with a group of hangers-on, in front of the neighbourhood grocery store, bottle in hand. It's he who calls out to me when I arrive on the square with my camera, 'What the hell you up to there? What you doing taking dirty photos?!', 'You from the town hall?', 'We're family here, and you're not part of it', 'You're lucky you don't end up scraping yer face off the pavement', 'Fuck off over to the Place de l'Europe, you'll see...' We bond over a drink. As I leave, the cheerful cry comes after me: 'You ain't even got no butt.' A year later, after the bench has been built, he sits on it next to two older women. They call him 'Uncle,' he's an alcoholic. They look out for him, the Place de Nations Unies looks out for him.



BRICE THE TEACHER

is one of the boulistes. During the first meeting with Michèle around their bench, he explains the situation to us. He becomes a spokesperson, while the others observe us. A black man in a tracksuit, a bottle of vodka in his hand, Brice shows us what is missing: more benches, more boules terrains, more lights so they can play at night. The idea of building a bench motivates him, but he doesn't really believe in it. But he's there two years later when we come back to build the bench, and puts his heart into the work. During the construction process he tells us that he is a teacher. Seeing that I only half believe him, he insists with a smile that it's true. He gives his all, helping to organise the job with the other boulistes. He is the one who gets most involved (along with Eric). Toward the end of construction, cracking open a can of beer, he tells us that it has made him want to work again. The next day he radiates pride, posing behind the bench in white trousers with his blue boules bag. You can see the happiness when he poses with his hands on Eric's shoulders.



MAGALI



checks in from time to time, talks with the President, avoids looking at the camera.

ERIC & FAMILY

arrived in the cité a short time ago. They had been in Clermont-Ferrand, but came back to Paris because Eric got a job as a roofer. It was through Eric's wife, Magali, that Michèle let Eric know when the building would take place. He joined the building site at around midday. He has short hair and wears a black Nike T-shirt. He is broad in his gestures but doesn't speak much, he has an efficient air, he talks with Pierre, and devotes himself wholeheartedly to the various different tasks: preparing the earth, packing, washing the formwork, sawing, sanding. He is every inch the building site guy. Sometimes he takes a smoke break, chats with the boulistes, standing to one side of them, not quite sure of himself. The building process brings him in and places him squarely within the group.



LA ROSE

Eric's daughter, a slightly cheeky teenager, who promptly gets to work stamping down the earth, showing off to impress the boys and the whole troupe.



FISTON

And then there's his boy, a little kid who drags us about, plays with the tools, enjoys being with the grown-ups, and fiddles with everything.



THE BOSS

only shows up once the building site is finished, obviously. We know exactly who he is. When he arrives, his gaze takes in the whole scene in one fell swoop, and everyone notices him. Eric goes up to him and tells him all about it. It looks good, he has to admit: We've done a nice job.



THE LOCAL

is a must. He's been here for ages. He was born here, a child of the cité, a leftover from the first generation of workers who moved into the newly built tower blocks. A large blond moustache, thinning medium-length hair, a beer can resting on his large belly, he's like a retired Viking. He insists on his seniority as a sort of elder statesman, but that's about it. He doesn't say what he does, or what he has done. He's just there. When the work begins he is there too, from the very beginning, sceptical and indecisive. Neither for nor against, he doesn't know. But once construction begins, once the gang gets to work, he does too. He carries a few paving stones to make the bottom of the bench—and leaves it at that. His arms withdrawn, his body seems stiff. But he stays right until the end, talking with everyone, passers-by and participants alike.



RED JACKET

is an early riser, he can't help it, it's habit. He knows the building site well enough, and he'd like to get out of it. Yet this morning he is there, lending a hand before going to the market, strolling along the boulevard in his cheerful red jacket, looking for a change of scene—to watch the horizon somewhere on the shores of the Mediterranean. Under the baseball cap, his hair turned grey long ago.



SWOLLEN-FOOT

is injured. We can see that he won't be able to do anything. You can't help but notice his heavily bandaged ankles and his swollen knees. Not that this stops him from arguing. He makes his disagreement known, right enough. With his big glasses he looks like an intellectual, and he takes up the wise man pose in his chair. You have to go to him, it's not up to him to come to you. The group spreads out, people come and go between the building site and the group of chairs a little further away where he sits, right in the centre.



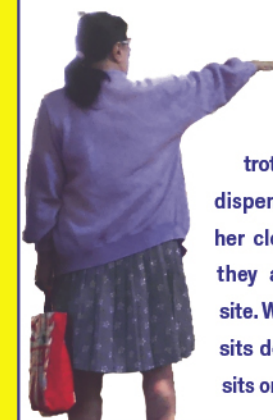
JOKER USA

glides into the group, wearing a cap emblazoned with the colours of the USA. He comes out of nowhere and suddenly he's everywhere. Neither young nor old, his long arms brandish tools: he packs, screws, waters, brushes, his sunglasses always on, always a happy smile. He follows the process nonchalantly, and thanks to him the construction moves along without our even noticing it. A beer is never far away, somewhere near the bench.



THE EXPERT WITH THE SHOPPING BAG

can tell right away that all of this is totally pointless. First of all, she can see that we know nothing about the place, and that this is not what should be done. And she should know, because she's been living here for a long time. At first we listen, but since it's not very constructive, it doesn't make any difference to the plan. A little upset, she leaves, but then comes back. She trots around the action, dispensing her advice to her closest friends when they are away from the site. When she is tired she sits down. Later she also sits on the bench.



THE POSER

is resplendent in his polo shirt, clean-shaven. It's Saturday today, no work. He comes to the building site in the afternoon with his two boys and gives a running commentary on the construction. He does have a try, grabbing the mallet, but soon gives up, it's not really his thing. He offers some words of support and then chuckles, waiting to see what happens next. Encouraged by Michèle, his boys take over, climbing into the formwork and packing it down. Now he's proud! Look at them, great little workers, aren't they? Looking good, right? The work continues.



BROKEN BACK

is rather introverted. While his mind is elsewhere, his hands work, his back bowing as he reaches down for the bucket of earth, a tape measure fixed to his belt. It hurts, he remembers. He tells us about the pain: 'We all have broken backs here. It's the construction sites in Paris. Lugging a sheet of plasterboard on foot up a tiny staircase to the fourth floor.' Leaning in heavily, he uses all his weight to drill through the concrete slab.



PRESIDENT

So called because of Chirac. Even though he's shorter, there is a physical resemblance, but it's not only that. Under his cap, President has a piercing gaze. All day he observes the construction process and listens to everyone—Magali, especially, talks to him. In his own way, he presides over the group. From time to time he moves away a little, sizing it up from a distance. You'd think he was a shepherd. He checks out the truck that brings the earth, gazing into the empty space around the two pallets left in the bottom of the tray, one eye still on the building site, never without a beer in his hand, his plastic bag seemingly bottomless. For the group photo with the bench, he joins the pose and takes off his cap. Beneath a few sparse hairs, a mischievous face peers out at us.



DOG HANDLER

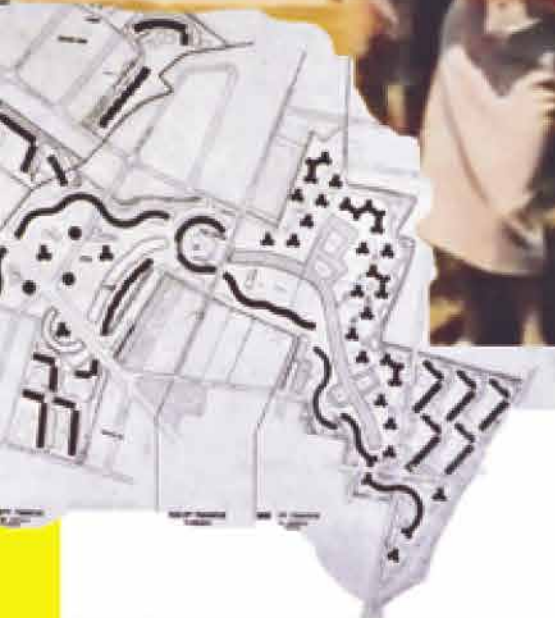
has arms covered with old tattoos. His moustache is already grey, his hair short. During construction he ends up talking with one of Michèle's colleagues, an actor who has come to help out. He's delighted to learn that they have both worked as cash couriers, and he shares stories about his adventures. Nowadays he has a dog and works as a security guard. When he wields the trowel it looks like it's a familiar gesture, there's vitality and experience there, he doesn't even need to take off his bag. The day after, we see him dressed in shorts, bag of boules in hand.





'La misère de Paris'
Charlotte Perriand, 1936

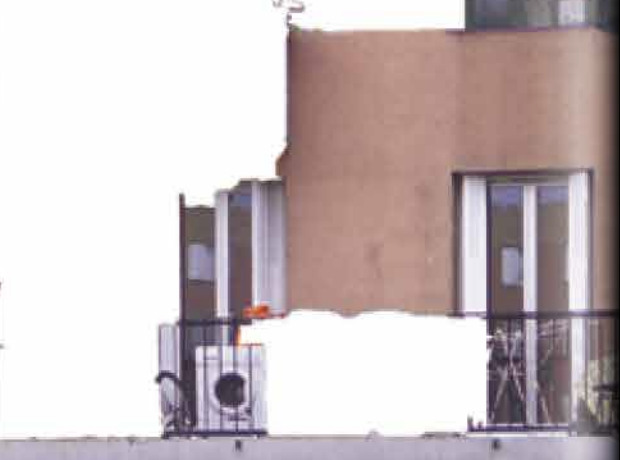
'Cités du soleil' Jean-Claude Sée,
1958, 20'



Place des Nations Unies,
1961-2013



The trace of the name of the cité, also
known as 'L'Abreu', used in a tag.



MAISON DE MEDIATION
Madeleine Pelletier
ASSOCIATION DES FEMMES RELAIS
DE BOBIGNY



As I photograph the premises of the
Women's Advocacy Association,

I am spotted by The Loudmouth, on
duty outside the grocery store...

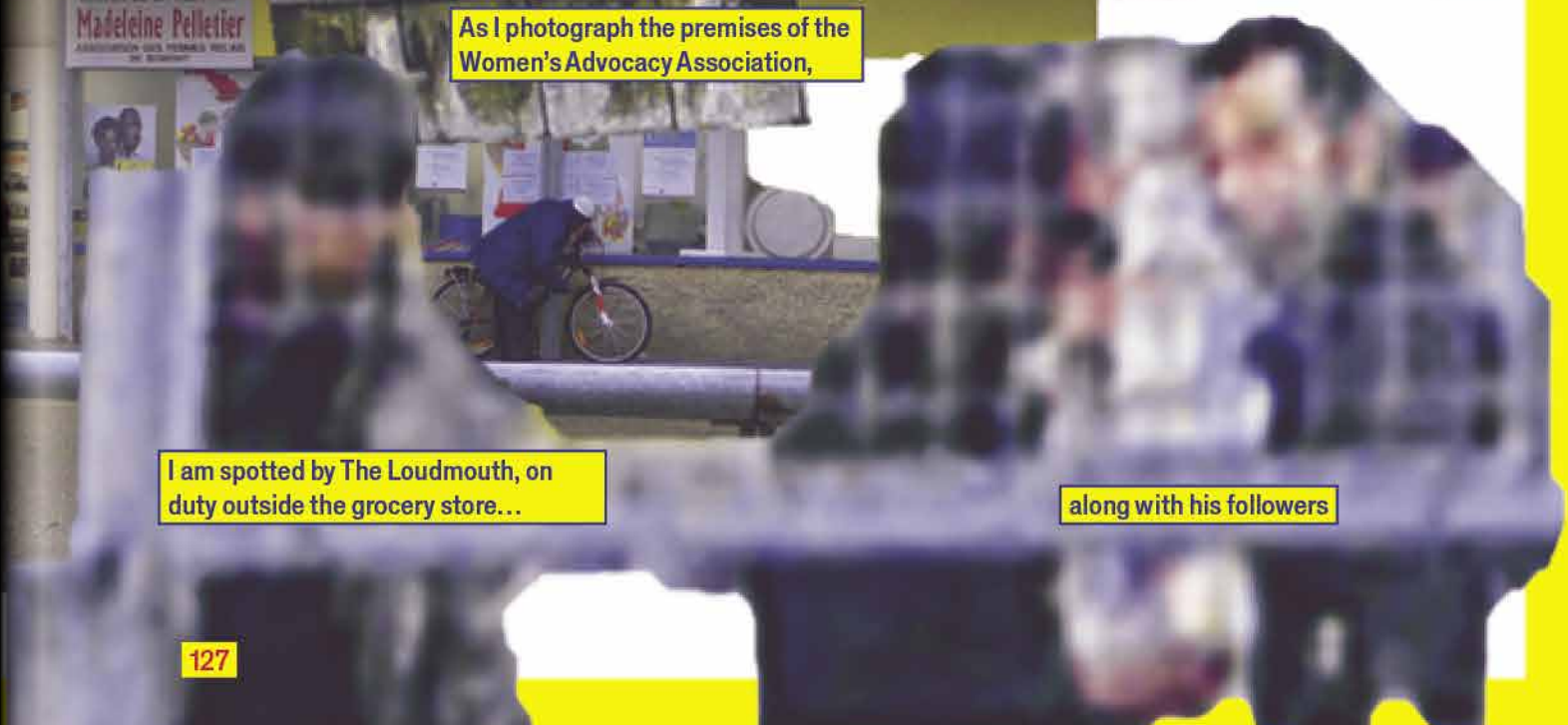
(1) THE CLASH



Passages through the lobbies have been blocked
to make things difficult for the dealers' runners.



Google Maps wrongly indicates Place de l'Europe; in fact
it is the Place des Nations Unies that I am photographing.

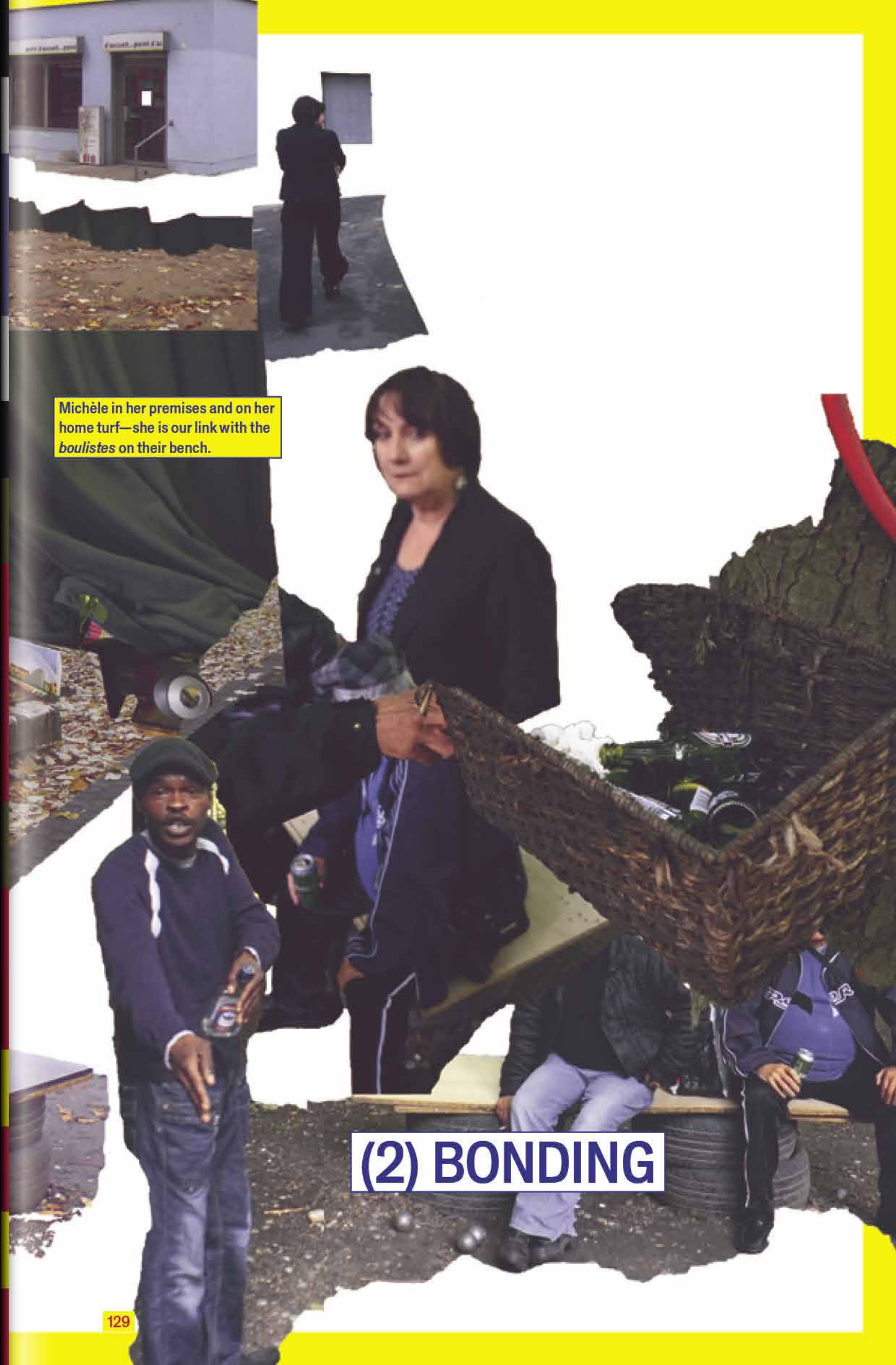


along with his followers



The real Place de l'Europe, a pseudo village square occupied by a gang, most of its retail spaces now vacant.

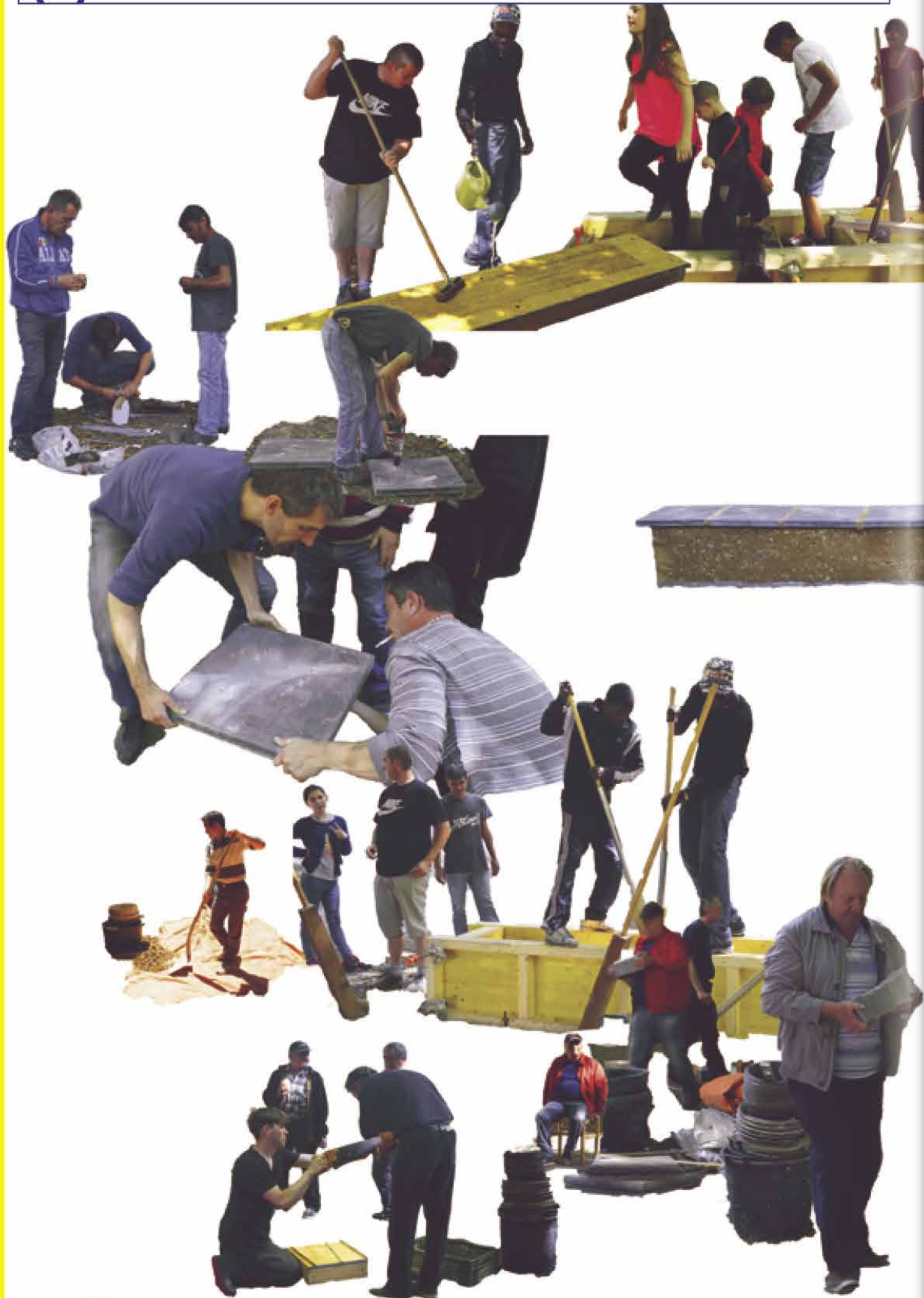
Pierre Zvenigorodsky, *Le glaive et le fruit* (1991). Abstract art in public space. Written in solder on the steel it says: 'Happiness is a new idea in Europe—Saint-Just'



Michèle in her premises and on her home turf—she is our link with the *boulistes* on their bench.

(2) BONDING

(3) THE CIRCLE OF PARTICIPATION



Michèle explaining things to the sociologist, off to the side.



And who's going to pay for the petrol?

In the distance, the suits from the housing office show up to take a look.



With a wry smile, The President watches over it all.

The Poser and his kids: nothing to be done here.

The Local, one foot in, one foot out

The Dog-Handler: once he gets started, it all comes back to him.

Brice, the teacher, gives it his all.

Joker USA—always there with a smile on his face.

Eric, hard at work.

The Expert with the Shopping Bag: she will have her say, and she knows what she's talking about.

The Boss surveys the scene.

(4) THE BOULISTES

(5) THE POSE



The camera comes out of its bag and directs its eye toward the construction in progress, then toward the completed site. We celebrate, preserving this inaugural moment to prove that we were there—look, it was us. We pose with the moment, the thing, the others. The camera moves around, and through it we see all sorts of relationships played out. They are composed of all kinds of postures, expressing scepticism, uncertainty, sympathy, affirmation, or challenging the lens. The panorama is made up of a range of photographic clichés, from the touching world of a UNICEF photo to the somewhat heroic pose of a family on their weekly outing, the affectation of a gang goading their viewers, a heart-warming photo of a family reunion, a funny motley crowd, caught off-guard and looking surprised, not quite sure what has just happened, the impromptu portrait of a management team after a successful event.



Among these familiar genres there are a few small instances where distance has returned. While the son shyly smiles, nestled against his mother, she looks away, over the camera, her elbow thrust out toward us like a barrier. There is also the elegant old North African man who agrees to be shot by the camera with dignity, but whose smirk reveals a certain weariness—he's seen it all before, he knows very well that a bench and a photo aren't going to change anything. And then in the midst of all of this, a little further down, in shadow, Eric poses next to a mate of his. Eric says nothing, but his foot is twisted, so is his mouth, and his look is a little defiant. He seems to be communicating through the other, telepathically. His mate stares at the camera through his glasses. His double victory sign is ambiguous, a little sarcastic: they know that this is only for a moment, that the curtain will fall, that we will leave, and that they will stay there.

CLOSURE: THE COMPLETION OF THE ARTIST'S PROJECT

My hypothesis is that I can find Europe in any Europe Square, since each Square carries some fragment, some spark, some reflection of the diffuse and plural desire for Europe. In the project 'Situating Heterogeneities', I wanted to bring together three Europe Squares with three art institutions in three cities. The idea was to circulate the fragments I found from one place to the other and, in doing so, make these desires for Europe glimmer in the in-between of the three sites. The objective was to make an intervention in the public space of each city in connection with its Europe Square, and to set up an exhibition in the city's art institution.

After Berlin and Lausanne, two squares that I knew in two cities where I had lived, I chose to complete the triangle with Bobigny. The square in Bobigny had caught my attention during my exhaustive cataloguing of all the Places de l'Europe in France. Firstly because of the extraordinary layout of the *cit  * at the heart of which the Place de l'Europe is set, and secondly because the list of names of the surrounding streets is quite unique: there is no other Place de l'Europe surrounded by the names of cities that are neither European capitals nor those of former empires.

Moreover, following a research project¹ carried out in response to a request by an association that supports drug users in the Parisian banlieue of Seine-Saint-Denis, I wanted to find a way to include this stigmatised world in my mapping of Europe. I had in mind that, in the early 2000s, the tense disparity between the capital and the suburbs had escalated into violent social unrest, which led to the reallocation of European Union structural funds originally intended to ease the integration of new EU member states on the margins of Europe to the redevelopment of this northern suburb of Paris. In this way, the margin and its disparity would be placed at the very heart of Europe.

1 As a part of Bruno Latour's Experimental Program of art and politics (SPEAP) at Sciences-Po during 2011.

Choosing the Place de l'Europe in Bobigny posed a challenge: What kind of Europe would I find in the middle of one of these famously troubled '*cit  s*'? How could I compare it to the square in Berlin, a historic European capital whose economic and cultural expansion was in full swing, or to the one in Lausanne,

a comfortable little town in Switzerland whose Place de l'Europe, located on the edge of a new shopping district, was designed by Bernard Tschumi, a master of deconstructivist architecture?

The project took place over two years, but since I didn't live in Paris I had just over a year to get to know the site and plan an intervention there. In collaboration with the Khiasma arts centre located at the Porte des Lilas, largely dedicated to presenting different perspectives on the residents of the banlieues and their origins, I had planned about ten visits to Bobigny. On the first trip to the *cit  * archives in the basement of the municipal administration building, I was welcomed with interest and kindness by B  n  dicte Penn. She guided me through the history of the *Cit  * de l'Abreuvoir, which is managed by the OPHLM) (a social housing office), and informed me of current developments.²

1 Today known as Seine-Saint-Denis Habitat, the Office Public d'Habitations    Loyers Mod  r  s served as a state landlord of the region's real estate, <<https://www.seinesaintdenishabitat.fr>>.

Among the documents, I found an analysis of the prospective renovation of the *cit  *—the first since its construction—which was to take place as a part of the GPRU II.³ The analysis concluded, among other things, that the population was living in a precarious condition of 'disaffiliation', meaning that residents were turning away from the state and its services. As I would later learn, the residents of the *cit  * had heard rumours of this plan and were worried about whether they would be allowed to stay.

3 The GPRU (*Grand projet de renouvellement urbain*, Nationwide Project for Urban Renewal) was first launched in 2002. Since 2017, le NPNRU (*Nouveau Programme National de Renouvellement Urbain*, New National Project for Urban Renewal, launched in 2014) has envisaged the partial demolition of the *cit  *, with a reduction in available housing: <<https://www.seinesaintdenishabitat.fr/npnru-bobigny-abreuvoir>>.

Despite my preparations, my arrival on-site was tense. I walked along streets lined with small family houses from before the *cit  *'s development to reach the neighbourhood accompanied by an artist friend who had grown up in a *cit  *, equipped with an unobtrusive camera and a map, which, curiously, indicated two different locations for the Place de l'Europe. Seduced by the architecture and the pleasant spaces around me, I forgot where I was. Arriving at a large square that I thought was the Place de l'Europe and taking some photographs of the premises of a women's association there, I was accosted by a man with a bottle in his hand, followed by two companions: 'What the hell you up to there? What you doing taking dirty photos?!' The tone of this introduction demonstrated the discrepancy well enough. Answering that my photos were part of an art project about the Place de l'Europe, I managed to generate enough incongruity to allow us to enter into a dialogue. Reassured that we posed no threat, the companions went back to their business. But The Loudmouth wasn't finished with us yet: 'First of all, you're not allowed to take pictures, you have to ask, and you have to be family. And anyway you're talking shit, this is the Place des Nations Unies, the Place

de l'Europe is over there, two hundred metres away, on the other side of the *mail*,⁴ so just fuck off and get going...cuz they're much worse over there'. In the end, we were lucky that we didn't end up 'scraping our faces off the pavement', and he let me go with my camera intact. The suspicion that I was some kind of council official had only finally been allayed once I shared the bottle with him. I left with trembling legs in the direction of the terrifying Place de l'Europe. After crossing the deserted *mail*—it was November—we arrived at the real Place de l'Europe, where there was a pharmacy, a bakery, and the OPHLM office, along with a dozen commercial premises, all with their shutters down. We didn't stay for very long. On the way back, I noticed an abstract metal sculpture on a traffic roundabout. Spray-painted, on its base it bore the slogan of the French revolutionary Saint-Just: 'Happiness is a new idea in Europe'.

4 A '*mail*' is a specific type of leisure park often found in the urban context in France, dedicated to strolling and playing *jeu de mail*, a croquet-like game using balls and hammers (*maillets*). *Mails* were popular in the late nineteenth century, and it was somewhat anachronistic for a modernist architect to use this form as part of his plan for the *cit  *.

In the visits that followed, my aim was to get over this altercation and find some way into the place by going to meet the residents. Mich  le Renard, director of the street theatre Fox Compagnie for thirty years, was to be our bridgehead. Based in a flat close to the ground floor where she was the 'artist in residence', Mich  le had been working with the residents since her arrival, recording their stories to stage them in two or three productions per year, presented in the community hall attached to the *cit  *. Mich  le was delighted by my idea to intervene with art in the public space of the *cit  *. For the previous two years she herself had led an open-air children's workshop at the end of the school year to decorate the *cit  *. She agreed to be my 'godmother' for the project, and we started visiting the residents present in the public space. Since the Place de l'Europe had been occupied since 2009 by a gang, probably active in drug dealing—something that worried everyone, especially the besieged employee in the OPHLM office—we decided to extend the perimeter of the intervention a little wider.

As we walked around, I observed the space while Mich  le spoke with the residents. In the whole of the *mail*—a pedestrianised public park dedicated to walking and games for young and old—there were no public benches except for one concrete slab covered with paint. There was a group of people who played boules every day while drinking together. Near their spot they had set up a bench made of four car tires and some planks, along with a basket hanging from a tree for their empty cans. During the conversation, led by Mich  le, we learned that all the equipment in the *mail*, including the wooden beams used to mark the boules lanes, had been removed by the OPHLM after their condition had deteriorated, and never replaced. We had discovered the object of our intervention: the public bench. With our limited means, we were obviously not going to re-equip the whole *cit  *. The plan was to make a prototype, within the framework of an artistic action that included the residents. In order for there to be a chance that the residents would actually get involved in the project, we decided to launch the intervention in parallel with the children's workshop at the end of the year. To produce a result that would be immediately

tangible for the participant-residents, the construction of the bench would have to involve a large amount of unskilled work, and be carried out in one day. This is where I called on my childhood friend, the architect Pierre Cauderay, who is involved in tactical urban planning and has often talked to me about building with rammed earth. The technique, which goes back a long way in Europe, has for some years now been in vogue in ecological architecture. Since all you need is earth, a formwork, and a 'rammer' (a kind of hammer), and since it takes a great deal of work to pack the earth in tightly, the technique seemed ideally suited to the project. In addition, the idea of building a bench from the earth of the *cit  * spoke for itself. The construction would also (unlike concrete) require some maintenance afterward, so that participants would have to take care of their work, otherwise the bench would come apart and return to the earth from whence it came.

In June 2014, in parallel with the third and last exhibition of the project at Khiasma, we built two benches over two days just a few steps away from the mural painting workshop taking place on the balcony of the Fox Compagnie premises, not far from the Place de Nations Unies. At the end of the second day, The Loudmouth reappeared and, without recognising me, sat down on the bench next to two women who knew him well and looked out for him: the success of the intervention was complete. An article in the Bobigny city newspaper, entitled 'Bench Test', was the icing on the cake—and encouraged us to continue, although the original project 'Situating Heterogeneities' had now come to an end. A spark of Europe shining in this little piece of public space, ignited by the bench.

Mich  le, Pierre, and I then decided to launch a proposal for bench workshops throughout the whole *cit  *. Disappointingly, six months on, none of our requests had been successful and all we had was a vague promise of co-production from the regional authority. From this point on we concentrated on just one bench, to be made with the *boulistes*, the only stable group we had been able to identify, while keeping in touch with the OPHLM and still hoping, via a contact made by Pierre, to develop the project further by demonstrating the success of the prototype. After even the pledges of the regional authority went up in smoke, Pierre and I managed to scrape together a few pennies from our friends, in exchange for a future limited edition silkscreen print, to finance our second 'campaign'. So it was that, with stubborn conviction, we left Switzerland in June 2015 with our rental van full of materials. On her side, Mich  le organised our accommodation, liaised with the park-keeper to ensure access to the site and water, and prepared the *boulistes* for our building project.

And there they were, waiting for us on a sunny Saturday morning. We debated a little about the location of the bench, neither too close nor too far from the boules lanes—as we explained to them, it couldn't be completely 'their' bench. The formwork was put down and the building site organised. Even the suits from the OPHLM, who happened to be conducting an evaluation of the *cit  * that day, came by. Over the course of the day about thirty inhabitants circled around the building site, with just a dozen or so remaining there all day long. Brice, one of the *boulistes* we had met during the very first visit, announced that he had got back his taste for work. During construction, Pierre suggested doubling the

length of the bench, and everyone went for it. By the end of the day the bench was finished and the whole peculiar troupe of builders posed for a photo. On the second day we made a second bench, closer to the playground. At the end of the afternoon the place was filled with children who had discovered the bench, climbing over it and playing on it. On the third day we spent some time doing minor repairs to the 2014 bench. Pierre had a plan to add a joint between the slabs that were covering it so as to limit erosion. During the day we walked around, saying hi to everyone. We were now part of the *cit  *. The benches had been adopted. The *boulistes* arranged their portable seats around the new bench.

OVERTURE: THE INHABITANTS GET TRULY HANDS-ON WITH THE BENCH

I see that the art installation is in place, completed according to Yves's plan, as perfect as a museum piece. The work of art, well-executed, terminated, done. Executed? Terminated? Done (in)? These terms suggest an atmosphere more sinister than the one presented at the inaugural festivities. And indeed, within a few months, the picture is quite different. A scene of desolation: the benches have indeed been executed, terminated, done in, destroyed. One has been levelled to its stone base, which, obviously, put up more resistance. The rammed earth, deprived of the shelter of the protective top, has been washed away by the rain. The top slab of another bench has been fractured and its fragments lie on the ground, scattered at the foot of the remaining heap of earth. A third has been counteracted in a different way: with a concerted action against the square angles of the friable corners of the rammed earth. In their plans for the project, the artists had chosen a concrete-free building material that allowed for reversibility. But the speed of this destruction of the work, fully participated in by the residents, hit the creators hard.

And yet... to resist, to remain, to counteract: these words reveal another story that is not one of annihilation, of the vandalism so often

associated with these banlieue *cit  s*. From my more distanced position, since I did not work on the bench myself, I try to comfort Yves by indicating this other plot which, far from having ended dramatically, is ongoing. Don't 'normal' artworks present a rigorous closure that prevents all further handling? Like the absolute of a new, impeccable object that must not bear any marks of use, or some sacred object? Isn't this closure the condition that makes possible a radiant artistic aura, in this case extended to the collective process of construction that fixed the art object? Like the monolith in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, whose frozen abstraction radiates its influence throughout the film, the art object is supposed to radiate an inspiring energy forever. But some residents didn't see it that way. They reacted by taking hold of the object and breaking into it, opening it up to their lives and that of the community. They resisted the hold exerted by this foreign object dropped into the middle of their territory. The inhabitants took the matter into their own hands, and got truly hands-on with it. A manual movement, like the manumission by which one seizes and takes hold, like a serf emancipating himself from bondage.



From this there emerged the idea for a new artwork to be made after the closure of the first one, this time featuring a more original conception of artistic participation, involving not the bench, but what it did to the community in the midst of which it had appeared out of nowhere. The story no longer ends tragically. What looked like destruction was in fact maintenance. The drama has a new act, opening with this process of maintenance that escapes the initial plan as it falls to the hands of the residents. In it, Yves examines the variety of interventions made by the participants who have taken hold of the bench, the decorations on the tops and edges of the slabs, the drawings, the graffiti, and the reconstruction of a new seat from the remains. As it spreads out, the bench loses its integrity but becomes more integrated. It has become flexible, embracing commonalities as well as differences. The question is now: How should this metamorphosis be addressed?



Some residents take it upon themselves to also 'intervene' in the work of art, using whatever means are at hand, writing or scratching, as if graffitiing their school desks, in a personal construction site that never ends.

Rows of stickers on the top slab have been removed, probably by the ladies who live in the building where Michèle has her workshop, the guardians of the bench. All that remains are the marks of this intervention, as an ornament.



The small bench has been razed to the ground, but its foundation remains, covered in writings.

The planned bench has long gone. But it lives on as a seat, taking on a new life alongside reclaimed chairs, done up and ready for conversation.



SITTING

The art bench didn't land just anywhere. It was built in the middle of a grassy, tree-filled area that the architect Émile Aillaud had designed as a *mail* for games and leisurely promenades, protected from any incursion by traffic. This *mail* is not only intended for games played with the mallet (*maillet*), it sets aside a space for strolling, in the heart of the *cité*, with an area for *boules*—a public space in which the *cité* can manifest itself, to itself. As a proto-political living and meeting space, it is dedicated to the residents' leisure hours, outside of work—work that the artist's project had brought back into it. It presents a great contrast to those modernist projects that plan tower blocks with green spaces with no specific function assigned to them. Unknowingly sited in a public space designated as a common area, whose imprint it would come to bear, the artist's intervention takes part in it, as do the actions and reactions of the residents. In this sense, the benches have been fully appropriated, even in their destruction. In this way, the proto-political space planned by Aillaud is still alive, unlike the village square renamed Place de l'Europe, or the Place des Nations Unies whose shops are subsidised by the city but are out of

operation. In the *mail*, the facilities may have been removed, but something still functions.

Beneath the art benches, whose integrity has been dispersed, the foundation remains. This foundation is not just a matter of the earth to which the bench has returned. Neither does the basis of the residents' community, in its continual reconstruction, depend upon the architect's plans or their original symbolic foundation. It is consolidated quite simply by those who sit together, fully taking part in the community. This is the primary way of taking part—of participating. The art bench in all of its states joins a whole genealogy of ways in which seating imparts commonality to places. It hasn't broken with this lineage, even though its rather sudden installation (albeit not without consultation) might suggest this. It perpetuates it.

The construction of the art bench had triggered shock waves. Concentric circles of participation appeared, moving outward from the fervent kernel of those—mostly male—residents who had rolled up their sleeves and got their hands dirty, to encompass—through varying degrees of detachment from the thing and the task—even those who remained noticeably aloof, expressed in their distracted bodies and ironic smiles.

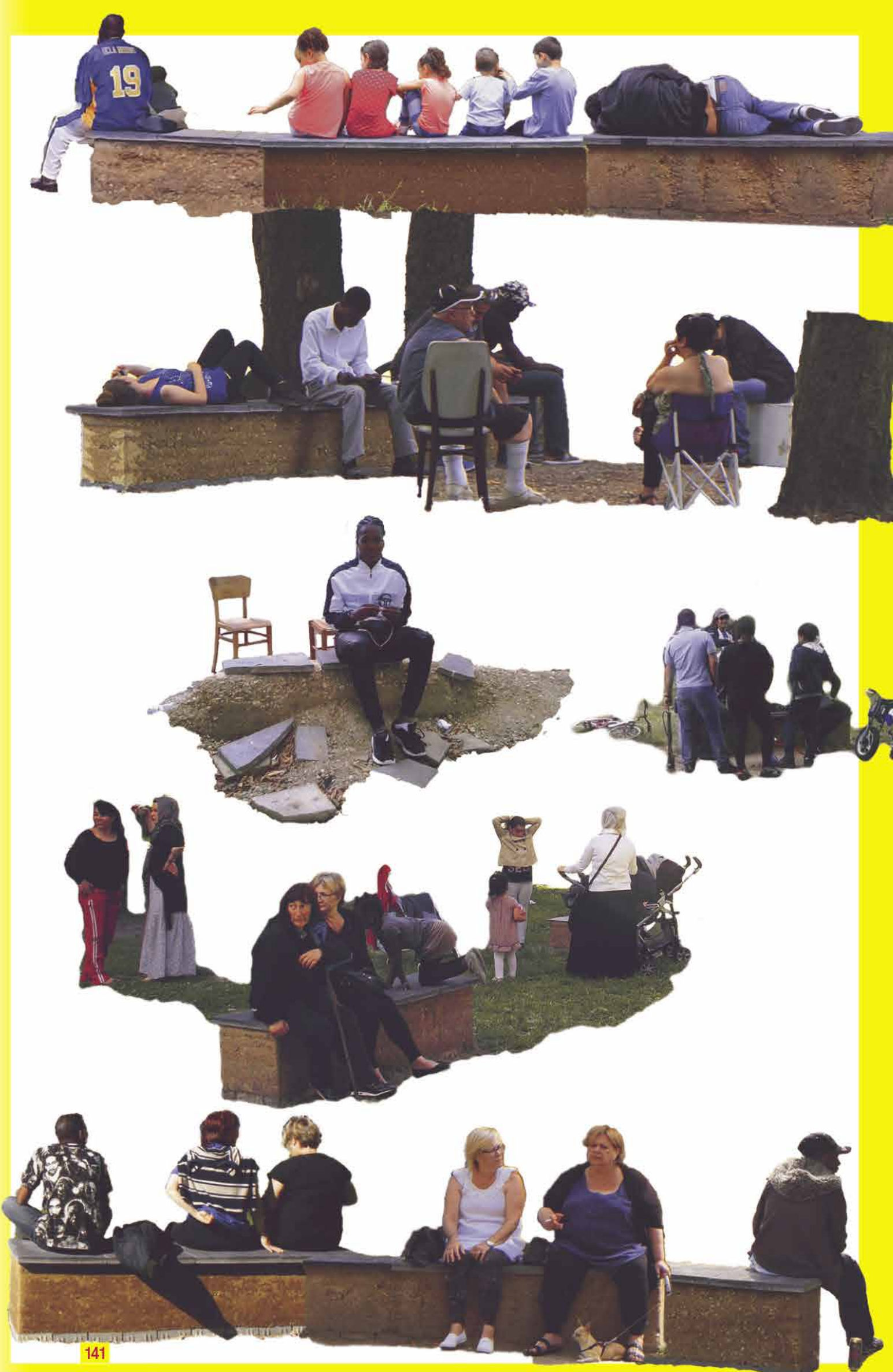
Once 'done', the bench, in its state of conformity and in its deconstructed condition, attracted the residents as intended. It became a place, a common place, for successive waves of various uses.

In the first wave, things go on as usual: a father watches his son play; there are girls in pink and boys in blue sitting on a bench that doesn't prevent anyone from sleeping on it either. In the next wave, the new artist's seat is totally enveloped, and not only by La Rose who, dressed in blue, drapes herself lazily across it. For, being fixed to the ground, the bench has attracted a company of portable chairs: one improvised out of a crate, one retired from someone's apartment, now taking on a new lease of life outdoors, and a fold-up chair, specifically designed for portability. Later on, there's a guy rolling himself a cigarette, staring serenely at the photographer, enthroned upon what has been reconstructed from the debris of the embattled bench. Assembled in groups, with motorbikes, bicycles, and shishas, the 'noisy youth' of the *cité* meet at their latest spot, a new common place for them too.

Next comes a wave of women. A pastoral scene of young mothers with their little ones. And then others, older, gossiping, standing guard, watching over—the benches in particular. The last wave is one of extremes: The Loudmouth, seen from behind, sits at one end, and another guy, also with his back to the camera, is perched at the other. Between the two, in conversation, are the women who run this little society, keeping everything in check.

At one point Eric, La Rose's dad, told her to get off her motorbike because the cops weren't far away. And sure enough, once the benches had been set up and the kids started hanging around them, law enforcement turned upon their own motorbikes for a police raid.

Because the *cité* has a bad rep.

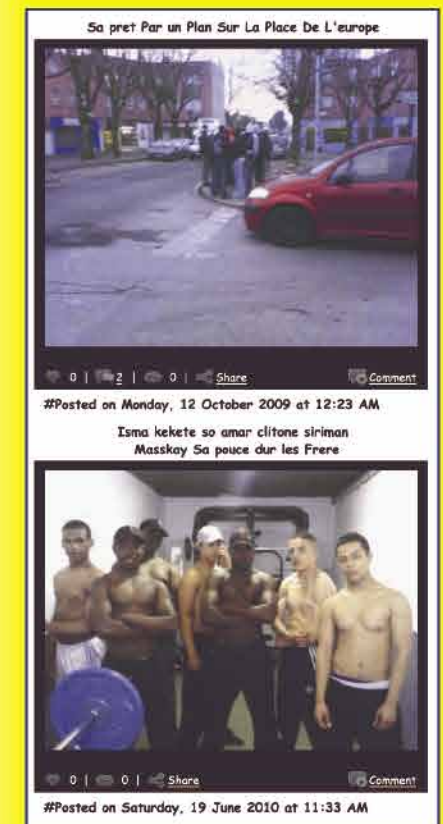




OCCUPYING

The art benches occupy a terrain that is already occupied. In their plural and conflicting engagements with the territory, the occupants do not participate in just one commonality. Multiple commonalities with diverse geometries confront one another, giving rise to differences that are expressed in various ways, including violence, and sometimes even murder. On the ground, like archaeologists, Yves and Laurent search out the traces of successive settlements and occupations, clashes of words and gestures.

Although elegantly curved to follow the undulating pattern of the buildings of the *cité*, the only remaining original bench looks more like a bunker, with its menacing concrete and the numerous paint jobs it has suffered over the years. The others have been destroyed. The state replaced them only once, say the *boulistes*. Which is why they made their own bench out of boards placed on top of four car tires: 'It's practical, because you can move it to stay in the sun'. Other facilities have been set up nearby so they can drink in peace. There are the baskets they have fixed to the trees, high enough so that children aren't at risk of injury from a sharp can or a broken bottle. A certified child-safe occupancy of the site. Later, when their home-made bench got burned down, they would comment sardonically: 'That's how things go around here.' Just a faint weariness: 'We'll find another one.' New benches have indeed appeared, remnants of furniture abandoned at the foot of buildings. 'Who burned it? We know who...!' The evening before the fire there had been some trouble. But they say no more: no denunciation, no dramatisation. Some charred wreckage was also found near the unharmed bench: 'They brought a scooter over and set it alight. Might not have been stolen, just an old one at the end of its life.' The bench that remains intact is still in use as a service station. Youths park their bicycles and motorbikes nearby, and hang out, puffing on a shisha pipe.



just come out the Pen With his boo Alexia'). A group photo on the Place de l'Europe is captioned: 'Getting ready Plottin On Place De L'Europe'. On the square, between the metal shutters of the abandoned shops, a female employee is the sole occupant of the OPHLM office, whose official signage reads 'Reception Point'. She has had a secure entrance installed—a two-door system. After ringing the bell with Michèle, then tapping at the window so she could recognise us, we get to hear all about her fears and grievances: the inhabitants are always complaining, they are confrontational, the Place de l'Europe is a no-go area....

1 *Département* 92 as opposed to 93: In the social and ethnic Parisian topography, the west-side 92 contains all the rich white suburbs, while the colony of '93labreu' boasts of 'hustling' ('*chiner*') in their own way....

The loose slabs of the disintegrated bench have been given a new foundation, placed back on top of the pile of rammed earth ruined by the rain. Like the remains of an archaic banquette bearing witness to a past culture, they have found a new lease of life alongside chairs brought out from apartments to continue their career as outdoor furniture. Meanwhile, the old top slab, now spewing out loosened earth after the attack, has been smashed to pieces. Our two archaeologists piece it together from scattered fragments in order to decipher its inscriptions. Vigorous and offensive invective: 'gonna make you sit on it' under a drawing of a Kalashnikov together with its deafening sound: 'KALACH' 'RATATATATA' 'Bang Bang'. There are geometric decorations ornamenting its edge, and on its top the slab has become a site for small ads, and declarations of affection or war: 'this is the street!!!!', 'this is our hood!!! here!!!' The pseudonym 'JazMax' sits alongside 'FedMax D'Labreu', from the name of the city (*L'Abreuvoir*: the Trough).

Cattle no longer drink here on the way to the slaughterhouse, but the name still harbours a latent violence, concealed under the greenery of the garden city. Dealing and violence are kept in the shadows, away from the prying eyes and ears of passing strangers like us. Yet they are evident enough in the harsh light of the archives, in traces, and in testimonies. The name of the *cité* then changes its aspect. In the first act, *The Clash*, the tag 'LABREUVOIR' was spotted, like a warning, on the barred and boarded-up window of the pharmacy in the deserted Place des Nations Unies.

At the other end of the *mail*, on the sinister Place de l'Europe, the diminutive 'LABREU' covers the dark side of the *cité*. The drug-dealing that irrigates a certain relational economy has progressively eliminated the spaces set aside by the architect for shops on the ground floor of the buildings around this square planted with plane trees. The gang has taken over a maintenance room, where they practice boxing while planning their biz. The opaque window of the room is surrounded by drawings of skulls alongside the tags 'LEUROP', 'LABREU', 'MAFIA' and nicknames—KEKETE, ISMA. In 2009–2010 the 'Blog de 93labreu' on the *Skyrock* radio website published a more extensive list of the players in this troupe: 'For all labreu mandem gettin up early to go hustle in 192.' The first image is a bird's-eye view of the *cité* outlined in red, entitled 'L'abreuvoir my balls' and captioned: 'If mans brave enough to run On These Roads you got Balls.' About twenty young people of African (2/3) and North African (1/3) descent introduce themselves with photos and nicknames together with placenames, proclaiming them to be 'from Place de L'Europe' (10), 'from the Place des Nations' (3), 'from the *Mail*' (2) and other adjacent streets in the *cité*. Some are shown wielding guns, and Ismail has posted a selfie taken in his prison cell ('Isma From the *Mail* in the Pen') as well as a photo taken on his release, in charming company ('Ismael

The terrorist attacks in Paris on 13 November 2015 marked a climax in public violence. That day, Pierre the architect sent Yves news footage of L'Abreuvoir that he had just seen on Swiss TV. The report used the images as an introduction to the dangers generally associated with banlieue *cités*, before moving on to the real object of the police. Just a stone's throw from the Place de l'Europe, in an adjacent street, a small suburban house had been rented by two of the perpetrators of the shootings on the streets of the 11th arrondissement, who also drove the suicide bombers to the Stade de France—two attacks for which 'Islamic State' had claimed responsibility. A woman who lives in the same street and works at the town hall told the press: 'Nowadays the whole neighbourhood is run by drugs and weapons dealers, everyone knows it.' A few steps away in the rue de Varsovie, a wall is riddled with bullets, traces of a shoot-out three years ago between five young people, following 'a lover's quarrel' according to the police. Another inhabitant of the street said that he had seen the terrorists' car shortly before the attacks: 'Round here nobody goes anywhere, everyone knows everyone, so a rented black Polo with Belgian plates sticks out a mile.' The house the terrorists occupied stands opposite the Robespierre nursery school in rue Georges Tarral, named after a hero of the French Resistance who died at the age of 25, a married father of two, and who is also honoured on a commemorative plaque in the town hall dedicated to nineteen Resistance fighters. The municipality has been naming streets after such heroes since the end of the Second World War. Breaking with this practice, without consulting the town hall, the public HLM office, project manager of the *cité* of l'Abreuvoir, chose to name its new streets after foreign nations, and then supra-national entities: 'Place des NATIONS UNIES' and 'Place de l'EUROPE'.





RECOMPOSITION : THE COUNTERPART

Attacked on the fake Place de l'Europe and the real Place des Nations Unies, it feels like the project is almost done. This leaves our two protagonists upset, downcast. The whole enterprise seems to be encapsulated in these two benches juxtaposed before them, one in conformity to the intended project; the other totally wrecked. The photograph shows the puzzled sociologist alongside the artist—a mere shadow of himself, and yet, the author of the whole image. What had they learned from this experience?

The experience had demonstrated that the art object, when it is opened up to participation in order to become social, critical, and political, gets jolted loose from the original objectives of the art project. The object had escaped the assumptions of the project, and evaded the future planned out for it, in which it would be justified by its engagement with the common good of civic solidarity in the *cité*, this little localised piece of Europe. Designed to be used by all, the object passed personally through the hands of the residents during its making (and not just contemplation)—and then through various uses and episodes of manhandling. And in being handled in this way, it was jolted loose.

As for Laurent the sociologist, attentive to the pressures brought to bear by the imperative of participation, and not only to its democratic virtues, he tirelessly nagged his colleague Yves about his participatory art. After everything that had happened, he could well have said 'I told you so', but his mind was elsewhere. He too had learnt a self-critical lesson from the adventure about the sociologist's craft. Doesn't sociological investigation also demand types of participation that make it more difficult to grasp what it is that people are attached to? He now recognised the comparative advantage enjoyed by artists, whose interventions are not made of words alone. It was all quite different from a 'sociological intervention', limited to discursive engagements in public

debate or to 'participant observation' which requires sociologists or anthropologists to participate alongside the people they observe in their activities, but without otherwise intervening. The abrupt and concrete irruption of the artwork, whose creation challenged the residents, jolted the community by setting people, in their multiple engagements, in motion. This jolting loose made possible by the work caused an upheaval, triggering processes of making common and differing. Doesn't this revealing disturbance deserve to be examined as another part, a counterpart, of the original work of art? The installation of the bench took place, but also made a place for something else.

The five acts of the plot outline a mode of intervention that is valid more generally, and not just in the case of the bench. (1) THE CLASH with a community calls for the recognition that the artist is a stranger, and brings with him implications of external violence, rather than attempting to deny this under the soft cover of an ambiguous participation. (1) BONDING implies paying attention to the ways in which the stranger can be domesticated, so that he may get closer to the community, through intermediaries who are already involved because of their local engagements. The project is anchored to the community through a variety of communications mediated in this way, rather than through formal survey and public debate. (3) THE CIRCLE OF PARTICIPATION needs to be explored in order to understand the composition of the community on the basis of members' attitudes to the construction of the art object,

according to concentric circles of participation around the common place under construction. (4) THE RADIANCE OF THE CHARACTERS highlights personalities not in the psychological sense, but in terms of their combination of engagements, as inferred from the postures and gestures that express the plurality of their personal engagements in the place and the resulting internal tensions which impact on the construction of commonality. (5) THE POSE around the object that has been made together offers a new opportunity to identify the dispositions and compositions of communities and personalities.

With the appearance of the art bench, what new work did our two companions produce, and according to which arts of making? Beyond the dialogues it involved—rather than questionnaires or interviews—the art bench gave rise to observations, and photographic and video recordings of the residents, and of their expressions in relation to the object. The analysis of this rich material, aided by a sociology of engagements and constructions of commonality in the plural, altered the initial topic of the investigation: the construction of a participative artwork in the *cité*. While working on the masterpiece, Yves observed on the spot and captured in photos what was happening. Scrutinising the abundant images led to this artwork-book. The tête-à-tête with Laurent, from conversation to confrontation, produced analyses, interpretations, graphic choices, and writings. From this bench placed in the *cité*, an original combination of the two collaborators' respective arts ended up generating the unexpected, in terms of both art and sociology.

The lessons of the experience go beyond the particular case. They give us the outlines of an artistic and sociological gesture that escapes the confusion present in the slogans of 'participative', 'social', 'practical', and 'critical interventions'. Yet there is no reason to renounce the spirit of intervening in the heart of the *cité*, a spirit which these words inspire. The design of this intervention should however embrace the plurality of ways of doing things in common and of differing, from gossiping to fighting to playing boules, as well as the plurality of ways of becoming engaged, from the most intimate attachments to the most public stances.

What the destiny of the projected object revealed is now part of the history of the community, which in various ways has appropriated it as a new common place. As for the artist, he did not just vanish into social work, because the artwork did not stop here. Generated by the vicissitudes of being the first art object placed in the community, the artwork was split in two, with a counterpart continuing its existence in these pages. More than a simple report on the project, the saga of the object is depicted in an epic figuration that tells of the deeds of colourful characters involved in various ways, in agreement or not, giving us a singularly animated portrait of the community. In this double aesthetics of the counterpart, the new work is engendered from the object installed in the community, while being clearly distinguished from the fate of that object, which is no longer under the control of the artist.