



Antonin Rousseau

Master Culture Politique et Patrimoine (Sorbonne Universités)
MS Aménagement et Maîtrise d'Ouvrage Urbaine (Ecole Nationale des Ponts
et Chaussées)

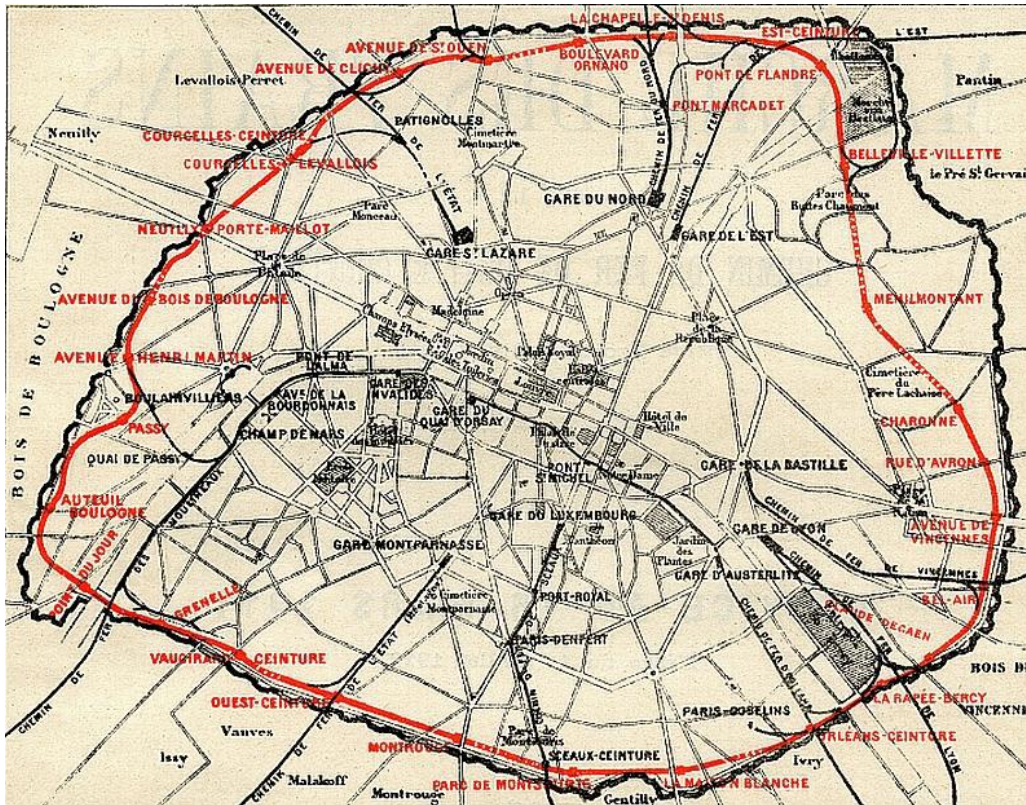
The Petite Ceinture in Paris: issues of cohabitation between some appropriations of an old railway and its institutionalisation

*La Petite Ceinture de Paris: la difficile cohabitation entre les
appropriations d'une friche ferroviaire et son institutionnalisation*





An old 32 km long railway from the mid-19th century, which was progressively abandoned during the 20th century.



Property of the SNCF (French National Railway Society)

The Petite Ceinture in 1911. Source: Association Sauvegarde Petite Ceinture, [Online].





- The concept of appropriation: beyond the private/public distinction, the complexity of the multiple links to space and relations of power.
- Many appropriations of the Petite Ceinture: from informal occupations to private and public refurbishments.
- The last wastelands of Paris: issues of urban regeneration.
- Feelings of a space that is outside urban norms, an heterotopia.
- Processes of institutionalisation: preserving the qualities of the wasteland, especially through participatory initiatives.



Source: Personal photos.





- However, the cohabitation between appropriation seems asymmetrical.
- Domination of institutional appropriations and verticality of power.
- Many gaps between the participatory intentions and discourses and the reality of the relations between the uses of the space.
- Processes of institutionalisation: preserving the qualities of the wasteland, especially through participatory initiatives.
- Questions the place of the informal in urban planning, and the limits of participatory democracy.
- The wasteland as a place of struggle against social and environmental injustices.





The Petite Ceinture in Paris: issues of cohabitation between some appropriations of an old railway and its institutionalisation

I- From the ordinary to the institutional: appropriations and valorizations of a wasteland which is lived as heterotopian

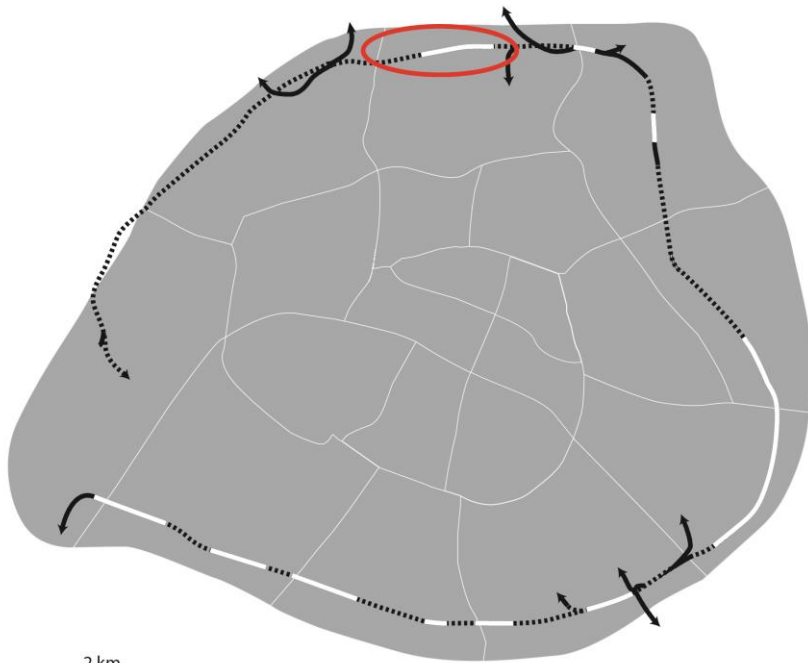
II- Tensions, conflicts et power relations between the stakeholders

III- What is the place of the informal in urban planning? The Petite Ceinture as a space of struggles for participation and against environmental injustices





The examples tackled in this presentation will mainly deal with the Petite Ceinture of the 18th district, in the North of Paris, which was where I did most of my research.



2 km

..... Railway — Tunnels → Connections with other lines

○ Zone studied in my research

Source: Personal production.

A lot of different appropriations:

- 3 private rehabilitations (Hasard Ludique, Recyclerie, Jardins du Ruisseau)
- 1 project of public opening
- 1 big shantytown (from 2013 to 2017)
- 1 insertion workshop (Halage)
- 1 informal garden
- Graffiti and street art
- Other people coming to walk and rest

But I will also evoke other parts of the Petite Ceinture.





I- From the ordinary to the institutional: appropriations and valuation of a wasteland which is lived as heterotopian

- Many appropriations: spaces of spontaneity, heterogeneity and difference





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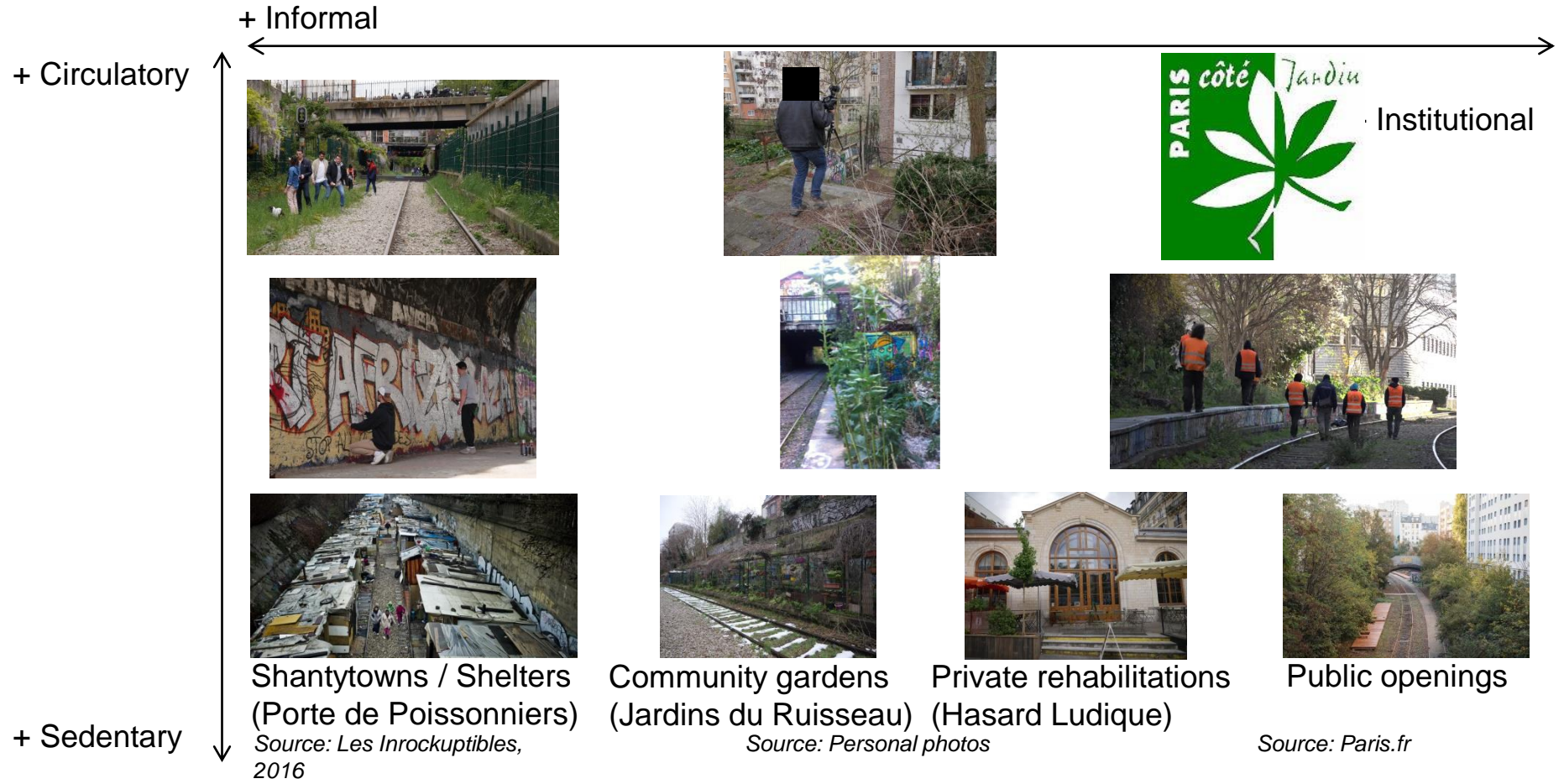


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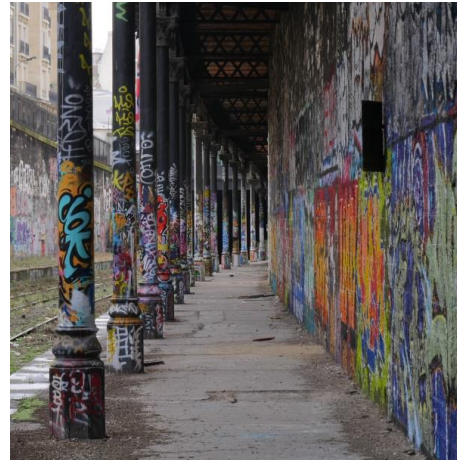


• **Many appropriations: spaces of spontaneity, heterogeneity and difference**





- **Habiter and heterotopia**
 - Social and natural spontaneity



Source: Personal photos.

- Feelings of freedom, fantasy and mystery.
- A particular type of *habiter* : a transitory link with an alternative and exceptional space, a moment of « achieved utopia ».

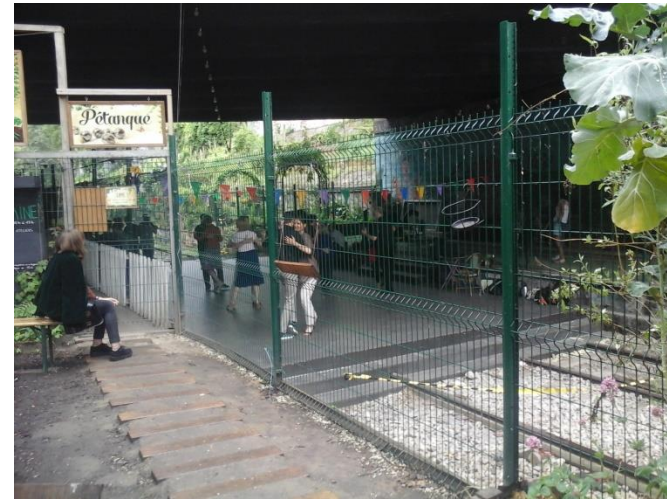


- Privatisations: community initiatives



Community garden of La Recyclerie

Source: Personal photo.



Les Jardins du Ruisseau: several activities for the neighbours.

Source: Personal photo.

- Many institutional actors work together, aiming to preserve the specificities of the Petite Ceinture.





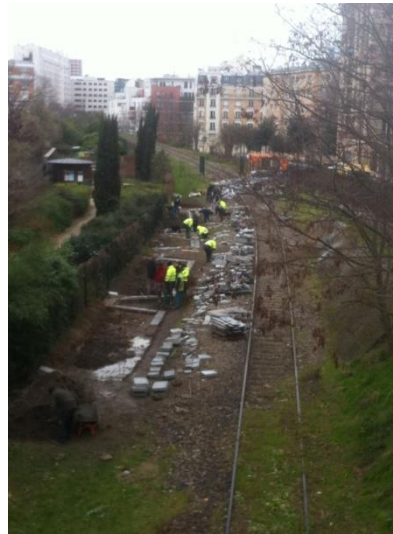
II- Tensions, conflicts et power relations between the stakeholders

- **Domination of the institutional actors and interests**
- Publicising : normalisation of space, making it standard and limited public spaces.



20th district

Source: « Ceinturama », Facebook.



17th district

Source: François Godard, « La voie de Paris, Facebook.



12th district





- The participatory collectives have a limited influence, compared to traditional powerful actors: SNCF, Direction des Espaces Verts et de l'Environnement (Green Spaces and Environment Board).
- Domination of private interests and the economic valuation of the Petite Ceinture.



Le Hasard Ludique (a bar): partial privatisation of the area that was devoted to the collective Traverse: struggle between private and participatory interests.

Source: Personal photos.





- **Standardisations and transgressions: conflicts of appropriations**

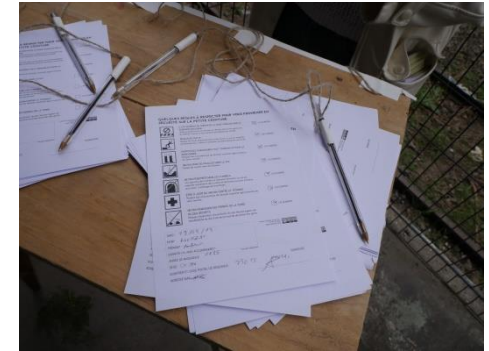
- Institutionalisation: closure and discipline



The participatory zone



Jardins du Ruisseau



Le Hasard Ludique



The Hasard Ludique's platform: before and after the fences (2018)

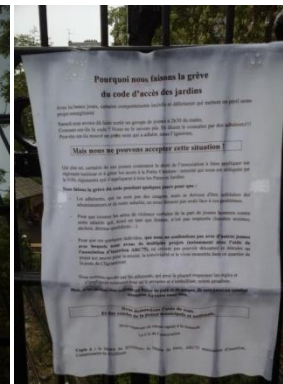
Source: Personal photos.



- Free uses of the spaces: transgressions and conflicts



People infringing the rubberband limits



« Strike » at Les Jardins du Ruisseau, reacting to behaviors that broke the rules.

Source: Personal photos.





- **Many other conflicts of appropriations: difficult cohabitation between the various interests and visions of the space**
 - Difficult relations between the shantytown and the other appropriations
 - The Petite Ceinture has many dimensions, depending on the people: land reserve, biodiversity reserve, heritage, free space, inhabited shelter...

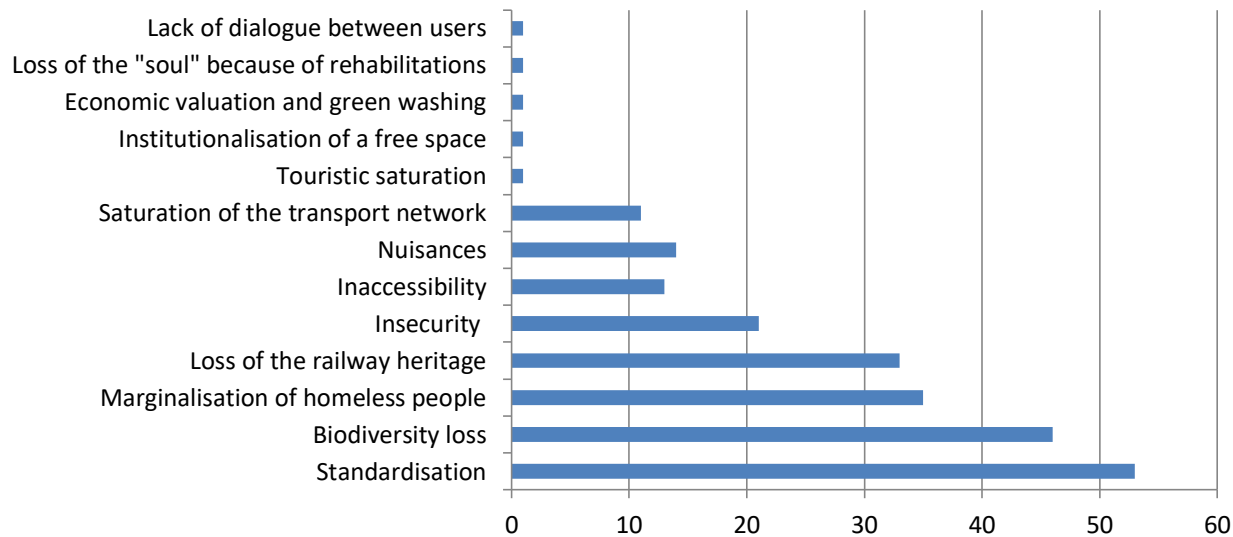


Diagram of the most worrying elements, regarding the future of the Petite Ceinture, for a panel of 93 people.
Source: Personal survey.





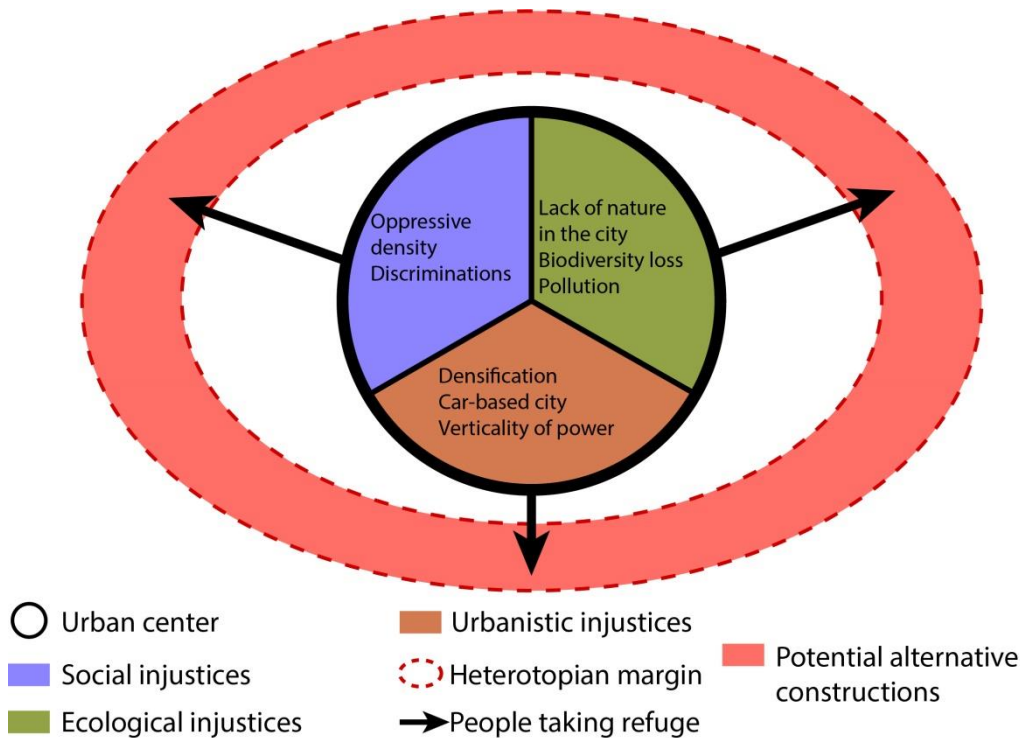
III- What is the place of the informal in urban planning? The Petite Ceinture as a space of struggles for participation and against environmental injustices

- **The limits of participatory democracy?**
 - Powerlessness of the collectives, and the people.
 - Feelings of frustration, because of an insufficient participation.
 - Despite the City of Paris's intentions and discourses about participatory democracy, there is no fundamental change in the organization of the city: same traditional stakeholders, and same power relations.
 - Participation takes place on a very limited scale: just details, and not the projects themselves. This situation seems to be similar to other cases in France.





- **The return of the institutional power into a wasteland, that can be perceived as a social and environmental injustice**
 - For many people, that represents the loss of a shelter, an alternative space of compensation, as opposed to the city.



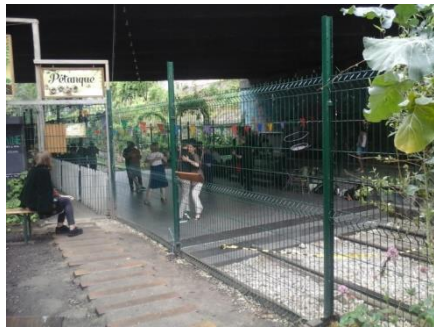
Source: Personal production.





• Right to the city, autonomy and *de facto* actions

- Against the environmental injustices or the relations of power, several actors have *de facto* uses that claim a right to the informal, to experimentations and participation.
- Using un-standardised space to question urban norms.
- Negotiations or struggle.



Jardins du Ruisseau: experimenting



François Godard: testifying



Bâtisseurs de Cabanes: auto-construction and empowerment VS the domination of land property.



Ecole Spéciale des Espaces Libres: free experimentations and squat VS SNCF.

Source: ESEL's old website

Source: Personal photos





Conclusion

- Beyond the multiplicity of uses with a difficult cohabitation because of different interests, there seems to be a struggle between vertical institutionalisation processes and informal appropriations claiming for autonomy and participation, in the Petite Ceinture.
- Contradictions of an approach pretending to be participatory but that it is still dominated by traditional stakeholders who have a vertical authority.
- Double paradox: it seems difficult to value the inner qualities of the wasteland through its institutionalisation; several actors appear to claim a right to the city, but in a radical space of « non-city », and want to defend its heterotopian status (right to the « non-city »?).





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