

This text is an excerpt taken from my Masters thesis entitled “**Reclaiming the Darling Foundry: From Post-Industrial Landscape to Quartier Éphémère.**” Without the generous participation of Sylvie and Stephan, this project would not have been a success. This text cannot be reproduced without my permission. For enquiries please contact me at [conspire@videotron.ca](mailto:conspire@videotron.ca).

Urban interventions have the potential to bring particular social, political and cultural struggles into representation. In the same way public protests have a power to bring certain aspects of a city to the surface, what then, do urban interventions both aesthetically and politically give the city and its inhabitants in terms of a rhetorical space, a space for discussion? Architectural historian Cynthia Hammond proposes that urban interventions are “visual and spatial speech acts, which bring cities to articulate themselves differently.”<sup>1</sup> Further, Hammond argues that urban interventions “harness the potential of the built environment’s potential to act as *architecture parlante*, a speaking architecture that communicates in surprising and subversive ways.”<sup>2</sup>

This text focuses on the work of German artists and urban interventionists Sylvia Winkler and Stephan Köperl.<sup>3</sup> The projects in question were created over a six-month period during Winkler and Köperl’s residency at the Darling Foundry between April and October 2008, which was the same time frame in which the city adopted the Devimco “Griffintown Project.” *Quartier Éphémère*’s artist residency program creates a sense of *place* within the marginal urban community, as well as locating artists and their practices

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<sup>1</sup> Cynthia Hammond, “Urban ‘Truths’: Artistic Interventions in Post-Socialist Space.” In The Post Socialist City: Continuity and Change in Space and Imagery. Marina Dmitrieva and Alfrun Kliems, eds. (Berlin: Jois Verlag, 2011) 4. (forthcoming.)

<sup>2</sup> Hammond, “Urban ‘Truths’,” 4-5.

<sup>3</sup> The artists’ work is well documented on their website, <http://www.winkler-koerperl.net/0englisch/heimseite.html> (accessed 13 May 2009).

*in relation to* the community and the recent struggles and controversies surrounding Griffintown's redevelopment. Griffintown is currently a contested territory because the city's scheme to revitalize the historic industrial zone could erase what remains of the architectural history of industrial, working class Montreal. In the spring of 2008, the city of Montreal gave private Montreal real-estate developer, Devimco, the green light to implement their 1.3 billion dollar project in Griffintown. Known as the "Griffintown Project," Devimco's plans include, among other things, the construction of four condo towers, two big box stores and a "*salle des spectacles*."<sup>4</sup>

Winkler and Köperl devised and constructed their projects within the Foundry, however, none of the work they produced or performed occurred *within* the Foundry. Insofar as the Foundry operates as gallery for the exhibition of contemporary art, it also acts as a threshold between its artists, and the highly contested terrain in which the building is located. In this way, the Foundry creates conditions in which artists such as Winkler and Köperl can explore their practice beyond the Foundry and engage with the cultural landscape of the city.

I first met Winkler and Köperl following an art history graduate symposium entitled, "Montreal as Palimpsest: Architecture, Community, Change,"<sup>5</sup> held at the Canadian Centre for Architecture in April 2008. They had just arrived from Stuttgart to begin their residency at the Foundry.<sup>6</sup> Drawn to the event's content and its examination

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<sup>4</sup> Michelle Lalonde, "Griffintown Developers Go Green with Plans," The Gazette, 25 April 2008: A1 and A7.

<sup>5</sup> See [http://www.canadianartinstitute.org/conf08\\_palimpsest/](http://www.canadianartinstitute.org/conf08_palimpsest/) (accessed 19 May 2009).

<sup>6</sup> The Canada Council for the Arts Foreign Residency Program (established in 2008) sponsored Winkler and Köperl's residency at the Darling Foundry. The program supports

of the morphology of Montreal’s built environment, their attendance, in many respects, is where their initial investigation about Montreal’s history began.<sup>7</sup> It is also an occasion that marks the beginning of my relationship to the artists and their work.

With every new city, Winkler and Köperl appear to absorb the mechanisms by which city space is transformed. Winkler and Köperl are politically engaged artists whose work responds to particular urban conditions. However, there is also a playful nature to these artists’ work, manifested in the contact between themselves and with the observers who, passing by, are lucky enough to catch them in the creative act. Brigit Neuer describes Winkler and Köperl’s approaches to intervening with the city as a psycho-geographic engagement with the structure of urban space.<sup>8</sup> Winkler and Köperl’s desire to communicate messages through playful tactics and humour is reminiscent of the Situationists International strategy of *dérive* and their critique of modernist planning. More than a *dérive* however, I see Winkler and Köperl’s engagement with the urban environment, to borrow from de Certeau, as a “spatial practice.” De Certeau’s premise is that walking is an elementary form of apprehending a city through all of the sensory modes. “The act of walking,” de Certeau claims, “is to the urban system what the speech act is to language.” Furthermore, he posits that walking in the city is a “pedestrian speech

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established international artists in a six-month residency and provides the artist(s) with a production bursary.

<sup>7</sup> Winkler and Köperl, personal interview, 15 September.

<sup>8</sup> Brigit Neuer, catalogue, “Reading in the Palimpsest of the Urban Landscape,” The Pausing of Thoughts in the Moment of Indifference (Stuttgart: Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste, 2006) n.pag.

act” with an “enunciative function.”<sup>9</sup> Rendell argues that through the act of walking, “spatial stories” are created which act “as theoretical device[s] that allow us to understand the urban fabric in terms of narrative relationships between spaces, times and subjects.”<sup>10</sup> According to de Certeau and Luce Giard, the inhabitants of a city are the true “*bricoleurs*” of urban space. They argue that the two modes by which objects in the city are transformed, interrupted or displaced are through gestures (tactics) and narratives (language).<sup>11</sup> Within this logic, they assert that “[g]estures are the true archives of the city... They remake the urban landscape everyday. They shift a thousand pasts that are perhaps no longer namable and that structure no less their experience of the city.”<sup>12</sup>

As a way of engaging with experiences and concepts of foreign places and cities, Winkler and Köperl begin each journey by walking through the urban landscape. How a city looks is influential to their work. Winkler explains,

We are not urbanists. [We are] interested in the social and how daily life is [affected] by the shape of the city. I am curious [about] how architecture affects life... what kind of built environment do people want to live in?

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<sup>9</sup> De Certeau, “Walking in the City,” 97 and 98.

<sup>10</sup> Rendell, Art and Architecture, 188.

<sup>11</sup> De Certeau and Giard, “Ghosts in the City,” 141.

<sup>12</sup> De Certeau and Giard, “Ghosts in the City,” 141. “Strangely Familiar,” a scholarly collective of architects, more recently formulated a theoretical framework of “filters” and “tactics” which refer to the different uses and productions of urban space. The collective posits that filters and tactics operate dialectically as tools for negotiating between oneself and the city. “Filters” are thematized by memory, experience and identity, whereas “tactics” are characterized by spatial appropriation, forms of resistance and domination. “Strangely Familiar” was co-founded in 1994 in London by architectural historians Iain Borden, Joe Kerr, Alicia Pivaro and Jane Rendell. See Iain Borden et al, The Unknown City, 12 and 13.

Architecture has an influence on how people live... and the art we are making.<sup>13</sup>

Through their observation of everyday occurrences, Winkler and Köperl's interventions are inspired by experiencing the city as strangers and by the complex urban situations that embed themselves as images in their minds.<sup>14</sup> Neuer describes their interventions as a series of associative investigations that reveal an expression given by the city.<sup>15</sup> As Köperl explains, the inspiration to create public interventions came out of his interest in discovering hidden objects in urban spaces combined with his desire to create minute landscapes and ephemeral works in the city.<sup>16</sup>

Significantly, what makes Winkler and Köperl's approach to urban interventions unique is how their work is inspired. From the perspective of information theory, Johannes Meinhardt has described their interventions as "communication interferences" or the failure of the interaction of communication through writing, language or human behaviour.<sup>17</sup> As a text for one of their catalogues from Stuttgart, Germany, explains,

[The artists] deal with pieces of writing turning up, for instance, which are incomprehensible or not perceived as writing in the first place; or which exist in a situation without addressee or speaker, anonymous and non-referential, floating and without context; or they concern certain forms of behaviour which evade communication [and] refuse expression[.]<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Winkler, personal interview, 15 September 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Sylvia Winkler and Stephan Köperl, personal interview, 15 September 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Neuer, n.pag.

<sup>16</sup> Köperl, personal interview, 15 September 2008.

<sup>17</sup> Johannes Meinhardt, "Address Unknown: An Aestheticism of Communication Interferences," catalogue, The Pausing of Thoughts in the Moment of Indifference (Stuttgart: Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste, 2006) n.pag.

<sup>18</sup> Meinhardt, n.pag.

These “communication interferences” combined with the artists’ integration into an urban space of foreign language, writing, signs and gestures become the material for their art and performances.<sup>19</sup> Like linguistic exercises, Winkler and Köperl’s point of entry into an unfamiliar culture is through the recreation or restructuring of (un)familiar sentences, phrases, or words and inscribing them onto the public and private spaces of the city. Examples of these phrases include: “how sweet is your friendliness to my heart” (Cairo, 2002); “to see something with dedication” (Poland, 1999); “to contest the actual occurrence of a truth” (Paris, 1999). The artists usually construct these sentences with the use of language dictionaries and random fragments of urban slogans, signs, objects and words that present themselves to the artists. Winkler and Köperl’s sentences and phrases appear disjointed, as they are “inscribed” onto inanimate objects and public spaces. But as Meinhardt points out, Winkler and Köperl’s messages are carefully arranged in an “invisible choreography.”<sup>20</sup>

During their six-month residency at the Darling Foundry the artists became increasingly involved in the “Griffintown Project” controversy. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of April 2008, the Community for Sustainable Redevelopment of Griffintown (CSR) staged a mock funeral for Griffintown in protest to the city’s approval of Devimco’s development plans for the area. With a *caleche* carrying a coffin marked “RIP Griffintown,” pallbearers dressed in black, among two hundred other protest supporters, formed a procession and

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<sup>19</sup> Meinhardt, n.pag.

<sup>20</sup> Meinhardt, n.pag.

marched from Griffintown to Montreal's City Hall. This gesture inspired Winkler and Köperl, who were compelled to join the procession.

In response to the “Griffintown Project” and captured by the activist nature of the community, Winkler and Köperl created an intervention whereby they offered free *caleche* rides through Montreal’s old port to tourists. Situated next door to the *Faubourg* and Griffintown, the old port of Montreal is a premiere cultural destination that boasts innumerable heritage buildings, public spaces and monumental landmarks such as Place Jacques Cartier, the Notre-Dame Basilica, and the Bonsecours Market, to name a few. The city of Montreal estimates that fourteen million tourists visit the old port each year. Many of these tourists experience old Montreal by *caleche*.

Winkler and Köperl’s *caleche* rides capitalized on their audiences’ (and in this case tourists’) willingness to collaborate in the intervention, thereby participating in the debates surrounding Griffintown’s redevelopment. In exchange for a free ride, the tourists held protest signs that critiqued the monopolization of public space. Protest signs were inscribed with the tropes of consumerism, capitalism and the privatization of public space. In so doing, the artists’ “staged” *caleche* rides subverted the traditional meaning of the tourist activity by transforming a cultural excursion, for both the artists and the tourists, into a site-specific performance and socio-political action.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The “Griffintown Project” is not the first time Winkler and Köperl have addressed urban revitalization politics and the preservation of architectural heritage in their projects. Their interest in issues of expropriation and urban change began in 1997 when the artists traveled to *Kunming*, a city located in the southwest part of the People’s Republic of China. Here they discovered the demolition of *Jin Bei Lu* (Gold Jade Avenue), an alley in a historic part of the city where hundreds of residents were evicted from their homes prior to the area’s demolition. In response to the abandonment and erasure of this neighbourhood, the artists’ wrote a cover version of *Xin Tai Ruan*, a popular song at the time. With a cassette player and the new lyrics, which were hand painted in Chinese

Meinhardt asks, “[w]hat, however, happens when apparently separated, disjointed surfaces supporting signs transport and communicate a continuous [and] coherent text [?]”<sup>22</sup> Kwon suggests that the movements of artists together with where they choose to locate their work participate in the formation of an alternative narrative and what Kwon has called a “nomadic movement” or “itinerary.” She writes,

[T]hrough the nomadic movement of the artist – operating more like an itinerary than a map – the site can now be as various as a billboard, an artist’s genre, a disenfranchised community, an institutional framework, a magazine page, a social cause, or a political debate. It can be literal, like a street corner, or virtual, like a theoretical concept.<sup>23</sup>

In proclaiming “[w]hat the map cuts up, the story cuts across,”<sup>24</sup> de Certeau states his belief that stories and narratives can operate as itineraries or guides which function as “spatial syntaxes” that organize and link places.<sup>25</sup> While playing with the syntax of a foreign language, Winkler and Köperl localize a situation (with which people are familiar) and alter this situation to create new images in the memories of city dwellers. In this way, Winkler and Köperl’s work becomes a game between the familiar and the unfamiliar and a discourse between a local situation and themselves as strangers that moves their interventions beyond mere communication interferences.

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characters on placards, like mourners, they sang their song while cycling through the rubble of the neighbourhood.

<sup>22</sup> Meinhardt, n.pag.

<sup>23</sup> Kwon, 3.

<sup>24</sup> De Certeau, “Spatial Stories,” 129.

<sup>25</sup> De Certeau, “Spatial Stories,” 115.

Continuing their investigation into the “Griffintown Project,” Winkler and Köperl created two in situ installations and a public performance entitled “Make No \$mall Plans.” The artists appropriated “make no small plans” from a corporate slogan used by MetCap Living, a corporate real-estate company that manages Montreal’s Olympic Village. The quote belongs to MetCap Living’s founder, Michael O’Gallagher (1957-2002), who was referring to Daniel Burnham (1846-1912), a celebrated architect and city planner famous for his dictum: “Make no little plans. They have no magic to stir men’s blood and probably will not themselves be realized.”<sup>26</sup> Winkler and Köperl’s research show that both the Olympic Stadium, designed by Roger Tallibert, and Burnham’s World Exposition site in Chicago, were both urban development projects operating on a mega scale at different times in history and were fraught with financial crises. In part, the artists’ intentions were to draw upon the historical and architectural circumstances that made these utopian projects an economic failure on some level, and to show how this resonated within their respective cities and subsequently how these events related to the revitalization of Griffintown.

On the grounds of Montreal’s Olympic Village Winkler and Köperl found a commemoration to Michael O’Gallagher. Their intervention involves the inscription and French translation of “make no small plans” into the stone tablet by decrypting the memorial to create the phrase “*ne pense pas petit.*” Thematically linked to the looming

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<sup>26</sup> Burnham’s legacy rests in the construction of some of America’s earliest skyscrapers, his master planning of the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago (1893) and in his advocacy of the “City Beautiful Movement.” The “City Beautiful Movement,” like the “The Garden City” movement in England, emerged at the turn of the twentieth century and borrowed from the Beaux-Arts movement. The premise of the movement was that the beautification of the city would effectively bring social order and uphold society’s moral values.

redevelopment of Griffintwon, “Make No \$mall Plans/ *Ne pense pas petit*” would become a reoccurring theme throughout the artists’ residency at the Darling Foundry. The second installation of this slogan appeared on and around the historic site of the New City Gas Company in Griffintown. The artists applied each word onto an advertising billboard, a portion of the concrete wall that supports the Canadian National Railway overpass, the blade of a chainsaw, and the façade of the historic New City Gas Building. In so doing, the site was transformed into a spatial syntax.

An important aspect of Winkler and Köperl’s work is the documentation of their projects.<sup>27</sup> Through documentation, the artists’ interventions are captured in their entirety. However, through the removal of certain materials the intervention takes on its true ephemeral nature and allows the traces of their interventions to take on new meanings. Today, what remains of “Make No \$mall Plans” on the New City Gas site reads: “no plans.”

“Make No \$mall Plans” was also arranged into a performance and presented as part of “Remember Griffintown,” a three day event that celebrated and commemorated the history of the neighbourhood.<sup>28</sup> Winkler and Köperl wrote new lyrics to Deep Purple’s 1972 pop song, “Smoke On The Water.” Their choice to use this song reflects the same historical time period that Griffintown essentially fell into ruin. The new lyrics

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<sup>27</sup> Following their residency at the Darling Foundry, Winkler and Köperl arranged the documentation of their projects in Griffintown into archival material for a multi-media exhibition in Stuttgart. See “Re: Development, Re: Considered” under exhibition views at <http://www.oberwelt.de/> (accessed 25 May 2009).

<sup>28</sup> See <http://www.remembergriffintown.org/> (accessed 1 March 2009).

fundamentally reflected the community's struggle with the prospects of urban renewal.<sup>29</sup>

The artists performed their parody in the vacant parking lot across the street from the New City Gas Building site. The artists' performances also occurred and were documented at different times throughout different parts of the district, namely in vacant parking lots, underneath overpasses and on the many deserted street corners throughout Griffintown.

As Kwon suggests, these kinds of urban interventions bring “greater visibility to marginalized groups and issues, and initiate the re(dis)covery of ‘minor’ places so far ignored by the dominant culture.”<sup>30</sup> Likewise, Hammond suggests that urban “interventions have the potential to articulate the deeply contested nature of civic space, and can thus frame a given space for reconsideration about what matters in the city, what has been forgotten, what is changing, and what might be reclaimed.”<sup>31</sup>

Although the ephemeral nature of Winkler and Köperl’s interventions is the potency of their projects, their interventions nonetheless resonate within the urban imaginary of Griffintown. Each performance of “Make No \$mall Plans” haunts the district’s street corners. As Köperl explained, he sees their interventions as a way of leaving a trace of themselves and their work in the cultural landscape.<sup>32</sup> In this sense,

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<sup>29</sup> See appendix for Winkler and Köperl’s lyrics of “Make No \$mall Plans.”

<sup>30</sup> Kwon, 53.

<sup>31</sup> Hammond, “Urban ‘Truths’,” 1.

<sup>32</sup> Köperl and Winkler, personal interview, 15 September 2008.

Winkler and Köperl's interventions operate as "nomadic narratives"<sup>33</sup> which are articulated by their passage through space.

Embedded within Winkler and Köperl's urban interventions is an element of activism but also a poetic dimension to their actions that brings new meaning to how the contemporary city is inhabited and transformed. Because issues of place, placelessness and urban revitalization politics predominantly inspire the artists' work, their interventions most often call attention to sites of struggle within the city. In this way, Winkler and Köperl's work is not only created or performed to fulfill their own ideas and identities as artists. Rather their ideas are integrated with those of each community and the socio-cultural context in which they find themselves. Their work also "stages" us, their audience, within a contested space in the city.

As a theatre practitioner I am naturally drawn to the metaphor of the city as *mise-en-scène* or the city as "a theatre of social action,"<sup>34</sup> to borrow from Lewis Mumford (1885-1990). The notion of "city as theatre" or the "urban stage" can be traced back to the late middle ages and early Renaissance when theatre occurred in public spaces and there were no buildings or architectural objects specifically designed for theatre performance.<sup>35</sup> Throughout this period, streets in the medieval city were used by the "everyman" for civic processions and dramatic pageants. In this way, public spaces were considered specific sites used for particular pedestrian rituals.

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<sup>33</sup> Kwon, 29.

<sup>34</sup> Lewis Mumford, (1937) "What is a City?" In The City Reader, Richard T. Legates and Frederic Stout, eds. (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) 185.

<sup>35</sup> Marvin Carlson, Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture (New York: The Cornell University Press, 1989) 14. See also Boyer.

For Mumford, who wrote prolifically about city planning and urban culture, the city was a social institution, a venue for the development of human culture and social drama. In Mumford's view, “[t]he physical organization of the city may deflate this drama or make it frustrate; or it may, through the deliberate efforts of art, politics, and education, make the drama more richly significant, as a stage-set, well designed, intensifies and underlines the gestures of the actors and the action of the play.”<sup>36</sup> I would argue that Mumford's idea that “the city creates the theatre” provides a tantalizing opportunity to explore the “performative” qualities of public urban spaces. With events like “Remember Griffintown,” the staged funeral march, Winkler and Köperl's performances of “Make No \$mall Plans” and their *caleche* rides, the post-industrial landscape of the *Faubourg* and Griffintown is made “performative” and transformed into an “urban stage.”<sup>37</sup> It is the performance of the site in conjunction with urban interventions that also “speaks the city.”<sup>38</sup> In so doing, the interstitial spaces of the city, such as parking lots, street corners and abandoned urban/public spaces become sites of performance that in turn generate cultural meanings of their own.

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<sup>36</sup> Mumford, 185.

<sup>37</sup> De Certeau and Giard, “Ghosts in the City,” 135.

<sup>38</sup> Iain Borden, “Skateboarding and the Critique of Architecture,” in The Unknown City, 195.