

Original citation:

Haedicke, Susan C. (2016) Performing Farmscapes on urban streets. *Popular Entertainment Studies*, 7 (1-2). pp. 93-113.

Permanent WRAP URL:

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Performing Farmscapes on Urban Streets

In The Principle of Hope, Ernst Bloch introduces the idea of the “Not-Yet”, a ubiquitous utopian impulse that stimulates future-oriented thinking about “something ... that has never been conscious before.” These imaginings of a better future, Bloch argues, are really only ways to understand the obscurities of the present. Street theatre companies, like Le Phun, Opéra Pagaï, Friches Théâtre Urbain and Fallen Fruit, seek to envisage a “not-yet” of future urban farmscapes in familiar present-day locations. Their performance-based projects highlight contemporary social issues around alternative agricultural practices and suggest imaginative provocations to world-wide concerns around food security by proposing ephemeral urban farms in unexpected city sites and restoring the efficacy of an agricultural “commons” where resources and tasks are shared. Each project thus metaphorically marks the urban landscape with creative possibilities for a more secure food future. Dr Susan Haedicke is Associate Professor of Theatre and Performance at the University of Warwick, UK. Her current research interests include a focus on local food growing initiatives and community gardens worldwide and how they ‘perform’ in the larger social setting.

Keywords: alternative agriculture, commons, Fallen Fruit, Friches Théâtre Urbain, Le Phun, Opéra Pagaï, street theatre, urban farm

In *The Principle of Hope*, Ernst Bloch introduces the idea of the “Not-Yet,” a ubiquitous utopian impulse that stimulates future-oriented thinking about “something new that is dawning ... that has never been conscious before.”¹ While the desire to imagine remote possibilities can take many forms from simple daydreams to complex artworks, Bloch argues that this imagining of a better future is really only a way to understand the obscurities and contradictions of the present:

Utopian consciousness wants to look far into the distance, but ultimately only in order to penetrate the darkness so near it of the just lived moment, in which everything that is both drives and is hidden from itself. In other words, we need the most powerful telescope, that of polished utopian consciousness, in order to penetrate precisely the nearest nearness.²

Street theatre (or outdoor performance) companies have, over the last three decades, sought to explore artistically a “not-yet” of future urban farmscapes in familiar city locations. Building on a growing city farm initiative in the United States and Europe that started with community gardens and allotments in the early and mid-twentieth century and expanded into a limited number of urban farms in the 1970s and 1980s, the artists attempt to draw attention to possible alternative agricultural practices to address current pressing issues around sustainable and equitable food production. Their unexpected and evocative interventions and installations propose imaginative solutions—or rather provocations—to world-wide concerns around food security and encourage passers-by to, as Bloch wrote, “penetrate ... the just lived moment.” The “not yet” re-frames the “nearest nearness” in these projects that create *memories* of possible futures that haunt the sites for those who experienced them. Thus the artworks metaphorically *mark* the urban landscape with visceral performance interventions that offer a “principle of hope” (to use Bloch’s phrase) for a more secure food future. In so doing, the artists, alongside their audience-participants, engage in contemporary discourse on sustainable and alternative agriculture, communal urban farming practices, and environmental justice, often more through bodily engagement than words.

Many visual artists and performers have experimented with ways to address these issues as, for example, Agnes Denes’ well-known “Wheatfields—a Confrontation” in New York City in 1982 and later recreated in London (2009) and Milan (2015) or Lauren Bon’s “Not a Cornfield” (2005) in Los Angeles. More overtly theatrical productions include PeerGroup’s *The Swine House* (2013) and *Drenthe Bluesopera* (2011), and *Ministry of Turen* (2007) or KMK’s *Les Jardins Migrants*; the walking audio tours of Mike Pearson, *Carrlands* and *Warplands*; and the durational community-based initiative, *myvillages* created by Katrin Böhm, Wapke Feenstra, and Antje Schiffers. This essay looks at four art-based projects from three street theatre companies based in France and an artist collective in Los Angeles. These projects range from short-term performance installations to long-term participatory agriculture-art events. Le Phun’s *La vengeance des semis* [The Seedlings’ Revenge] and Opéra Pagaï’s *La Maison sur l’eau* [House on the water] propose ephemeral urban farms in unexpected city sites and challenge preconceptions about farmscapes on multiple levels from the personal and local to the global. Fiches Théâtre Urbain’s *Aroma-Home* and Fallen Fruit’s *Public Fruit Maps* and *The Endless Orchard* create more enduring and interactive projects that combine art and growing or foraging edible crops. They attempt to restore the value and efficacy of an agricultural “commons”³ where resources and tasks are shared. While relying on very different dramaturgies, these performative projects use art to imagine “not-yets” of urban farming quite whimsically and yet with enough farming knowledge to have a potential impact on future agricultural sustainability. Simultaneously, they point out the paucity of urban agricultural sites today in the “just lived moment,” as evidenced by the startled reactions of passers-by. In many ways, they offer artistic responses to calls issued by scientists and social scientists to address the lack of public awareness about where our food comes from and the limited compassion for those people, animals and habitats that are being exploited. Increased urbanization and wealth have divorced many people from the land,

which has in turn led to a degree of apathy about agriculture, horticulture and other forms of food production: apathy that acts as a major barrier in the Global North to bringing about changes in the food system. As Carolyn Steel claims, “Food arrives on our plates as if by magic, and we rarely stop to wonder how it got there.”⁴ These projects begin to address that gap in knowledge as they bring the farm to the city and foster somatic dialogues between the public and the land in the form of creative farmscapes on city streets.

The artists engaged in these urban farm art projects do not try to hide the everyday world that surrounds the art, so the *not-yet* and the *already-there* are simultaneously visible. Here an imagined future reinterprets a contemporary actuality, often causing the onlookers seeing familiar locations through a lens of artistic imagination to experience a revision of what seemed established or permanent, and that unexpected shift in the stability of the site creates an experiential shock as the familiar location becomes unfamiliar. Jacques Rancière explains *shock* through an analysis of collage, an art form that reassembles ordinary objects and sites into new and often startling creations and spaces that hover at the spatio-temporal point of tension where a comfortable comprehension of a logical reality coexists with an unsettling disorientation caused by an imagined possibility. Thus collage often “takes the form of a shock, which reveals one world hidden beneath another.”⁵ This shock causes a disruption in “the relationship between the visible, the sayable, and the thinkable,” a rupture that overturns expectations and “resists signification.”⁶ The experiential shock of this disorienting contradiction elicits an initial somatic response that then stimulates a desire to understand critically what had seemed natural moments before and is now unfamiliar. Grant Kester explains that “we meet the epistemological challenge posed by aesthetic shock not by abandoning ourselves to the pleasures of ontic dislocation but by renewing, and expanding, our efforts to grasp the complexity of our surrounding world.”⁷ Given the nature of collage, it is possible to ask whether a spectator achieves an enhanced understanding of food production from these street theatre *collages*. Street performances that insert working farmscapes into urban public spaces create experiential shocks by pushing at the limits of credibility and simultaneously remaining within the bounds of the conceivable in their performative “not-yets” of urban agriculture. The efficacy of the “not-yets” relies on an ambiguity of art and non-art that involves place-making of a “not-yet” urban agricultural site that is both *working* in its repetitive and ongoing farming tasks that must be completed each day and *ephemeral* in its artistic creation. But, perhaps more significantly, these actual/imagined sites can stimulate curiosity in surprised passers-by about farming practices, encourage dialogic interaction, often through simple activities, between artists and participants, and cause public anger at the limited public urban space devoted to growing edible crops. According to the United Nations, 54% of the world’s population now lives in cities, a number that is expected to increase to 66% by 2050, so why not bring the farm to the city?

In 1986, Le Phun, a French street theatre company,⁸ startled urban residents with a performance installation constructed as a simulacrum of a French family farm, with gardens of flowers and vegetables, a cottage, sheds, and

livestock. They placed the urban farm incongruously in a city centre, and since it was not advertised, its appearance in spaces where it did not belong—the platform at a train station, a city square, or along a main road—presented a collage of the actual recognizable geographic location and an ephemeral and fanciful working urban farm.



Figure 1. La Vengeance des semis, Huddersfield, UK, 2014. Photo by Susan Haedicke.

La Vengeance des semis has been performed in cities worldwide from Australia to the UK for the past thirty years. The pop-up farm is set up during the night so that it is in place and ‘running’ by the time people begin going to work. For three days or more, performers in Le Phun live on and work the farm.



Figure 2. La Vengeance des semis, Huddersfield, UK, 2014. Photo by Susan Haedicke.

They cook, eat, garden, harvest crops, and tend the animals as the public walk the farmscape, chat with the ‘farmers’ about urban food production, plant seedlings in the polytunnel or help with the cow, sheep, pigs and chickens.



Figure 3. La Vengeance des semis, Huddersfield, UK, 2014. Photo by Susan Haedicke.

The small Le Phun farm is clearly out of place in its surroundings, hemmed in on all sides by the urban setting—a rural oasis amidst concrete, traffic, large buildings and hurrying crowds. The agriculture on this farm imitates the fast pace of urban life as here the vegetables must grow quickly, often not even waiting for the plants. The tomatoes, aubergines, cabbages and other fruits and vegetables, that appear in artistic patterns right on the soil (see Figures 4, 5 and below), get bigger and bigger each day, until they are ready to be harvested.



Figure 4. *La Vengeance des semis*, Huddersfield, UK, 2014. Photo by Susan Haedicke.



Figure 5. *La Vengeance des semis*, Huddersfield, UK, 2014. Photo by Susan Haedicke.



Figure 6. La Vengeance des semis, Huddersfield, UK, 2014. Photo by Susan Haedicke.

While the durational nature of this project allows for the growth of the crops, it also encourages repeat visits as urban residents comment on and play with the accelerated time frame of the farm. Many spectators relished the “game,” I discovered, when I experienced the performance installation in St George’s Square outside the train station in Huddersfield, UK in 2014.

Le Phun’s unexpected intervention offers a reality that mimics everyday life on a farm, but in a troubling way that defies logic and initiates an experiential

shock. Le Phun's performance strategies, however, limit the potential of this art-based agricultural project to initiate discussions about future farming options. Retaining a reliance on theatrical illusion, actors who perform the tasks necessary to keep the farm running insist that they are *farmers*, not artists, and that the faux farm is an actual producing farm when challenged directly by sceptical visitors. Not surprisingly, conversations among those who wander through the farm tend to focus on the authenticity and artistry of the gardens rather than the viability of urban farms. In Australia, a bemused actual grower challenged the Le Phun "farmer" by insisting that crops do not grow like that on his farm. He merely shrugged.

Imagining the surprise of passers-by at the earliest Le Phun installations in 1986, one cannot help but ask if this ludic urban farm could have contributed, even minutely, to the exponential growth of community gardens and urban farms. Unlike large commercial farms, they often include educational and horticultural programs and art-based activities for interested participants that offer benefits far beyond affordable and nutritious food. One good example of such a successful venture is Will Allen's "Growing Power," an urban farm that began in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and is now in other US cities as well, working with local inner city children to produce large amounts of fresh vegetables. A very different example is Incredible Edible Todmorden in the UK where volunteer growers plant edible crops in small public spaces around the town—in front of the library and police station, around the train station, along the river banks, and many other places. These small communal plots invite passers-by to pick what they might need for dinner. Other examples exist world-wide.

Just as suddenly as the Le Phun farm appears, it disappears, leaving only the farmscape memory haunting the site. A colleague at another university, who experienced the Le Phun farm in Huddersfield admitted that whenever he leaves the train station and enters the square, he "sees" the baby pigs, sheep, chickens, the cow and the rapidly growing vegetables. This haunting of the site by the art-based farm certainly kindles a sense of nostalgia for a simpler rural life, but it can also *plant a seed* of alternative urban futures into the public imagination that can *grow* into actual urban farm initiatives.

Opéra Pagaï's *La Maison sur l'eau* develops more fully the impulse of artistically presenting a "not-yet" of urban farming in an ordinary, familiar location—the "nearest nearness"—in a project whose backstory raises questions that encourage participation in debates about sustainable agriculture and urban planning. On 4 October 2011, a floating farm inhabited by three generations of the Laborde family suddenly appeared on the Garonne River that runs through the center of Bordeaux, France.⁹ The tiny artificial island, built on barges and anchored in the middle of the river, measured three hundred square meters, enough space for a wooden house in which the farm family lived for the project's duration, a vegetable garden, a chicken coop, an enclosure for a goat, a sheep and her lamb, and a grassy lawn with a large picnic table. At one end of the floating farm were a small lighthouse and a hut for fishing. Opéra Pagaï has played repeatedly with performance installations of alternative agricultural forms. *La Maison sur l'eau* is the sixth in a series of interventions, entitled *Entreprise de Détournement* that challenge preconceived notions about a range of social issues.

The fourth intervention in the series *L'Appartement Cultivable* (2006),¹⁰ also proposed alternative farming strategies, with the growing taking place all over a model of a small city apartment. In the living room, one of the apartment dwellers watched television while he weeded the cabbage and courgette patches that acted as rugs. Underneath the bed, mushrooms grew in a large plastic box, and the bedroom carpet was grass for the grazing goat. Lettuce and other salad vegetables grew on the kitchen walls and the floor was covered with hay for the small rabbits and chickens that ran freely in the room. And in the bathroom, the people, fish, turtles and oysters shared the space, as the floor was a shallow pool. Even the roof was a garden as it was covered with sunflowers. And in *Les Jardins automobiles* in 2013,¹¹ Opéra Pagai artists proposed placing tiny gardens, many with edible crops, on the roofs of automobiles. They argued that the roofs were just wasted spaces in crowded cities.

Although *La Maison sur l'eau* was one of the commissioned performance installations for *Evento 2011: Art for an Urban Re-Evolution*, Bordeaux's festival of new art works, it was purposely not listed in the programme so that the sudden appearance of a floating farm hovered between possibility and improbability. The press joined in the ruse and covered the unique family farm as an odd human-interest story from their first arrival on 4 October until 10 October when the artists and the journalists unveiled the truth. For Opéra Pagai, this element of surprise was essential in order to engage the public in an actual dialogue on issues raised by this alternative agriculture. As a performance, *La Maison sur l'Eau* would be intriguing, but as a bizarre but seemingly actual event it had the potential to initiate an experiential shock and thus overturn long-held positions about farmlands. Director Cyril Jaubert insisted that the aim was not to play a trick on the residents of Bordeaux, but rather to encourage people to ask questions about what was happening and why. The artists used what could be an actual situation as a way to dislodge preconceptions and assumptions about urban farming and the city's river.

In *La Maison sur l'Eau*, the inhabitants of Bordeaux were confronted without warning with a seemingly ordinary family who chose to locate their small family farm in the middle of the river. The four members of the Laborde family (grandfather Papy, father Marc, mother Christelle and their twelve-year old son Ferdinand) actually lived on the farm-island from 4-13 October. A boat came every morning to take Ferdinand to school, mail was delivered, and the family fished, tended the garden and fed the animals. The floating farmers produced all their own electricity with solar panels and a windmill and created a recirculating system—a modified version of aquaponics (a blend of aquaculture and hydroponics). Here food scraps from the farmers' meals fed the fish in the river and the fish became the family meal; the river water was filtered for watering the crops, the crops provided the family with food and the river sediment was used as fertilizer for the crops. This concept is not as far-fetched as it may sound. The Grow-Up Box in London, England, an urban farm that started in a shipping container in 2013, uses aquaponics to grow lettuces, herbs and fish that it sells to local restaurants: London's first commercial aquaponic farm.

During the first week on the river, the family willingly explained their choice to try another way of living simultaneously in the city and on the farm to

curious onlookers. They installed large panels on the river bank to “explain” their sudden presence, they wrote about their farming experiment in a blog,¹² and they invited interested passers-by to take a free boat ride to their floating island to observe its sustainability close up. In the blog, they described how the family had struggled a long time to find a place to live that would satisfy all of them. The father and grandfather wanted to live on a small family farm in the country, but the mother and son wanted to enjoy the city life that Bordeaux offered. They confided that their son Ferdinand suggested that if they lived in the middle of the river, they would be in nature and in the city centre at the same time. While they admitted that they originally laughed at the idea, its possibilities captured their imaginations. They decided to give it a try, they explained, when an association called ICI C’EST AILLEURS [Here is Elsewhere], a forward-looking group promoting alternative ways of living, offered to help design and build their floating farm. This elaborate backstory, including the “performed” three-generational family and the establishment of the faux ICI C’EST AILLEURS, gave credibility to the sudden appearance of the Labordes, but it also shifted discussions away from an amusing fictional farm to a viable experiment in alternative agriculture.

More than 2,500 people took the free ferry to the floating farm, over 1,500 visited the interactive blog each day during the durational performance, many thousands (estimates up to 80,000) viewed the installation from the banks of the river, and social media spread the news further. Visitors to the island said it was a “bubble of quiet in the rush and noise of the city” and “a dream come true.” Many spectators said exactly what the artists had hoped to hear: that the floating farm was “a real part of the countryside right in the middle of town.” Only a few expressed anger, accusing the family of trying to avoid property taxes. Even after the ruse was revealed and the public were let in on the secret, the dialogue about urban agriculture continued and several politicians commented on how important it was that artists engaged so performatively to draw attention to issues of sustainable food production. Just as suddenly as the floating island appeared, it disappeared between sundown on 13 October and dawn on 14 October. But the memory of the family’s farm that created an imaginary, and yet possible, future stimulated debate about the viability of the Laborde family’s alternative habitation and whether many floating islands would be a catastrophe for the river and the city.

Whether such performance interventions like those of Le Phun and Opéra Pagai are anything more than amusing, if somewhat informative interludes, is difficult to assess. Clearly the transition from aesthetic experience to participation in socio-political life is not guaranteed as Rancière explains: There is no straight path from the viewing of a spectacle to an understanding of the state of the world, and none from intellectual awareness to political action. Instead, this kind of shift implies a move from one given world to another in which capacities and incapacities, forms of tolerance and intolerance, are differently defined. What comes to pass is a process of dissociation, a rupture in the relationship between sense and sense, between what is seen and what is thought, and between what is thought and what is felt.¹³

Rancière tackles the issue of efficacy by identifying what he calls “the efficacy of dissensus” that relies on rupture to open the possibilities, here the possibility that these alternative urban agricultures could actually happen. In *La Vengeance des semis* and *La Maison sur l'eau*, audiences experienced an overlap of fiction and reality through imaginative situations in dialogue with actual ones. For Rancière, this efficacy of dissensus initiates a reconfiguration of the expected logic of social life, and in so doing affects social change, even if only minutely.

The passers-by who chose to engage with the urban farms created by Le Phun and Opéra Pagai were not passive spectators of a theatrical event, but rather what Rancière calls “emancipated spectators.”¹⁴ They did not just receive the performance as a gift; on the contrary, they challenged its premises and debated its solutions. The artwork, Rancière argues, is a “third thing” that remains separate from the spectator and the artist but links the two. It is through this “third thing” offered by one and *translated* by the other, but belonging to neither that intellectual emancipation is achieved. A spectator does not become emancipated through participation in the performance, but by translating the “third thing” into his or her own experience, by linking it to what he or she already knows and, through that association, creating new knowledge. Applying this notion of “emancipated spectator” to such interactive events not only creates a living situation and an active discourse in the here and now, but also performs a *not-yet* that encourages audience participation in discourses around future urban agriculture.

Friches Théâtre Urbain’s *Aroma-Home*,¹⁵ develops this process further as it transforms the separate roles of artists and audiences into co-participants in an art-making process. *Aroma-Home* is a tiny communal garden-farm just outside Paris, France that originated in aromatics, flavours, guerrilla gardening and conversations. It seeks to develop a *commons* of natural and cultural resources equitably shared among all its neighbours through its urban agricultural experiment. Starting in 2013, Sarah Harper of Friches Théâtre Urbain joined forces with the local inhabitants to reclaim urban public spaces marred by construction and neglect and to start to heal the many varied wounds, both social and environmental, caused by this damage. Creating tiny artistic (agri)cultural eco-oases in brownfield land, the participants began to alter both the urban landscape and attitudes towards active citizenship and communal public spaces as small scale sites of food production appeared little by little. Through the weaving of story-telling, place-making and everyday performance, the project worked with embodied cultural practices of the multi-ethnic participants around growing and preparing of food, tasting and smelling food, and sharing recipes and horticultural skills: cultural practices that are inseparable from food production processes. These practices/processes in turn provided entry points into their multiple concerns about immigration, memories of home, treasured edibles from afar, assimilation, urban growth and environmental health.¹⁶

Aroma-Home is located in Villetaneuse, one of the communes in the northern *banlieues* (or suburbs) of Paris. Its diverse inhabitants include recent arrivals from Mali, Ethiopia, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Haiti; French citizens of foreign, mostly Algerian, descent; and long-time *indigenous* French residents.

Several train tracks side-by-side divide Villetaneuse's small geographic area, only 2.3 square kilometres, so in early 2013 the city officials opened a footbridge over the tracks to link neighbourhoods. This is no ordinary footbridge, but rather an urban landmark that resembles a leaf uncurling. However, its unusual design creates a blind spot that soon became an ideal place to rob the pedestrians. In addition to the train tracks, the city landscape was marred by the construction of the new tramway line T8, in its fifth year of construction during the project. Commissioned by the city in 2013 to 'accompany' the disruption of the on-going construction of the tramway, Harper conceived of *Aroma-Home* as a way to poetise damaged places that had become uninviting and dangerous by creating small pockets of unexpected natural beauty.

The vividly decorated *Aroma-Home* caravan, at this point a physical metonymy for nature in the urban landscape, would park in random places beside one of the town's many construction sites.



Figure 7. *Aroma-Home* caravan, 2014. Photograph by Susan Haedicke.

Harper and her partners, Camille Frechou and Pascal Laurent, would set out blue deck chairs and a bright blue umbrella and begin to work on the wasteland as a garden: planting in tiny bare spaces around the city, sowing seeds of aromatic herbs and flowers amidst the rubble, or drawing attention to edible crops and wildflowers already growing on the damaged land. The neighbours would soon

arrive to watch or ask questions, and then the conversations started about food: what edible and medicinal plants already grew in the neglected site, what plants the visitors ate, how they were prepared, what they would like to grow, what they miss *from home*. These horticultural-culinary conversations became inextricably connected to gardening and eating activities: *edible stories* that nourish those who prepare and consume them. Harper invited visitors into the tiny caravan to taste and smell unfamiliar and exotic titbits covering the table: exotic herbal teas, pâtés of dried herbs, jams, syrups made from roses, hibiscus, ginger or mint, medicinal herbal remedies, chutneys, pestos, pili-pili, aromatic oils and Armenian paper to burn like incense. Each taste had a story: what is on the plate? where and how did it grow? how did it get to Villeteuse? With each new visit, some tastes, aromas, plants, and other items remained the same—familiar and comforting, but there were always surprises, at first brought by the artists for the inhabitants, but soon the inhabitants reversed the exchange. It did not take long for the caravan to develop a following.

As residents returned to talk and taste, they started to plant at the edges of worksites and in cracks in the pavement and to throw ‘seed bombs’ over fences into abandoned lots. Wildflowers and flowering herbs seemed to appear overnight in the most unexpected places. And the diverse groups that made up the neighbourhood began to share, cultivate and harvest local stories around growing and preparing food as recipes and foods cooked in their homes were exchanged.¹⁷ During the first few months, in addition to the guerrilla gardening, the artists and residents created small art-garden installations: embodied ‘stories’ of the land. For example, in front of one wasteland, they designed a graphic panel that highlighted the biodiversity of edible and flowering plants already growing in the construction site and placed it under an official panel announcing the roadworks.

Since the project was itinerant for its first few months in 2013, it might have seemed *place-less*, but as Tim Ingold points out, itinerancy or what he calls “wayfaring... is neither placeless nor place-bound but *place-making*.”¹⁸ The *place* that was being *made* was a “commons”—a shared public space with shared resources in which each participant has a stake. Here the shared resources were food memories, recipes written and actually prepared, horticultural skills and spatio-temporal narratives in a mobile, communally-created place. In late spring that first year, the participants and the artists relinquished their poetic ephemeral gardens for a more established communal garden-farm and thus added small-scale food production to the shared resources of their uniquely established commons. They chose the empty lot near the entrance to the footbridge to soften the chaos of the construction site with its concrete barriers, chain-link fences, machinery and debris; to draw people to the area and thus hopefully discourage the footbridge muggings; and to invite the neighbours to reclaim a damaged public space and make it their own with nature’s help. Over the summer, the participants relished the space to grow crops “from home” that were difficult to find in Villeteuse or impossible to grow in window pots.



Figure 8. The residents visiting Aroma-Home, 2014. Photo by Susan Haedicke.

Aroma-Home's communal mini-farm was a small *eco-oasis* amidst urban redevelopment. It confronted the mess of the tramway's large building site—that presented a narrative of progress through durable man-made constructions—with an intimate *growing* space offering a dynamic counter-narrative of biodiversity in small-scale, communal food production. This creative structure, based on sharing, attested to the value of a notion of the commons, where participants imagined and together built what may have been unimaginable a short time before. In so doing, *Aroma-Home* established both a geographically-grounded communal food-growing site that presented a sharp contrast to its surroundings, and a narrative site of shared experiences and stories around food memories. Ingold links narrative and place by arguing that story-telling is less a way to represent and depict a place, and rather a way to enter into it, to experience it from *within*. The place *is* the story of what Ingold calls the “dwelling” of the inhabitants. Story-telling offers a path into a place and locates the teller and the listener in that place so that its place-meanings may be discovered. Stories “serve to conduct the attention of the performers *into* the world, deeper and deeper, as one proceeds from outward appearances to an ever more intense poetic involvement. At its most intense, the boundaries between person and place, or between the self and the landscape, dissolve altogether.”¹⁹

Aroma-Home's community garden was not only an aesthetically pleasing contrast to the chaos of construction, it was also quite successful in bringing together diverse populations of the neighbourhood. But it would be a mistake to think political power dynamics and opposing voices did not cast a shadow over the garden. In the autumn, some city residents with an opposing spatial narrative

for the site lobbied to have it replaced by an asphalt football pitch. In early winter, the mayor authorised its dismantling and tarmacked it over, but offered Harper a smaller hilly piece of land off to the side of the original communal garden. Much to the neighbourhood gardeners' delight, they discovered that the tangled hedge between the hill and the street was autumn olive, a tasty berry for jam, and they soon found other edible crops there.

The plantings in the new hilly *Aroma-Home* communal garden-farm began in early spring, 2014, with the arrival of the artists and the gathering of the neighbours. While the tiny whimsical caravan offered a cosy space for swapping knowledge about traditional culinary and horticultural techniques, the actual garden not only provided a geographic space in which the artists and the residents could reinterpret the conversations into artistic beds of edible crops, but also a socio-ecological space in which human and nonhuman collaborators transformed the damaged site into a haven of biodiversity. Mme Delva planted joumou seeds she brought from Haiti so that she could make the famous joumou [pumpkin] soup. She explained that the former slaves made the delicious soup but they were not allowed to eat it, so now it is a symbol of Haitian independence. Sometimes, participants would take responsibility for a particular plant and often created a sign to announce their task. Conversations over cups of various teas and tisanes and other special homemade treats filled the temporal spaces between diggings and plantings. Over the summer, participants of all ages walked paths into the hillside and built raised beds and benches. On the day I spent there in June, close to thirty people dropped in, some to chat or taste something new, some to work in the garden, some just to watch.

On Sunday, 7 September 2014, the final artist-led event, tellingly called *The Inauguration*, took place as over one hundred people came to celebrate their own community garden. Neighbours prepared dishes native to their countries of origin, spiced up with vegetables and herbs picked from the garden, and the city provided grills placed outside the garden. For *The Inauguration*, Harper and the gardeners completed the communally-created artwork in the garden: benches, stumps that became stages for impromptu performances, panels with information, and three permanent sound installations. One of the colourful sound columns offered compositions of bits of conversations and stories shared by the local inhabitants when they visited the garden or sipped tea in the caravan. It was activated when someone pushed its button. The other two sound columns, activated by movement, played augmented ambient sounds recorded in the garden and sounds that could be in such a place, but were not actually there ... yet. People walking by would start these soundscapes, but so would birds or blowing leaves. It was almost as if the garden had found its voice, and it seemed to "issue a call" to the local inhabitants.



Figure 9. Aroma-Home, 2014, sound column. Photo by Susan Haedicke.



Figure 10. Aroma-Home, 2014, bench. Photo by Susan Haedicke.

Aroma-Home acts as a collaborative performance of everyday between humans and non-humans to create an embodied, participatory space of biodiversity. The site of *Aroma-Home* is not a passive place to garden, but a responsive partner in a communal endeavour, and the vital energies of the garden enriched the participating neighbours' sense of connectedness to place.

The power of *Aroma-Home* to affect change occurred repeatedly as a construction site transformed into an inviting edible garden and eco-community hub. It could be seen in the mothers who began to compost because the garden needed food just as they did, and they wanted it to flourish on what they ate. It could be seen in the neighbours who brought seedlings sown in paper cups to plant in the garden and to share the plant's life story, an edible story of food preparation, emotional connection, sociality and belonging. It could be seen in the “bug motel” designed and built by the children. It could be seen in the teenage boys who came to hang out along the edges of the garden and make snide remarks or even intimidate the artists or other young people who wanted to work there, but were slowly, reluctantly, but irresistibly drawn in to taste something unfamiliar, help carry the wood for benches, or plant a seedling. It could be seen in the plants that sprouted seemingly on their own or that ‘redesigned’ the garden beds: plants called “revolutionaries” by the participants.



Figure 11. The bug motel at Aroma-Home, 2014. Photo by Susan Haedicke.

By the end of the last day of the artists' intervention on 7 September 2014, as the artists packed up the tools, umbrellas and potted plants around the caravan, as the mothers relaxed and chatted in the garden, and as children created impromptu performances of song and dance on the tree-stump stages, even the teens who had been disruptive joined the group. The multiple competing narratives at work in *Aroma-Home* create what the editors of *Nature Performed* call a “performance of nature [that] appears as a process open to improvisation, creativity and emergence, embracing the human and the non-human.”²⁰

Fallen Fruit's on-going *Public Fruit Maps* and *The Endless Orchard*²¹ expand the notion of the “commons” further—beyond a common pool resource

to an active participation not only in foraging of fruit growing in urban public spaces, but also in redefining the notion of *public space*. The participatory events of Fallen Fruit, an art collective based in Los Angeles, California, push the limits of *performance* as they seek to change the way people understand equal and democratic use of public space by showing that what is in a public space belongs to the public. In addition, they strive to re-engage with a notion of a “commons” that foregrounds the sharing of natural and cultural resources.

Founded in 2004, Fallen Fruit began as an art project for the *Journal of Aesthetics and Protest* by Matias Viegner, David Burns and Austin Young. They created *Public Fruit Maps* of fruit trees growing in public spaces in their neighbourhood in Los Angeles and shared those maps with the public, encouraging them to harvest the fruit so that the food that usually rotted on the ground could be enjoyed by the city residents. They argued that the law allows people to pick fruit from trees that grow on or have branches that hang over public space, so why not *advertise* this free food and in so doing draw attention to how we currently understand public space. By giving *permission* to take the fruit, they encouraged residents to re-consider the meaning of public space. Since that initial project, the Fallen Fruit artists (now David Burns and Austin Young) and their collaborators from the general public have created these hand-drawn *sketched* maps of public fruit in many neighbourhoods in cities across the United States, Sweden, Denmark, Spain, Austria and Columbia. On their website, the artists ask individuals to map their neighbourhoods and send the maps to the cooperative so that they can be posted online. In addition to the maps, they have created many other events such as *Nocturnal Fruit Forages* (night-time fruit-picking tours), *Public Fruit Jams* (communal jam-making from fruit gathered on an urban forage, with the jam often given to homeless shelters), or *Public Fruit Tree Adoptions* (where the general public plants fruit trees on the margins of private space).

Expanding on *Public Fruit Tree Adoptions*, the artists developed and crowd-funded their most recent project, *The Endless Orchard*, in 2016. Here, foraging is supplemented by planting of fruit trees by the public, for the public. Burns and Young identify the project as a “massive sustainable, living public artwork: the planting and mapping of urban fruit trails.”²² The goal is to encourage members of the public to plant fruit trees on private land (in front of their homes or places of work) and allow the branches to grow over into the public spaces of streets and sidewalks so that anyone can engage in an edible walk. This project, they argue, collaborates with the public certainly, but also with cultural organisations and city planning departments. In addition to the planting of the trees, they plan to upload hand-drawn maps of the trails onto the Fallen Fruit website. The artists seek to explore how small individual acts initiated for the common good might have wider resonances in the community and beyond. They hope that these site-specific artworks will reaffirm a *commons* as an efficient and effective food production strategy as well as a collaborative community-building strategy.

All of Fallen Fruit’s events have an existence both on the street as communal activities, small acts of resistance and protest, and online in photographic series, interviews and videos. Fallen Fruit’s projects seek to

convince the public to engage in democratic practices around issues of equality, ownership, social justice and the common good. They encourage communal participation in food security by showing how food can be available, affordable and accessible, and they foster community development through the sharing of food, increased use of public space, and dialogue. Their projects work to reconfigure awareness of and attitudes toward public and private property, class interactions, and active citizenship.

Participation in the performance events in the work of Le Phun, Opéra Pagaï, Friches Théâtre Urbain and Fallen Fruit occurs in the encountering, questioning and responding to popular and official discourses on significant social issues around urban farming and sustainable food systems within an imaginative frame but in real public space. It is the creating of dialogue between people and places and the challenging of traditional notions of farmscapes. It opens a space for a “not-yet” in urban farming to emerge and uses art-making to contribute to a community’s ability to identify and debate urban renewal projects. It is art as social practice. These activities in the liminal space of imagination <--> actuality sometimes occur through language, but more often through physical statements made by the body, thus blurring the distinctions between speech and action as physical acts become a form of free speech. Hence, the spectator can intervene in public discourses and official narratives through bodily statements that are then remembered by the body. These art-based urban agriculture *place-events*—social, relational, iterative and paradoxical in nature—not only encourage a shift to a communal food production system, but also spark imaginings of creative and artistic solutions to our critical foodscapes.

¹ Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, vol. 1, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice and Paul Knight (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1986), 11.

² Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 12.

³ See Elinor Ostrom (notably *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Collective Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) who won the Nobel Prize in Economics for her work on the value of the commons (also called common property resource or common pool resource) in 2009.

⁴ Carolyn Steel, *Hungry City: How Food Shapes our Lives* (London: Vintage Books, 2009), ix.

⁵ Jacques Rancière, “Problems and Transformations in Critical Art” in *Participation*, ed Claire Bishop (London: Whitechapel, 2006), 87.

⁶ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 63.

⁷ Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community + Communication in Modern Art* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 84. However, in a later book, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Durham and Lond: Duke University Press, 2011), Kester questions the power of shock to initiate insight and increased agency since the disorientation it causes resembles trauma in its psychological impact. He identifies shock as a key tactic of avant-garde art and offers an alternative model in dialogic collaboration (182-4).

- ⁸ Information, photograph and videos are available on the company's website, <http://www.lephun.net/compagnie/> and <http://www.lephun.net/spectacle/la-vengeance-des-semis/>. I include a limited number of photographs of *La Vengeance des semis* in the article.
- ⁹ Information, photographs and videos are available on the company's website, http://www.operapagai.com/spectacle.php?id_page=31. In addition to the website, I obtained information about the intervention from discussions with Cyril Jaubert and the Dossier Artistique for *La Maison sur l'Eau*, an unpublished document used by the company to explain the concept and the aesthetic to city officials sent it to me in October 2011.
- ¹⁰ For photographs, see http://www.operapagai.com/spectacle.php?id_page=20.
- ¹¹ For photographs, see http://www.operapagai.com/spectacle.php?id_page=44.
- ¹² The journal-blog written by the faux family living on the floating island is available at <http://www.icicestailleurs.blogspot.com/>.
- ¹³ Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), 143.
- ¹⁴ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London and New York: Verso, 2009), 15.
- ¹⁵ See Friches Théâtre Urbain: <http://www.friches.fr/projets/aroma-home> and <http://aroma-home.hautetfort.com/> for colour photographs and additional information on *Aroma-Home* (in French). I include a limited number of photographs of *Aroma-Home* in this article.
- ¹⁶ See also Nils Norman, *Stroom Den Haag* (Edible Park, 2010) that uses similar ideas and strategies to introduce the possibility of a communal urban farm, http://www.stroom.nl/paginas/pagina.php?pa_id=8063523.
- ¹⁷ See Sara Ahmed, "Orientations Matter" in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, eds. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 234-57. She writes about the significance of human relationships or "orientations" with things as she plays with the dual meaning of "matter" as "significant" and "physical."
- ¹⁸ Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 101. Ingold explains "the wayfarer is continually on the move. More strictly, he is his movement.... As he proceeds, however, the wayfarer has to sustain himself, both perceptually and materially, through an active engagement with the country that opens along his path," 75-6.
- ¹⁹ Tim Ingold, *Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 56.
- ²⁰ Bronislaw Szerszynski, Wallace Heim and Claire Waterton, "Introduction," in Bronislaw Szerszynski, Wallace Heim and Claire Waterton, *Nature Performed: Environment, Culture and Performance* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 4.
- ²¹ See Fallen Fruit website for images of these projects: <http://fallenfruit.org/map/> and <http://fallenfruit.org/projects/endlessorchard/>.
- ²² See <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/fallenfruit/the-endless-orchard-phase-1/description>.