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[Title]

Unpacking and challenging habitus: an approach to temporary urbanism as a socially engaged practice

[Authors]

Armelle Tardiveau and Daniel Mallo

[Abstract]

Temporary urbanism is attracting worldwide attention and has been praised for its capacity to transform socio-political and physical spaces while at the same time, it has been criticised for its tacit instrumentality as vehicle for the progressive gentrification of the urban environment. A closer look at temporary urbanism reveals a myriad of practices, initiated by a great variety of actors with diverse ways of operating and taking place in a wide range of environments. Rooted in assemblage theory, we situate our design practice in the specificity of an underused space surrounding social housing blocks in Gateshead, explore manifestations of habitus and the capacity of temporary urbanism to reveal and engage with socio-spatial struggles.

Introduction

A variety of forms of temporary urbanism have emerged worldwide in response to the inability of urban design and development to deal with social, economic and ecological urban crisis. Oriented towards leisure, trade, tourism or culture, temporary urbanism has been celebrated for its potential to alter planning practices, influence local governance and to stimulate less tangible changes and more socially aware practices (Bishop and Williams, 2012; Worthman-Galvin, 2013). In parallel, temporary urbanism's transformative capacity has been highly criticised for its instrumental role in economic growth agendas, place-marketing discourse, and displacement (Andres, 2012; Mulliez, 2008). Colomb (2012: 147) sees this friction as a result of an inherent tension within temporary urbanism, between the search for alternative forms of urbanism and the "tendency to pave the way for profit-oriented urban redevelopment processes".

Other temporary urbanism initiatives, as forms of urban activism arising from an engaged civil society, emphasise the importance of stimulating flexibility,

imagination and innovation in urban development, in particular in times of crisis and uncertainty (Sola Morales, 1995; De la Pena, 2013; Lydon *et al.,* 2011) or as "testbeds for change" (Shane, 2005). Within this literature, the engagement of users and groups has been associated with building alternatives that are semi-autonomous or self-organised and that therefore challenge established urban planning and governance (De la Pena, 2013; De Smet, 2013). Theorisation of this form of temporary urban intervention is limited so far, but as Margaret Crawford notes, it is important to shape these activities' creative potential as "openings towards a new urban politics, still to be discovered" (2012).

In that regard, Schuster (2001) links "injecting dynamism" (16) into a place through temporary urbanism with shaping "memories and images of places, [..] views of their importance and meaning, […] impressions of their quality and value" (3). Engaging in everyday life activities (such as gardening, drinking tea, etc.) as a form of design practice enables us to impact on the building of self-image (Schuster, 2001), to disrupt naturalised assumptions and to defy conventions about how to interpret places, thus "making the familiar strange" and "recognis[ing] ourselves, our ways of living, our conflicts, and our traditions by rendering them legible" (Wortham-Galvin, 2013: 36). Under such forms of urbanism, designers approach places as (public) democratic processes, not as (private) consumable products (ibid.:23).

Building on such socio-relational views of design practice and in line with a number of urban practitioners (e.g. aaa in Paris, Supertanker in Copenhagen, City Mine(d) in Brussels, Rebar in San Francisco...), we aim to build an argument that focuses on the promises and limitations of temporary spatial practice, away from the well-publicised cultural and artistic programmes that have emerged in recent years in many European cities. In collaboration with Masters students in architecture, we have deployed creative tactics to challenge the approach to social space in urban design practice; we have actively engaged in trying out things "we are told can't be done or thought" (Russell *et al.*, 2011: 580 quoted in McFarlane, 2011: 737); we have aimed at

facilitating windows of opportunity for an imaginative and egalitarian place-making process.

Specifically, we have taken this approach to question the use and management of a grassed area surrounding a 1950s modernist housing estate in Gateshead (north-east England). Through a series of temporary interventions, we have explored how the symbolic and social dimensions of such a space can be altered, starting from collective reflection on people-place relations.

To analyse in what ways temporary interventions shape the symbolic and social dimensions of space, we mobilise the concepts of habitus and assemblage to reflect on our own interventions in Gateshead. Habitus, as conceptualised by Bourdieu (1997, 2005), enables us to assert the relevance of temporary urbanism as a means to unpack personal and collective dispositions and challenge the socio-spatial status quo embedded in a particular open space. In turn, assemblage theory allows us to describe the operative capacity of temporary interventions to generate new interactions, "different encounters" and "produce alternative urban imaginaries" (McFarlane, 2011: 735). According to Dovey (2010), assemblage theory provides the tools for rethinking place as the product of relationships in a constant state of change, interlinking spatiality and sociality whilst avoiding essentialism through its historic and contingent process (Dovey, 2010: 16). The temporary interventions carried out by the authors can be considered as assemblages, linking bodies, artefacts and spaces with expressions of meaning and narratives, while habitus is understood as a form of code, bearing an influence over the meaning and narratives of the assemblage (Dovey, 2010: 7). Habitus and assemblage theory are made operative through a methodology of repeated events or actions that tap into everyday life habits and rituals. This method offers a framework for participants to become "active interpreters" of the actions (Rancière, 2009: 22) and appropriate physically or mentally the space in which the actions are located.

We aim to contribute to the efforts of theorising temporary urbanism by focusing on a socially engaged form of urban activism through design. We

suggest that temporary interventions can be generative in making spatially embedded struggle visible and opening up opportunities that interlink the physical and socio-political spheres.

1   Temporary urbanism

The space for temporary practice

Research on temporary urbanism has expanded in the last few years, and has deployed a great variety of foci, conceptual understandings and practices. Temporary urbanism is associated with urban spaces such as abandoned land, wasteland, brownfield sites, interstices (Petcou and Petrescu, 2007), interim spaces (De Smet, 2013), 'terrains vagues' (Sola Morales, 1995), or gap sites (Haydn and Temel, 2006). This paper focuses on urban sites with an idle status, in particular the open spaces in between social housing blocks that are characteristic of modernist estates in the UK. In contrast with other urban spaces, such as brownfields, these spaces emerged from a typology of high rise housing that offered vast expanses of green space for the use of the residents, yet more often than not, such spaces have become idle or fallen into disrepair through the lack of appropriation by the communities living in these dense blocks. Trancik (2007: 64) sees them as "lost space".

A number of space practitioners, such as muf architecture/art, have been commissioned by local authorities to engage with what they describe as "open spaces that are not parks", which include open spaces within post-war housing "characterised by the seemingly use-less open space – [of which the] primary purpose seems to be to keep the buildings apart by statutory distance" (muf architecture/art, 2004: A12). Nevertheless, both in design practice and in its theorisation, the open spaces surrounding high rise modernist buildings receive surprisingly little attention (Gehl, 2011; Verstrate *et al.*, 2013).

Mainstream discussions on temporary urbanism commonly focus on the intermediate use of brownfields or gap sites (see for instance Haydn and Temel, 2006; Bishop and Williams, 2012). Urban brownfields are abandoned

post-industrial sites or buildings, often in a derelict or dilapidated condition, whose potential has been conceptualised by Andres (2012: 3) as "differential spaces", which are heterogeneous in nature and embody spontaneity, difference and disorder. In turn, gap sites are sites, which have not been developed by the real-estate market, due to their lack of financial viability or current planning restrictions. These have been widely published and documented and invite meanwhile use as they stand within the development agendas of both local authorities and developers (Andres, 2012; Colomb, 2012). Temporary interventions in such spaces inevitably add both use and exchange value to the land and can be responsible for a process of "progressive economic gentrification of the district" (Andres, 2012: 10). In this respect, Stevens and Ambler (2010: 515-516) argue that temporary uses (such as urban beaches) plugged into urban brownfields or other underused urban areas can, on the one hand, attract attention and raise the value of these sites, and on the other provide opportunities for public engagement through "informal socialising and play, sports, programmed cultural events, [...] drinking and dining" (ibid.: 516). The instrumental use of temporary interventions by policy-makers and real-estate developers for urban and development and city branding or place marketing has, as Colomb (2012: 131) notes, "put pressure on the very existence and experimental nature of 'temporary uses' and 'interim spaces'". Temporary urbanism in itself has become the locus of displacement, a space of commodification and conflict between current and future uses.

In this paper, we focus on indeterminate, unregistered, in-between, spare or left-over spaces that are namely tended, yet underused, outdoor urban spaces, as are often found in the housing estates of the modernist city. They include the outdoor areas surrounding social housing blocks, spaces conceived as providing a functional separation between public space and the estate (for a typology of residual urban spaces see Villagomez, 2010). Their function might include prescribed access paths to the entrance of the blocks, but in many instances, such as the case study presented here, they do not cater for any collective use. Indeterminate and unregistered spaces such as the underused outdoor areas between social housing blocks described above

strike us by their distinct lack of appropriation and ownership by users. The protective policies of housing companies managing estates in deprived neighbourhoods seem to discourage appropriation: in order to minimise anti-social behaviour, restrictive policies prevent any possible social use (and therefore misuse) of these outdoor areas. They do not qualify as abandoned or as dormant spaces, but embody a latent unspoken conflict: they hold the potential to become an arena for alternative and collective direct action yet clashes of interests between the residents, housing companies or local authorities prevent any initiative taking place. The notion of 'terrain vague' applied by Sola-Morales (1995), captures well the potential that comes from the absence of activity or usage of space. The indetermination of space literally offers 'room' for creative appropriation and alternative ways of experiencing the city. We argue that the transformation of space through temporary uses has the potential to diffuse the established distribution of powers between different stakeholders, opening up a process of negotiation (Andres, 2012), engaging with shared experiences and providing opportunities to imagine alternatives for the space, while stressing the socially engaged capacity of temporary practice.

Temporary practice and assemblage theory

Following Massey (2005: 10), we embrace a conceptualisation of space as a product of interrelations and consider that space does not exist prior to identities/entities and their relations. Drawing from this relational approach to space, spatial identity ought to be understood as socially constructed, dynamic and mutable – that is, "bound to time and process" (Blaut, 1961 quoted in Madanipour, 1996: 334). It is in this context that we locate the scope for temporary practice, in that it enables invisible relations to become visible and an unregistered space to be acknowledged. For Massey (2005: 9-10), imagining space as always in process is a proposition that defeats the somewhat predetermined grand narrative of the modernist project and expands on the reading of space as the product of relations, "relations which are necessarily embedded in material practices which have to be carried out" (ibid.: 9). In this sense, temporary practice can be aligned with a relational

approach as it is a form of enactment, trial and action bound to a limited life span that intensifies and invests a space with new dynamics, allowing new socio-spatial interactions.

In order to widen the scope of a relational conceptualisation of space, we mobilise assemblage theory with a view to bringing into play the micro and macro scale and drawing, on an equal basis, on people, spaces and objects by creating "a whole whose properties emerge from the interaction between [these] parts" (DeLanda, 2006: 5). Assemblages are heterogeneous entities forming a whole, with their parts interacting in such a way that each component can be detached from the whole or added to it, triggering different interactions: a property of the components of the assemblage that is defined as relations of exteriority and implies a certain autonomy of the parts (DeLanda, 2006: 11).

The concept of assemblage is characterised by two dimensions or axes (DeLanda, 2006: 12-13; Dovey 2010: 16-17): a horizontal axis defines the components of assemblages, including "*materiality"* (bodies, spaces, objects) at one end of the axis and "*expression"* (meaning, narratives, expressions) at the other; while a vertical axis is associated with processes that influence the stability of its identity. The horizontal axis of the assemblage overturns the dialectical relation of materiality versus expression, as both components are at the same time heterogeneous parts of it; for example, a space read as assemblage would be the realm where material things and people co-exist with the narratives and meanings associated with it. On the vertical axis assemblages tend towards stable entities ("*process of territorialisation"* [DeLanda, 2006: 12]) at one end, while at the opposite end, they move towards a state of destabilisation ("*process of deterritorialisation"* [ibid.: 12]). The former increases the homogeneity of the assemblage, literally making its spatial boundary (territorialisation) more defined and sharpened, while the latter destabilises these spatial boundaries and increases heterogeneity. The territorialisation/ deterritorialisation axis plays a key role in the conceptualisation of assemblage "since it is in part through the more or less

permanent articulations produced by this process that a whole emerges from its parts and maintains its identity once it has emerged" (ibid.: 14).

The theoretical proposition of assemblage theory and its spatial conceptualisations enable a reading of spatial practice, and in particular temporary urbanism. For Dovey (2010: 16), all places can be read as assemblages; that is, the street is the assemblage of material things that co-exist with narratives, expressions and meanings. Moreover, the process of stabilisation/destabilisation at stake offers a break from static and fixed notions of space. This dynamic specificity, associated with assemblage theory, and supported by the philosophy of "becoming" articulated by Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 90, 326), becomes operative for the conceptualisation of space as proposed by Dovey (2010). This reading of space is also reinforced by McFarlane (2011) who discusses the contributions and limitations of assemblage theory in the context of critical urbanism. "The implication is that assemblage, through its focus on description of how everyday relations are put together and change over time, reveals urban multiplicities: […] socio-material alignments through the diverse uses and imaginaries of urban sites, objects, institutions and networks" (McFarlane 2011: 732-733). Thus, the main emphasis of assemblage theory does not solely lie in a particular reading of socio-spatial relations, but in its capacity to change over time. Similarly to Dovey, McFarlane stresses that "relations are assembled and change over time" (ibid.: 735), which highlights the relevance of temporary interventions in the reconfiguration of relations "through new socio-spatial interactions", such as the "new and surprising use of places and materials" (ibid.: 733).

As an example, Petrescu's spatial practice with aaa (atelier d'architecture autogérée) presents a form of temporary/tactical urbanism deeply engaged with a relational dimension of space and concerned with a reading of place as product of heterogeneous and sometimes conflicting socio-spatial relations. Such practice can be paralleled to assemblage theory: it highlights the intrinsic fluidity of assemblages as a way of creating a social space and seizing temporary dynamics through "mobility, temporality, smallness and informality, all qualities that can contribute to the mutable, unplanned nature of

public space" (Petrescu, 2007: 2). The mobile furniture modules employed in Petrescu's temporary interventions introduce uses that add to the intensity of living but more importantly "generate temporary agencies and form progressive networks of actors" (ibid.: 5). The agency of these objects lies in their capacity to enable new social dynamics as well as to appropriate spaces, both mental and physical. In other words, they allow new interactions to introduce new capacities and territorialities ("a form of becoming at home in the world" [Dovey, 2010:17]), which is achieved through micro spatial practices; furthermore these objects create assemblages enabling the expression and envisioning of the possibilities for a space, thus sketching an "anticipatory mapping of the future" (Carless, 2009: 7), a way of testing and projecting into the space and, more importantly, a way of triggering a process.

We argue that temporary urbanism can be read as "*precarious" assemblages* whose horizontal axis (material and expression) form an incipient *whole*. While this "precarious" condition (DeLanda, 2006: 28) is inherent to the ontological status of assemblage, we use this term to qualify the unsteady and slippery assemblages forming around temporary practice. This theoretical proposition enables us to establish that the expression of this process of the assemblage's territorialisation/ deterritorialisation (vertical axis) within the context of temporary spatial practice outlives the permanence of physical outcomes. However it is important to acknowledge the different temporalities and therefore legacies granted to temporary urbanism. Novy and Colomb (2013) discuss the legacy of temporary urbanism in the context of the Berlin Mediaspree case, the "most successful urban social movement of the last decade […] involving, among other stakeholders, a large proportion of 'creatives' who fought to delay or stop further redevelopment projects in the area" (Novy and Colomb, 2013: 1825). Over a long period of time stakeholders can "acquire and sometimes sustain a position in the place-making process" (Andres, 2012: 14), forming a political voice against the local authorities and speaking "out against gentrification, the displacement of community networks, the privatization of public space and public goods and the commodification, displacement and destruction of Berlin's alternative cultures" (Novy and Colomb, 2013: 1827).

In contrast, the time of spatial practice discussed in this paper is rather ephemeral, appearing and disappearing over the course of a day. While this may suggest a weaker capacity to sustain a position in the place making process, small or short-term actions and enactments, presented in this paper, have an [equally] effective capacity to "give birth to a more democratic city if we can find ways to politicize them" (Iveson, 2013: 955). These forms of expression (actions and enactments) can crystallise into more permanent forms of collective memory and narrative, which inevitably initiates a social process. Iveson argues that this process "must involve sharing and reflecting on our experiences, as part of the on-going effort to make them public by building platforms on which we can stage a disagreement with existing urban authorities and their associated 'titles to govern'" (ibid.: 955). The assemblage offers the opportunity to bring into light the socio-spatial struggles embedded in an space, such as that described in the case study that follows: a variety of actors, brought together, enter a process of negotiation of uses for an underused space. It opens perspectives to challenge the spatial status quo with view to revealing or making visible what is normally "taken for granted" (habitus) through a form of practice that destabilises the ordinary immanent life of the space.

2   Habitus: framing and shaping open systems of dispositions

The concept of habitus is defined as a system of dispositions, a series of schemas, forms of know-how and structures of perception, conception and action (Bourdieu, 2005: 43; Swartz, 2002: 62). Dovey (2005: 284, 2010: 32) observes that it is "a way of knowing the world, a set of divisions of space and time, of people and things, which structure social practice". More importantly, he notes that habitus is an underlying ideology, a taken-for-granted socially constructed vision. Thus one of the key aspects of habitus is its socially accepted thoughtlessness, its "tacit silence" (Swartz, 2002: 63), generally making habitus-generated action not consciously reflected upon.

The relation between assemblage and habitus is often presented in the literature as problematic and oppositional (DeLanda, 2006: 63-64; Dovey, 2010: 7). If assemblage is a dynamic and fluid whole, habitus is a set of rules and habitual practices that are static and rigid. Yet "both assemblage and habitus are immanent to everyday life" (Dovey, 2010: 7). Habitus can be read as a form of code, a stabilised expressive component of the assemblage, that is, a form of stabilised narrative, meaning, language or representation. Moreover, Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1997) sheds light on the role of the structuring structures of habitus in relation to the generation of social practices: while the habitus is described a "system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures" or "generative principle of regulated improvisations" (Bourdieu, 1997: 72, 78), it should be noted that habitus-generated practices are not a form of automatism but, rather, adjust to the demands of actual situations. In other words, social practices are accounted for by relating habitus to "the conditions in which habitus is operating, that is to the *conjuncture*" (ibid.: 78 emphasis in original). This suggests that habitus embodies a latent potential, a disposition for action which is far from being deterministic of social behaviour. As Swartz (2002: 63) stresses: habitus simply shapes and orientates social practices, it does not determine them. Habitus is thus stabilized, but not immutable or fixed. It is a set of evolving social practices that can develop into new forms of habitus. In this paper we suggest that as a result of the assemblages formed through temporary practice, habitus can undergo some kind of "adjustment to the new conditions it encounters" (Swartz, 2002: 66).

In this context, the collective Rebar, known for their 2005 pioneering action of transforming a parking space in San Francisco into a temporary park, for the duration of a couple of hours, equally refers to the notion of habitus, arguing that the temporary transformation of a space destabilises the organising structures of habitus. "The environment and habitus are locked in a mutually reinforcing and self-referential cycle. This is the field in which tactical urbanism, as an interruption of habitus, operates" (Merker, 2010: 50). In

other words, the embodied dispositions of habitus towards everyday social practice (Dovey, 2005 and 2010) are also manifested in the configuration and practice of space. Bourdieu posits that in the same way that we talk about *physical space*, we could talk about *social space*, that is, the place for "social agents and things in so far as they are appropriated by them". Furthermore, he claims that social space "tends to be translated, with more or less distortion, into physical space" (Bourdieu, 2000: 134 quoted in Dovey, 2005: 285). Rebar observe that there is a "two-way relationship" between habitus and space in that "they both produce environment and are reproduced by it" (Merker, 2010: 49). Similarly Dovey (2005) establishes that the relation of habitus to spatial practices resides in the connection of habitus to habitat – that is, the socially constructed dispositions of the habitus are silently present in the physical space. Yet, there is an additional dimension to informally acquired dispositions in that they are socially constituted through "practice in its humblest forms – rituals, matrimonial choices, the mundane […] conduct of everyday life, etc." (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 121). The real power of a socially engaged spatial practice resides in its capacity for "unpacking and restructuring the habitus" (Dovey, 2005: 294), a complex task that requires working with the mundane, the informal, in order to nurture the social and spatial resources required for new dispositions.

3 Temporary Practice as a Method for Opening Up Opportunities for New Socio- spatial Dispositions

Assemblage and habitus in the context of temporary practice

Our approach to temporary urbanism is based on a method of engagement described as actions. As stated above, these actions are understood as a series of assemblages that enable unexpected interactions to take place. McFarlane (2011) and Dovey (2010) argue that assemblage theory not only serves the purpose of describing a process of interactions but also plays an operative role beyond unveiling existing socio-spatial practices and power asymmetries: it can foreground a forgotten a space, revive past memories and open up new possibilities and capacities.

Furthermore, the actions hold a two-way relationship with habitus: habitus as a structuring structure is ingrained in the expressive component of an assemblage formed around the action, while in turn, the action provides the setting, the conjuncture, in which habitus operates and can adjust. Over time, repeated actions lend themselves to progressive adjustments of the existing socio-spatial dispositions. As noted by Swartz (2002), from enacting past learning to adapting to external situations, circumstances and contexts, habitus points to a trajectory that evolves through time. Indeed habitus should be understood as an "open system of dispositions" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 133) that is constantly affected by new experiences, such as the actions temporarily investing an underused space. The actions open up an opportunity for a new reading of the space that was previously unconceivable.

Tactics

The approach that informs the actions is best defined by de Certeau's (1984: 34-39) most quoted, yet still relevant, definition of tactics, which operate "in isolated actions, blow by blow [and take] advantage of opportunities and [depend] on them". This approach serves several methodological aspects of the empirical research. Firstly, it defines the lapse of time during which the interventions can take place. In our Gateshead intervention, while the actions were carried out in an area belonging to the local council and managed by the housing company, we tactically avoided requesting formal permission but informed the housing company of our presence on the space by sending them an invitation prior to the interventions. Similarly, the residents were informed and invited at short notice through flyers posted in their letterboxes. In line with Rebar's tactical approach to their Park(ing) installation, we "exploited a legal loophole – a tactic at once radical but superficially unthreatening to the system" (Merker, 2010: 46). This context limited the time of deployment of the actions and determined the nature of the objects and spatial configurations that each action would encompass – they needed to be lightweight and easily brought to, packed up and taken away from the space. This ensured a window of opportunity for an alternative use of the space to be experienced or enacted in spite of the restrictive policies of the association preventing any social use of the space. Secondly, the tactical approach is also exercised

through the conversations that emerged from these actions, which were intentionally unstructured but triggered sometimes by the objects or by the spatial configuration. Stories of the here or there, the now, past and future were shared: a wealth of material was harvested and pointed towards the articulation and design of the ensuing action.

Recording methods

The actions were recorded using comments jotted down by some residents on tags, personal notes taken after a conversation, and also photographs and videos. Tags by the residents supported a further understanding of the experience of the space, while photos and videos were taken and edited to highlight positive moments during the actions and between the actors. More importantly, in the absence of a collective physical space where residents can meet, these recorded moments provided a temporary virtual shared space in which the residents came together as a group[1]. Sweetman (2009: 20) recognises visual methods "as prompts and personal mnemonics, and as powerful ways of conveying information in an accessible, economical and non-verbal way". The videos were also used to erase the time between the actions, but more importantly and similarly to the Rebar Park(ing) installation, they formed the only remnant of the actions once dismounted: "After two hours […] Rebar dismantled the park and returned the space to its normative function. All that remained of the incident were the photos and video footage shot" (Merker, 2010: 46).

4 Case study: an underused space outside three social housing blocks in Gateshead

The case study that follows describes the empirical research that was carried out by the authors in collaboration with Masters students in architecture and funded by the SPINDUS research project [2] and Newcastle University.

Context

The research focuses on the grassed space outside three social housing blocks built in the 1950s. The eight-storey blocks, housing approximately 145 residents, are sited on the edge of central Gateshead (north-east England) and are crushed between an elevated bypass (built less than 6 metres away) and the back of the High Street (Fig 1).

The sole function of the grassed area is to separate the housing blocks from the street and circulation space in and around the estate. This space appears to have no collective use. Indeed, it is cluttered with signs banning ball games in addition to CCTV cameras, heightening residents' feeling of a space where antisocial behaviour proliferates. This clearly reflects a set of dispositions in relation to the space itself, both from the housing company in restricting the use of the outdoor spaces and from the residents' sense of being limited in their rights to appropriate them. According to the housing company, antisocial behaviour only concerns minor issues of noise and occasional misconduct by visitors, thus classifying the estate as low on the antisocial behaviour scale (*personal communication with housing company manager*).

In 2010, the neighbourhood was ranked among the most deprived areas in the UK [3]. Ethnically, the housing company records show 90% of the residents are white and 88% British (*personal communication with housing company manager*). With a few exceptions, the core group engaging with the actions were people aged 60 years old and over. This group totalled 72 residents and was homogeneous in terms of ethnic and socio-economic background (white British on low incomes) as well as having lived the longest on the estate. The absolute number of residents who took part in the actions constitutes a third of the core group (up to 30, see table 1). The engagement of the more stable residents confirms that transient residents of public housing companies tend neither to settle down nor to engage with other residents; these residents perceive their presence in the estate as merely transitional, as argued by Madanipour (2004: 270-271), who provides a very accurate picture of dwellers in the deprived neighbourhoods of English inner cities such as that of our

case study. More often than not, people live in spaces they have been allocated to and feel trapped "within a limited space and with limited access to resources and rights". In addition, the daily preoccupations with "sorting out some of the basic problems of life" (ibid.: 271) undermine their capacity for living together, which results in tension, social fragmentation and also in a culture of dependency in relation to the housing company.

Temporary actions as assemblages

Over the course of two years, a series of temporary actions was designed to engage residents with the outdoor space of their housing blocks. The aims were to reveal the status quo among the actors as it is mirrored in the space, to facilitate a place making process and to support a group of residents to become active citizens in relation to the space of their own estate.

The actions (see table 1) encompassed outdoor gatherings (on the grassed area outside the housing blocks) as well as indoor gatherings (in the nearby community hall). They took the form of tea parties, bingo sessions [4] (Fig 2) or simple opportunities to get together for a chat about the outdoor space of the estate. They included residents, caretakers, housing company staff and even the social worker providing us with access to the community hall and participating in the actions on an equal basis with the residents. Place, objects, expressions and people were all part of the diverse assemblages, each of which enabled new interactions (McFarlane, 2011) and pointed towards the next actions in both their social and spatial dimensions. Furthermore, the actions provided the setting in which residents expressed wishes, opinions and past memories about the grassed area.

For instance, *The Garden of Urban Delights* action made us aware of the importance of simple moments drawing from habitual practices (habitus); this led us to emphasise the presence of everyday life objects (such as a tea set and historic photographs of the area). *Bring a Mug, Take a Frame* action invited residents and local politicians to exchange an everyday life object (cup of tea) for a photograph from the previous action. Similarly, *Spring into Action*

saw a long table akin to a wedding celebration investing the grassed area making "the familiar strange" (Wortham-Galvin, 2013, 36).

Existing dispositions

Habitus as a structuring structure ingrained in the relationship between residents and housing company can be illustrated in the culture of dependency on the housing company, which is tacitly accepted as an underlying rule that governs relations and behaviours and suggests a form of habitus which also overlaps with the class-related habitus that reproduces the socially constructed vision of the actors involved. The temporary actions invited residents to become "active interpreters" of the actions (Rancière, 2009: 22). Such an alternative method was a radical change of culture, given the consultation process to which the residents were accustomed as taking place before any maintenance and improvement works were carried out by the housing company. These consultations tend to address deficiencies and needs on the estate. This appears to be one of the factors affecting residents' relationship with their estate, as it may have generated a culture of passivity and dependency, a taken-for-granted *modus operandi* habitus. While some residents were disconcerted by actions that did not seem to generate a tangible outcome, others questioned who these actions would benefit, themselves or the housing company.

Evolving habitus

The research started with small and familiar objects that could appear and disappear in a short space of time and without leaving any trace but the memory of the shared moment (Fig 3). The objects acted as a point of reference for the residents and the actions provided new narratives of the space in which they were located: the enactment of a tea party on the grassed area challenged the taken-for-granted negative view of this outdoor space.

Once the residents felt familiar with each other as well as with the regular occurrence of the actions, we deployed a temporary structure (Fig 4 and 5) that would provide an opportunity to frame the outdoor space in the light of a potential communal space. The structure's translucent skin ensured that

people would not feel threatened when inside it, as well as taking into account the force of the wind, which is intensified by the high-rise blocks and a nearby elevated bypass. It provided a partially sheltered environment that pays attention to sound and weather conditions and emphasised the physical qualities of the green and leafy surroundings through its translucent nature. In line with the tactical approach that informs the actions, the structure was designed so that it could be built and dismantled in a day.

This intervention showed in an unexpected fashion how habitus can operate and adjust. The group of residents who engaged in the process shifted from observers to players as they began to consider the formation of a tenants' and residents' association that would provide them with greater leverage over the desires expressed and enable them to apply for funding for a collective facility. In turn, the housing company only showed an interest in the process at the time of the setting up of the temporary structure. Initially, they manifested concerns for compliance with health and safety measures and facilitated a first aider and ensured the presence of a caretaker. In addition, they invited a local newspaper photographer and local councillors. The temporary structure and the space in which it was sited created a new focus of attention, bringing a new actor into play between the residents and the housing company. The temporary structure revealed the housing company as a supporting agent for the temporary appropriation of the grassed area, which provided the opportunity for tenants to express their desire for a communal space. As Rancière (2009) argues, "emancipation" is based on the principle of equality and on the ability of all parties to invent their own translation.

Conclusions

We situate our approach to temporary urbanism as a form of urban activism that reveals spatially embedded struggles and opens up opportunities that interlink the socio-political and the spatial spheres. This practice suggests a point of departure from other forms of temporary or tactical urbanism that tacitly play an instrumental role in the commodification of the urban environment.

The case study demonstrates that socially engaged spatial practice opens up opportunities in the place-making process (Andres, 2012). Addressing underused urban environments in deprived areas, such as those around social housing blocks in Gateshead, requires engagement, in the first instance, with the activation of new relational dynamics instead of relying solely on physical transformation that would not allow the creation of an arena in which otherwise ignored or misheard voices could not come together (Healey, 1997: 273).

The theoretical framework has attempted to establish a conceptualisation of temporary spatial practice as precarious assemblages. It makes it possible to reveal and destabilise the taken-for-granted dispositions (habitus) embedded in the relationships between residents, with the housing company and in relation to the outdoor space. The actions, read as precarious assemblages, were not a goal in themselves, but rather a form of enactment through trial and error and a reflective approach. They supported a process of stabilisation and destabilisation of socio-spatial configurations nested in the underused space and provided an opportunity to increase, momentarily, heterogeneity (DeLanda, 2006) which allowed new interactions to introduce new capacities and territorialities (Dovey, 2010).

This argues for an activist role for architects and urban designers in an effort to give citizens more local control over urban space and a call for stimulating imagination and innovation. Without facilitating a sense of appropriation and "emancipation" (Rancière, 2009), any physical transformation can easily fall into decline and neglect (Madanipour, 2004) in the uncertain urban futures of deprived neighbourhoods.

The results of these actions should not be evaluated in terms of physical outcomes but rather in terms of the alteration of the socio-spatial relations that the process enabled. The temporary transformation of the space has been instrumental in bringing about the emergence of a group of residents with shared interests who have envisioned their desire for a collective space as a possible reality.

[Notes]

1 Video recordings of the actions are accessible online:

Gateshead Action October 2010

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hOkTkEVGVdQ

Gateshead Action March 2011

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dXmK1n35bac

Gateshead Action November 2011

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ukCvnVlK1jw

2 SPINDUS is initiated by the research units P&O (Planning and Development) and OSA (Urbanity and Architecture) at the Dept. in Architecture, Urban Development and Spatial Planning at KU Leuven (Belgium) in partnership with GURU (Global Urban Research Unit) at the School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape, Newcastle University (UK) and ITER in the Dipartimento di Sociologia, Università Frederico II (Italy).

3 Source: Office for National Statistics. The 2010 Indices of Deprivation can be consulted at:

http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/NeighbourhoodSummary.do?a=7&b=276795&c=NE8+3JJ&g=366624&i=1001x1012&j=292534&m=1&p=1&q=1&r=0&s=1352652245363&enc=1&tab=1&inWales=false accessed 1 Nov 2012

4 Bingo (a form of lottery) is a popular game played in the UK, which consists of marking off numbers on a card as they are drawn randomly by a caller.

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[Table]
1. List of temporary actions carried out between 2010 and 2011 in the outdoor space of three housing blocks in Gateshead (UK)

[Figures]
1. Urban context locating the three social housing blocks
2. Bingo session with residents
3. A table dressed as for a celebration on the grassed area
4. External view of tea party in temporary structure on the grassed area
5. Internal view of tea party in temporary structure on the grassed area

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