



More found than Made

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"I like my town, but I can't say exactly what I like about it. I don't think it's the smell. I'm too accustomed to the monuments to want to look at them. I like certain lights, a few bridges, café terraces. I love passing through a place I haven't seen for a long time."

Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces* (London: Penguin, 1997).

As-found

'As-found' is a collection of photographs – some of which are reproduced here – documenting hiccups, adaptations, encounters and subversions in the street; studies of the minutiae of our everyday surroundings, or what Georges Perec termed the 'infraordinary'. Whilst each series documents the common ground of the street, their definition fluctuates between two poles: the unconscious act, what seem to be accident or apathy; and the conscious act, the often skilful appropriation and adaptation of found objects.

Hiccups can be seen in the 'Manholes' series. Inlaid and applied patterns, some decorative and some utilitarian, are playfully disrupted when the cover is replaced the wrong way round. We assume that these errors are unconscious acts, but perhaps some are made on purpose. Adaptations can be seen in both the 'Builders' and

'DIY' series. Here objects are borrowed and re-used for temporary solutions, which quite often remain in place. The 'Paths' series documents subversive behaviour. The routes dictated by designers are abandoned and corners are cut, the direct route from A to B being preferred. Whilst the paths are not accidents, how conscious are their users of taking them? Other series also lie somewhere in between the conscious and unconscious; the 'Cycle Lanes' series for example. Whilst the markings painted are honest attempts to reproduce a standard sign, their collection and documentation reveals the possibilities for individual interpretation (or human error).

Why?

Why are we interested in recording these things, and what is their value? It might just be the designer's equivalent to train-spotting, but do these observations provide a useful link between criticism and practice? Part of the answer perhaps lies in the opening quotation from Georges Perec. We enjoy these anonymous adaptations because they help us to see our immediate surroundings. Rather like someone wearing odd socks, the 'Manholes' expose details in our routines that normally pass un-noticed. Some series – the 'Bollards' for example – expose the endless variation found in seemingly identical objects. Others show

refreshingly simple solutions to common problems: a beer crate functions perfectly well as a step; buckets work perfectly well as a traffic barriers.

These images trouble us as designers because we tend to think they illustrate something that is incorrect, but there are limits to what we can control. After all, anything in the street is fair game. It can be written on, dented, knocked over and burnt. It can also be adapted and used for another purpose. Perhaps the misuse highlights a failure of the original design, or that design needs human interaction to come to life.

What lessons can we draw from the anonymous work of the Builder or the DIY-er? We enjoy the freedom of their interventions, but of course we cannot design them. This is an ongoing investigation, and whilst it is too early for conclusions, perhaps the photographs simply highlight the gap between design and reality, a territory that we can work with or at least accept.

More details can be found on the website of Medium, <www.mediumism.com>, a network of designers whose work focuses on public space and visual culture. We invite you to contribute photographically, critically, ideally both, and to carry on observing.

