

PUBLIC PHENOMENA

Temporary Services

[Whatever] concerns the human species, considered en masse, belongs to the domain of physical facts; the greater the number of individuals, the more the individual will be submerged beneath the series of general facts which depend on the general causes according to which society exists and is conserved.

- Adolphe Quetlet, 1832

Temporary Services has an ongoing interest in the visual and social explorations of shared spaces. Since 1998, we have kept an archive of a wide range of phenomena that has occurred in these spaces. Our documentation, and subsequent presentations of our archive includes observations of a myriad of methods that people use to modify shared space. These modifications and insertions run the gamut from informal or accidental to intentional and/or political.

We are interested and inspired by the ways that people change shared space beyond its original design or intention. Some modifications that we have observed include roadside memorials in honor of people who died from car accidents or street violence, items left out on the street with the intention of saving a parking place for the person who spent hours shoveling snow to park his or her car, and homemade basketball courts in alleys and vacant lots. We learn a great deal from these activities about how people use their cities beyond the official planning, and put our research to use for our own projects.

In 2005, we published a small selection of images from the archive in a booklet titled ***Public Phenomena: Informal Modifications of Shared Spaces***. This booklet is available for free download from our website at www.temporarieservices.org/public_phenomena.pdf.

For this issue of Multitudes, we looked at three additional categories of phenomena in Chicago: trees severely cropped to keep them from growing through fences or electrical lines, patchworks of scrap wood used to create walls and fences, and outlines of torn down buildings that have left a trace on the adjacent structure. These things all take place on private property that is visible to passersby. Through the accumulation of evidence of each phenomena, we can perceive the broader control (or lack of control) of natural and human processes. A new “public” space is created when everyone seems to be doing the same thing, albeit privately.

By investigating multiple examples and variations of these things, a clear picture of human behavior emerges. This research tells us a great deal about our surroundings and it is something we can build upon and share with others to gain their feedback and insight.















