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**Balloons, Sweat and
Technologies: Urban
Interventions through
Ephemeral Architectures**

Society of Molecules was orchestrated by the SenseLab as an emergent and internationally distributed micropolitical event for research-creation carried out in several countries during the first week of May, 2009. This paper reports from the Montréal-based molecule named the Lack of Information Kiosk. It aimed at bringing attention to urban mobilizations on the frontierland between a traditional working-class district (Parc Extension) bordering a bourgeois neighborhood (Outrement) in the northern part of the city. Université de Montréal has bought the 56.0000 m² space between these two districts to develop their future campus literally closing off access from Parc Extension. The quotidian appropriations of this space (by walkers, dog owners, homeless) confront the multiple layers of a space that suffers from a lack of information. The focus was on this ever-present lack of information in both governmental and everyday dialogues about the future of the physical and social spaces.

The molecule moved its activities to a vacant lot in the area of intervention. Inhabiting this piece of land in the actual urban setting started feeding into the creative processes of active interventions into the urban fabric. The lot provided a new set of affordances for activation of the area and one might argue that it soon became a physical as well as conceptual middle for the future interventions. The site itself formed the generative ground for us to experiment as “molecular collective” with the urban environment. The lot ended up hosting an extensive range of participatory and poetic urban interventions aimed at re-activating the neighborhood in the form of relational BBQs, urban camping, a lack-of-informational kite-building workshop, nightly dérives, photo-walks, a lack of information board and the low-tech creation of ephemeral architectures using LED-floaties.



Balloons, Sweat and Technologies emerged out of an attempt to work with low-tech technologies in an urban context, where no power outlets or wi-fi existed. The intervention consisted in crafting so-called LED-floaties (helium-balloons containing LEDs in different colors) and relating them to the lot and the surrounding area in experimental ways. The project started out investigating the materiality of the balloons themselves, moved towards employing the balloons to build an ambiance in a gazébo at the lot, and ended up using the balloons in combination with long-exposure camera functionality to create ephemeral architectures at the nearby rails. The digital technology entered through the backdoor in the form of cameras documenting the process, adding an extensive durational layer to the temporality of the event. The situated and in-the-moment caring for the material objects (the floaties) and the future envisaging of possible outcomes of the documentation (as photographs) both affected the interaction with and displacement of the balloons. As such, they continuously provided new conditions of emergence and enabling constraints resulting in unforeseen and interesting conceptual and material movements.

One of the intervention's particularities related to the fragility of the balloons which became very palpable indeed. Developing feelings and deeply caring for the balloons was a big part of the experience, especially when we decided to hand the balloons out to the people participating in the molecule. The idea of taking the balloons for a walk and tie them to the rails seemed pretty peaceful. In retrospect, distributing the balloons to everybody who went on the *dérive* was maybe interesting as a collaborative action, but hardly the safest way to transport the fragile floaties on a windy night. The cool and calm ambiance of the floaties in the gazébo was torn into pieces and replaced by escapist balloons soaring off into the night and sudden

auditory bursts of explosion, killing the precious inflatables. Finally, only a handful of the balloons survived, but the memory of the ones lost in battle lives on through the pictures from the nightly event.

The documentation of the project takes the form of a slideshow of some of these pictures. What one sees in this film is the result of struggling with humans and non-humans on a couple of rainy and windy nights at the lot. The final results hardly capture this struggle as it formed the process and the heartbreaking departure of most of the balloons during the *dérive*. Instead, it shows the non-visible materiality of the event as a result of the digital post-processing, retro-activating the event through the documentation.

By addressing the fragility and multiple uses of urban marginal yet negotiated spaces Balloons, Sweat and Technologies experimented with analogue technologies to create ephemeral architectures that bring attention to the micropolitical and metastable relations between technologies, cityscapes and interaction.