***GR2013***

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**Summary**

The GR2013 project proposes itself as neither a nostalgic viewing nor a touristic excursion, but rather a means in which narrative frameworks, territorial strata, and scientific knowledge can be shared. It aims to evoke a universal and industrial heritage, reminding us of the legacy behind our uncertain future, while placing an emphasis on new participatory, artistic and ecological uses. The GR became the preferred location for envisioning and developing a collective thought and culture around walking and considering the city, furthered by the diversity of artistic practices—from artists to choreographers, designers, illustrators and photographers.

Here, we intend to address questions that arise, such as to what extent this project has been able to introduce new spatial parameters to the representation of specific territories, as well as what methodologies it has developed for furthering the educational concerns. At that, within this we will also concentrate on further topics, such as to what extent the project is forwarded to the public; what are the links between environmental issues and artistic production, and how these are put into perspective by the range and symbolism of artistic practices, which are shaped by environmental discourse, imagination and social engagement. At that, can we perhaps begin to talk about ecological gestures in art?

**Think outside the box with GR2013 Top guide guided trails, Marseille**

Roused by innovative practices and projects in the public realm, my work as a curator has allowed me to observe how, interdisciplinary, contemporary artists have become a communal force with the aim of enhancing their living and working conditions. Here, eleven proposed artists walk through the metropolitan area [of Marseille] using tools, which are not necessarily those conventional to traditional navigation or cartography. The paths taken by each of the respective artists, at that, are not traditional either, so to speak. Rather, by infiltrating the landscape and innovating with its uses, the GR2013 hike, recreating the popular sport, delineates the city from its natural landscape, and at that, emerges as a central feature of Marseille as cultural capital.

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With this proposal, can we perhaps begin to talk about ecological gestures in art?

After all, who has not had the desire to follow a previously unknown road, or to be led along marked trails, following instructions from a book or audio guide? From these collective desires, and the tradition of walking that stems from the beginning of the 19th century, in Marseille2, artists are invited to introduce new relations within the territory, concerning particularly the redevelopment of outstanding new parks and locations. In this interrogating manner, the artist guides, led by writer and editor Baptiste Lanaspeze, combine their efforts to create a public project with communal benefits. They have also worked collaboratively towards the publication of this GR as a guidebook.

This project has been realized with people living in virtually every corner of Marseille: Christine Breton, a cultural heritage curator, who in the ‘90s initiated a program working for an “integrated patrimony” with the inhabitants of the Northern areas, thus paving the road for urban walking in Marseille. Photographer Laurent Malone is a member of the artist collective Stalker, and has documented the urban changes starting from wandering, free paths and places suitable for meetings. Hendrik Sturm, an artist and hiker from Düsseldorf, studied neurobiology and fine arts; he now teaches at the School of Fine Arts in Toulon. Nicolas Memain, a former urban planner and expert in 20th century architecture, has become a land surveyor and guide of the contemporary city. Through persistent activity in the metropolitan city, he intends to develop himself as a scholar of Provence. Dalila Ladjal and Stéphane Brisset of the collective SAFI are visual artists, whom have been greatly inspired by the richness of interactions in Marseille between vegetation and construction.

Performer and artist Mathias Poisson is pursuing a body of research focused on the practice of urban walking. As the author of an experimental tourist guide and creator of interactive maps, Poisson has created a series of interactive walks in unique areas where the viewer is given the impression of being in the midst of the research itself. Julie de Muer, a freelance cultural producer, accompanies several artists interested in questions of territory and landscape on these urban walks, as she co-develops audio tours to be listened to in public spaces. Photographer Geoffrey Mathieu is working on a landscape that meanders poetically from the urban to the rural, in hopes of documenting the relationship between physical spaces and human intervention. For GR2013, together with Bertrand Stofleth, designed a photographic observatory of the landscape at scale. Denis Moreau, originally an architect, has been addressed as a geographer, an urban planner, writer, photographer, adventurer, connoisseur or, simply, a walker. His online project <http://banlieudeparis.org> has been on going since 1995, proposing a vision of greater Paris as a construction site, as an extensive exploration of metropolitans. He is one of the founding members of this project, alongside photographer Christophe Galatry of the artistic collective “Par ce passage, infranchi” (2005), (http://www.passage- infranchi.org/asso.html). The project followed an initial event in Marseille, together with photographer Catherine Poncin. In 2009, they became interested in the French Mediterranean territories of the Gulf de Fos and the west Berre, both near Marseille to the south. In the project, entitled ‘Sauf… (Territories) autour du GR2013’ (‘But… (territories) around the GR2013), and co-produced with Marseille-Provence as cultural capital in 2013, Denis Moreau operates as a member of association providing tours around the GR2013.

It is here, whoever, that the question truly arises as to what extent this project has been able to introduce new spatial parameters to the representation of specific territories, as well as what methodologies it has developed for furthering the educational concerns.

Methodologically speaking, there had to be a strong pragmatism involved in the deployment of 38 municipalities for the GR2013 to cross through, not to mention the mobilization of general Council, local authorities, French Hiking federation, county and regional hiking committees, as well as the Bouches-du-Rhône. It was on these diverse territories that the dialogue was conducted, working with strong intelligence, tolerance, imagination and spiritedness towards the design and synthesis of the path surrounding the Berre pond and the massif of Etoile—almost, in essence, becoming a sort of infinite loop of territory and design in Nicolas Mémain’s proposal.

The project had already gained approval for the GR in 2010 from the French Federation of Great Hiking Trails. This was granted by the director Jean-Michael Humeau himself, whom had quickly understood the new representational structures that the GR utilized. At essence, the new GR2013 is a metropolitan trail, scaled at 365 km of walking distance through city and nature alike, which reveals Marseilles-Provence in an entirely new light. The cultural and participatory nature of the project ensures a new experience within the realm of hiking, which lies equally between nature and urbanized areas. It establishes a space in which various actants can share their know-how of unorthodox ways of enjoying the landscape, all while still respecting the biodiversity and environment as such. At that, the project expands beyond its physical dimensions by virtue of the vast complexity of associations that form between human and non-human components that meet on the trails.

What is the impact of this project on its participants, and at that, how can it be better relayed into the public sphere? As the nature of territory has become evermore fragmented, both in terms of the activities held within, and customs suggested, how do we unite people in a way that understands city and nature as a unified whole? Can we consider visiting territories that seem hostile or foreign? Or, how do we reverse our relationship to nature in a way that positions it as a priority? All of these questions are addressed in the works of the 11 invited artists, whom each respectively have discussed and developed concrete proposals for the transmission of a territorial way of knowing to the public, not only through the pleasure filled activity of hiking, but also in its hybridization with various artistic practices.

These knowledge exchanges are stratified in the GR guide book through various incentives such as a distribution of a subsidiary pamphlet entitled “How to get lost on the GR” as well as downloadable audio tours of the landscape, which both impart information on the flora and fauna of surrounding areas, as well as creates an unorthodox understanding of the landscape through a discussion on its post-industrial legacy, carried out through picnics had along the way.

Under the authority of the Landscape Observatory, Geoffrey Mathieu was granted access to the archives of the GR before its inaugural date. Together with Bertrand Stofleth, and the board of the CNAP in 2013, he established a protocol, in which a photographer or artist was sent to a specific territory to draw the portrait of the landscape, forming a connection between art and science, objectivity and subjectivity, as well as casting a question on the nature of representation. For this, a structure consistent of 100 different points of view was established, analogically referring to the number of biases prevalent in the GR today in its future assessments and analyses for the next decade. For this, a board comprised of artists and landscape architects in order to devise of this structure joined them. In hopes of consecrating this model of representation, they invited outside photographers to similarly “adopt” a portion of the landscape to portray, resulting in 70 contributions, or revisions of the landscape, sourced through a call for entries on the internet, the results of which have now been made available through the GR6 website.

Mathias Poisson and Virginie were, in their own course, asked to develop basic tools with which to address traces and memories formed by and embedded within a landscape. For this, they invented an experimental tourist guide entitled “How to lose a GR”, which created roles to be distributed amongst participants within a collective event. The guide is a delightful edition of small drawings and tasks, which are to be realized by its possessors in a series of personal and collective means.

Julie de Muer proposes audio tours in collaboration with Radio Grenouille, which consider the context of Marseille 2013 and how a medium such as the audio guide can establish a connection between the territory and its citizens. For this, she has invited musicians and their fans to create compositions, which participants can listen to while they walk. 30 authors declined the experience.

In a similar way, Denis Moreau has embarked into the actual creation of hikes with the project “Sauf.. (territories) autour du GR2013’. Together with Christophe Galatry, he has further proposed five artist residencies in the areas of Martigues, Port-de-Bouc and Istres, which are to collaborate with the GR2013 programming.

The GR2013 hiking trails are also intended to offer culinary experiences, for example through the organization of “Perspective Picnics” through six cities crossed by the guided path. Using ingredients natural to each respective territory, the picnics question and consider the dialectic between city and nature through the rich narrative of Provençale cuisine. Picnic participants are sent to experience, observe and engage with the delights of wild plants, firstly as a culinary experience, but also as a way of countering the landscape and territory itself as lexical analogy to the ‘flavours’ of the GR2013. These picnics are issued by the “Landscapes of Taste”-organization, lead by the collective SAFI, whom have invited chefs from around the area to set up meetings and pickings, which allow participants to discover the nature around the paths.

In addition to the MP13 website, an open-access exhibition entitled “The Palace and the Path” took place from March 12 to May 15th, 2013, at the Palais de Bourse. The exhibition functioned as a kind of self-confined trail proposed as a visitation site to accompany the GR2013. The exhibition could be accessed by following red and yellow signs, which had been erected by the Departmental Hiking Committee of the Bouches-du-Rhône near the old port of Marseille. The public entered through the first floor of the Palais de Bourse only to be confronted by the interventions of a dozen artists that had worked on the GR2013. In the VIP lounge, Mathias Poisson and the Tourist agency, Bryan Connell, Remy Rivoire, Frank Gerard, the SAFI collective and Philippe Piron showed their views on the GR through photographs, installations, maps, books and scented works. Christine Breton (from the Hotel du Nord et Ciel), Hendrik Sturm, and Baptiste Lanaspeze offered visitors a walk through a corridor enriched with documents and materials regarding their projects. Geoffroy Mathieu and Bertrand Stofleth exhibited the first portions of the landscape observatory in the Salon Provence. Laurent Malone went a little further in his photographic display of Romanian people. Julie Muer and Radio Grenouille offered two audio guides of the premises, allowing visitors to walk through the Palace as well as lie down on the floor on the Le Salon des Elus with an MP3 player in hand.

On paper, MP2013 is committed to an environmentally responsible approach, in such a way that activates people and motivates them to visit public exhibitions and interventions. In this way, the GR2013 is one of the few projects that provide an interest and attractive encouragement to participate not only in artistic interventions but also in the promotion of a territory in a socially and ecologically committed way. In a way that is consistent in its responsibility to environmental factors, to public and private partners, and careful to not degrade the life of the cultural capital, the GR2013 educates visitors to ecological issues through dynamic and productive projects, which mobilize structures necessary for preserving the natural heritage. The Bioversity Awareness model proposed by the GR2013 combines ecological knowledge exchange and promotion with sensory experiences in a vast variety of collaborative and participatory ways.

In conclusion, the GR2013 offers the possibility of shifting the general perception on landscapes, in a way, which creates links between various practices and approaches, following suit to the mandate of Marseille as Cultural Capital of uniting city and nature as a new, common path.

Across the countryside and council estates alike, sheds and shrubberies, highways and natural resources, these hiking trails—both urban and rural—form a kind of poetry embedded within our metropolitan existence. Between city and nature, a lexical image close to Bruno Latour’s conception of the quasi-object in cartography, functions also as an object of interest concerning the on-going development of a new transportation infrastructure that will work from 2013 onward towards facilitating travel between the city and its suburban regions.

1 http://www.mp2013.fr/gr2013/a-propos/
2 See the text *Extra-Muros*, p. 128, in: « Marseille, Ville Sauvage », Essay on suburban ecologies, ed. Actes Sud, 2010, by Baptiste Lanaspeze with photography by Geoffroy Mathieu
3 30 zones *Natura 2000*, the 2700km of pathway is maintained by the General Council of the Bouches du Rhône department and its concomitant 118 hiking associations. See the text: *L’invention de l’écologie urbaine*, p.99 in: « Marseille, Ville Sauvage », Essay on urban ecology, Ed. Actes Sud, 2010, by Baptiste Lanaspeze with photographs by Geoffroy Mathieu
4 « GR2013 Marseille-Provence, Sentier métropolitain autour de la mer de Berre et du Massif de l’Etoile, 20 jours de randonnée », co-edited by Editions Wildproject and FFrandonnée, supported by Marseille Provence 2013 and the Council General of the Bouches du Rhône ; 2013.
5 *Id*.
6 http://www.mp2013.fr/gr2013/
7*How to get lost on the GR*, Ed. Wildproject, 2013
8 [www.promenades-sonores.com](http://www.promenades-sonores.com)

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