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on the beauty of ephemeral usage
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In Lagos, Nigeria there is an aborted off-ramp that carries the name of Oshodi. Unable to cross the right-of-way of the almost defunct Nigerian Railway Co., the unfinished cloverleaf has been appropriated by the city's dwellers and has become by some accounts the largest, most active market in that African country. The market established itself on the overgrown and rarely used tracks of the railway; the ephemeral nature of the gigantic, spontaneous undertaking is underscored by the fact that the vendors are often sited upon rails and must relocate themselves quickly every time a rail carriage passes through. Merchants must seek out and occupy their plots temporarily and transiently; each passing of the day is said to reveal new formations, new adjacencies, new products and sellers. Oshodi seems to act as a valve for the city of Lagos, allowing overheated consumer demand to be relieved by the lubricious flow of goods through its informal markets. It even turns automobile congestion into a virtue, funnelling commerce to the places where "go-slows" – the Nigerian slang for traffic-jam - brake and deflect passing commuters.

Of course, it is difficult to truly compare Austrian cities with their West African counterparts: *Linz darf nie Lagos werden*. However, there are examples of temporarily programmed and transiently used spaces closer to home. In Vienna for example, the southerly end of the Naschmarkt is used as a parking lot during the week and is reconfigured as Flea-Market on Saturdays. The need for informal marketplaces seems to be almost universal. In New York, for example, the scars which the widening of Canal Street rent in its urban fabric have been filled by small markets with such abstruse specializations as used tools, old buttons or cut-rate artists supplies. It seems that off-mainstream demands exist, and are best served by the unceremonious, low-capital markets that seek out the informal spaces of the city. But the usage of temporarily-programmed spaces must not always be just buying and selling. Consider the Rathausplatz in Vienna: here one finds, in addition to the *Christ-Kindl Markt*, Opera on film, Ice Skating, Street-Basketball festivals and, if you are lucky, the Circus once or twice a year.

The point is that every city needs these social buffer-zones where unusual, even extraordinary things can happen. They give the city an opportunity to escape itself, to experiment and to give new ideas the chance to stand public test. Michel Foucault considered such sites to be *heterotopias*, and defined them as real spaces that exist outside of and in counterpoint to prevailing socio-spatial practices. In the west, we define and design space in response to a series of institutions such as ownership, rental and leasing, certificates of occupancy and usage permits; these exist to allow space and its usage to be regulated by both the private and the public hand. These institutions are of course necessary for the operation and survival of urban life; they represent a basic level of social agreement that have been negotiated out between the city's established interests. But in order for the city – and its populace – to develop, evolve or even to remain sane, I would claim that heterotopias, as spaces that lie outside of everyday norms, are a necessary part of the urban landscape. By giving room to *less-established* interests, they allow people to step outside of usual routines and expected practice, not in order to subvert them, but to make it possible for us to reflect upon our norms and thereby begin to imagine the existence of other possibilities.

One quality that these urban spaces have in common is that their layout and configuration is as informal as their usage: Canal Street in New York consists of empty lots and residual spaces; Upper Naschmarkt is the space that remained when the Market itself was parcelled out. It seems that these *heterotopias of transient programming* work best when their design is as spontaneous their utilization. These spaces are nourished by *underdetermination*, a state where many possibilities are held open (it is important to note that they are *not* indeterminate or undefined; informality is not a lack of definition, rather a type of definition that refuses or refutes the ritualized norm). This underdetermination allows cross usages, new usages and simultaneities to arise. To impose an unnecessary order upon these spaces would be to determine them, and to squeeze the life out of their heterotopian being.

When pondering the future of their *Jahrmarktgelände*, the city of Linz should not forget the fragile traits of such informal spaces. While the city can and should not stop its evolution, public spaces must be handled with care, and their specific qualities need to be considered in each case. The city needs its heterotopias. While they may not seem beautiful to all eyes, we must be careful that, caught up in the urge to order, shape and design, we do not wring them dry of their uniqueness.