Why, since 1998, do we work on the idea of territory with homeless people in Rouen, Montreal or teenagers and young adults of Orléans? Why do we work on utopian space with nomads in Sotteville, unemployed or homeless people in Rouen? Why do we work on the possibilities of representation, traversing the districts of a city with the women who live or work there? Why do we question the town planning of a 'no-global village' with the activists who build it, practice it, live it? Why do we question the habitat of the Gypsies in Europe with the Gypsies themselves? Why do we cross France to meet the Algerians of the 'prison-city' of Abd el Kader?

Because we do not believe in the existence of the imagined city of architects, town planners, sociologists or politicians; their representations are prisons. Because we know that the territory, of which some consider themselves to be defenders, is an invention, a representation only of the community that occupies the ground. In reality the representation has to be endlessly reinvented —not on a drawing board or by voting but in conjunction with those who live there. Because only this work can question and face an unsatisfactory reality. We want to recall our dream, of a self-determined city, a place for everyone. It is the city of the Commune of Paris, it is Barcelona of 1936, it is the maquis, it is a poem by Gatti or Maïakovsky, the moving city mounted on Maknovichina's 'tanks' in the Ukraine of 1919, it is the concentric circles of walls painted with all the knowledge of the world in the 'City of the Sun' of Tommaso Campanella, it is the theory of 'unitary urbanism' of the Situationists, it is the theory of the property of Proudhon, it is the village of sub-commandant Marcos. Cities which struggle with themselves to grow should save us from reality. It is a city in perpetual motion, which builds and thinks itself with all those who live it. A city without despot and without leader, a field of struggle, restlessly re-starting, between ideal and reality.

Our work, in which we fundamentally want to be political, is aimed at apprehending and reinventing the polis (the city) with those who live in it, trying to re-integrate political action, at a time when the only political act for most of the people is the delegating of one's own power in the secrecy of the polling booth. We fear for the disappearing need of thinking, of knowing the space and the manner of living together.

This work is seldom presented within the frame of exhibitions, more often in public space, in order to unceasingly question a potential danger (the 'security laws'), which today pose an even greater danger: the loss of the city as a space of freedom and of the possible. That's why we abandoned our costumes as architects, actors or graphic designers; the reason why we deserted the agencies, the cabinets and our roles as suppliers of the 'new' models for the city. For this reason we work with the people, reconsidering and representing our spaces of living, convinced that a voice is not given but must be caught, worked at and carried on.

On 21st of April 2002, while we were finishing a fiction already too spectacular in our opinion, the worst happened. What now is the city that we reinvent today, which is able to resist the hatred disseminated in the form of ideology?

Our work can be divided into two distinct periods: the first from 1998 to 2003, aimed at questioning the concepts of the makers of the city (architects, politicos, town planners) by working with the ones that are excluded from their plans. It resulted, for instance, in a work on representation made by homeless people about their landscapes; another one on Utopia together with homeless people, the unemployed and nomads. A second part, started in 2003 with work in the 'no-global village' on the plain of Annemasse during the counter-G8 summit, which tries to question the relations between the city and political struggle. This work is on-going in several French towns involving amongst others, the Algerian community, focusing on the case of Smala, the itinerant capital of Algeria during the nineteenth century.

Stany Cambot for Echelle inconnue
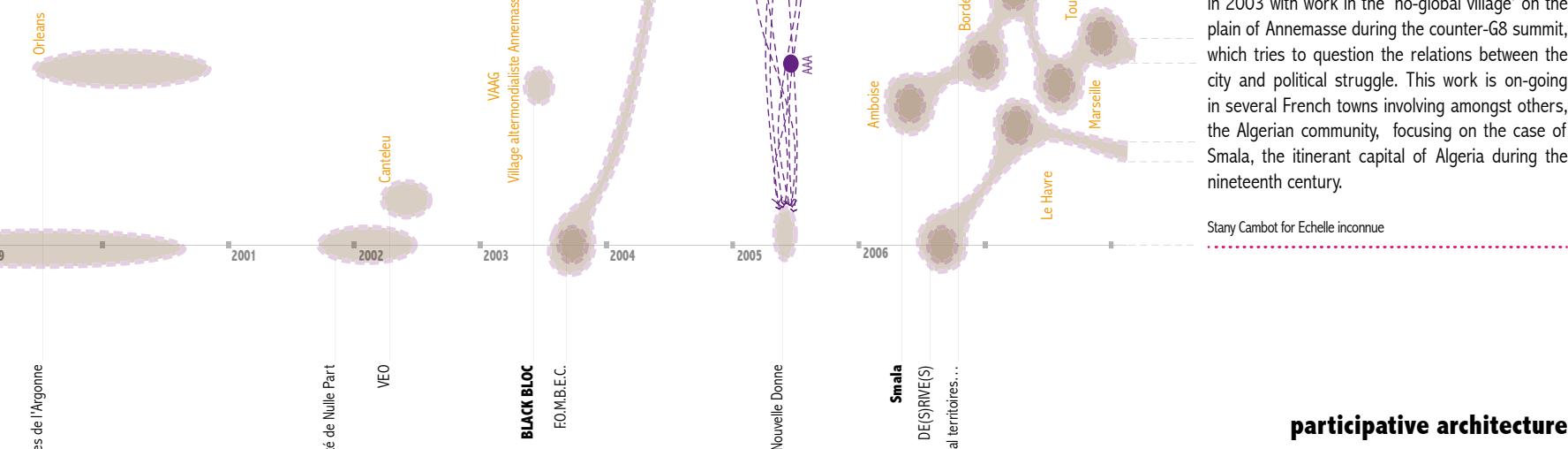
participative architecture

cartography

popular university

politic

LOCATION Rouen

CONTEXT Old shop in downtown, one part is used as public space for meeting, another as a studio (for computing, screen-printing etc.)

TEAM For we do not believe in the 'uni-city', instead we attempt to harmonise its polyphony. Who are we? An organic cluster who operate around the projects written and directed by Stany Cambot, a producer, Stéphanie Recatala, a computing software? designer, Pierre Commenge, architects, plasticiansartists? and sound musicians, who have all decided to get away from lonely creation and work together. Since 1998 we have attempted to realise projects with people about experiences which question city, space and territory.

2 full-time persons
1 part-time person
A number of voluntary and intermittently engaged people depending on the needs of the project

PEOPLE Architects, artists, students, inhabitants, homeless people, gypsy people, workers, militants, etc.

SPACES 90 m²

COST(S) 4 €/m²

SHARING No

MOBILITY The studio in Rouen is the base for each project and we install a new workshop in the place where people with whom we want to work are living (Gypsy's camp, homeless centers, alter-globalist villages, the town where the first Algerian resistant, the chief and urbanist of the Smala was incarcerated). Geographically the work has covered many areas in these towns: Rouen, Annemasse, Naples, Budapest, Montréal, Bordeaux, Pau, Canteleu, Royan, Orléans.

SUPPORTS Generaly institutionnal

PRACTICE **From the beginning our programme is the same: a war.**
Fight against the official city with the city we desire that is not inscribed in the cadastral survey. From there possibility emerges…
The work can now be divided in two parts: the first (1998-2002) was the interrogation of the 'greats concepts' of the city-makers (architects, urban planners, politicos, sociologists…) e.g. 'territory' and 'Utopia'; the second (2003-present) 'Politic/Polis', tries to interrogate the relationship between the city and war through projects around the 'alter-globalist village' or Smala, the mobile capital city of Algeria in the nineteenth century.
Echelle inconnue **also try to assume a theoretical position organising or participating in national and international meetings.**
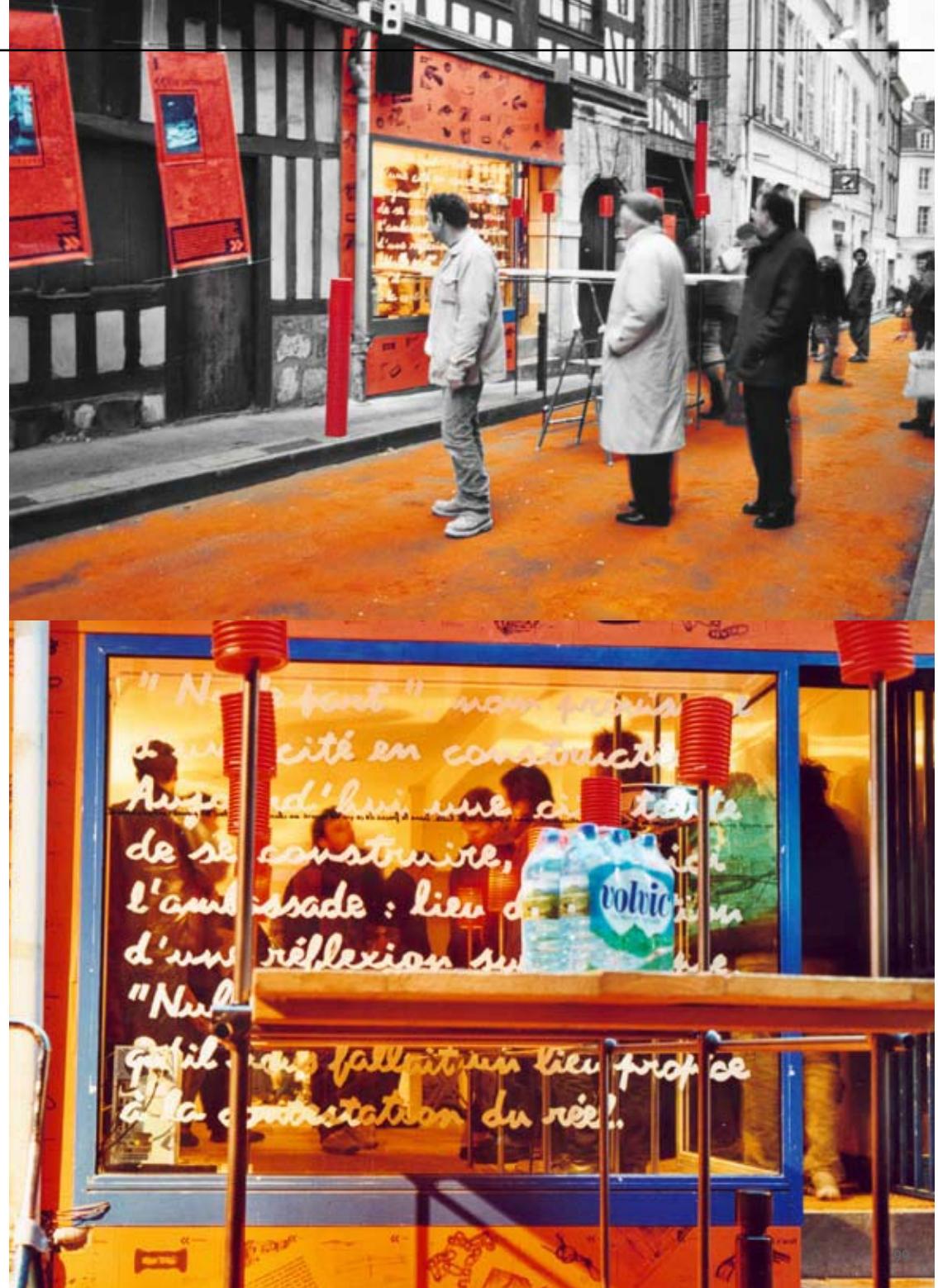
Les urbanismes combattants ou politique/ polis. Si la politique est la continuation de la guerre par d'autres moyens, la ville est-elle la continuation de la guerre par d'autres moyens?

Black Block
29 mai - 3 juin 2003

Intervention et atelier cartographique de campagne pendant le contre-sommet du G8 à Annemasse (France). Black Block c'est, au milieu du village 'altermondialiste', l'installation d'une camera oscura depuis laquelle nous tenterons d'interroger, au travers de ses représentations, la possibilité pour le contre- sommet de constituer une urbanité provisoire et combattante. Black Block c'est, dresser en forme de banderole, la carte polyphonique de ce lieu à travers trois questions: d'où venez-vous? où êtes-vous? et quel est votre ennemi?

POURQUOI TRAVAILLER SUR LA VILLE ET LA GUERRE?

D'abord une interrogation de la place de l'architecte, puis de la place du pouvoir dans la ville réelle et dessinée. De là, un constat, celui de la séparation, celle du pouvoir et de la ville et ainsi la visible perte d'intérêt de celle-ci comme espace de la lutte politique. Perte d'intérêt pas si récente en définitive. En 1968, déjà les militants l'avaient compris: «Faites le siège de la bourse, murez-la et le capitalisme continuera de tourner». C'est la lente évolution de la sphère informative, devenue aujourd'hui numérique, qui permet aux différents pouvoirs de faire l'économie d'un lieu physique. A l'époque, transférées par télex, les fonctions vitales des places boursières étaient déjà indépendantes du lieu «Bourse».

Ainsi, même si aujourd'hui le pouvoir continue de s'exercer dans les villes, le contrôle, la prévention du débordement n'ont plus la dimension majeure qu'ils pouvaient avoir au XIXe siècle, soit la préservation des lieux abritant le pouvoir. La ville n'est désormais préservée que d'un débordement sur elle-même pouvant enrayer une partie de la production de richesses, une partie des services, mais sans jamais faire dysfonctionner de manière significative les organes majeurs du pouvoir.

Le défilé, la barricade, l'ensemble des pratiques de la ville pouvant, dans l'imaginaire, aboutir à l'insurrection, aucun de ceux-là ne peut aujourd'hui dépasser l'efficacité symbolique. À la fin des années soixante, on le savait déjà et pourtant le rapport des militants à la ville n'a, pendant longtemps, pas changé.

Il faut attendre Seattle pour que les militants entendent que le pouvoir même «médiatisé» a cependant besoin, à certains moments, de se recristalliser, «d'avoir lieu». Le premier geste de la lutte politique devient alors la construction d'une ville éphémère, une ville de tentes, appelée village alter-mondialiste. Lieu d'hébergement des «troupes» mais avant tout lieu dans lequel s'expérimente l'idéal politique: «Dans un village éphémère anarchiste vous êtes en république anarchiste».

C'est cette innovation, la création d'une ville comme premier geste de la lutte, que nous sommes venus interroger en 2003 dans le village altermondialiste de la plaine d'Annemasse pendant le contre-sommet du G8, tentant d'en dresser la carte à travers trois questions posées à ses habitants «Où êtesvous? D'où venez-vous? Et quel est votre ennemi?»

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Un urbanisme mobile et combattant, d'une ville de tentes en lutte contre la ville de pierre. (cf. illustrations p.101)

A mobile and combating urbanism, one of a town of tents fighting against the town of stone.

ATELIER CARTOGRAPHIQUE DE CAMPAGNE
Si ici est une cité où se pose et s'invente la question politique, se pose et s'invente, alors, la question de l'ennemi politique. Poser cette question ici, c'est aussi tenter une sortie face au monstre mou que contiennent à peine ces définitions paravents : mondialisation, guerre, libéralisme...
Nommer l'ennemi, c'est lui donner un visage. C'est énoncer comme réel l'existence de celui qui semble depuis longtemps s'être virtualisé dans les vecteurs de la communication.
Nommer l'ennemi c'est, à l'heure où les campagnes armées tentent de se faire passer pour des campagnes de maintien de l'ordre international, dire que la guerre est un état constant, dont les campagnes militaires ne sont que les moments de visibilité spectaculaire.
Black Block, atelier cartographique de campagne ; c'est, pour nous, la caméra obscura au sein de laquelle nous désirons interroger cette cité provisoire au travers de la parole de ceux qui l'habitent, et dresser la carte de ses fondations.

Town plannings polished combatants or policy / If the policy is the continuation of the war by other means, is the city the continuation of the war by other means?

Black Block
May 29th - June 3rd, 2003

Intervention and cartographic field workshop during the G8 counter summit in Annemasse, France. In the middle of the altermondialist village Black block is the installation of a camera oscura to attempt to question, from its representations, the possibility to achieve a temporary and fighting urbanity. Black block is the creation of a polyphonic banderole which answers three questions: where do you come from? Where are you? and who is your enemy?

WHY WORK ON THE CITY AND WAR?

Initial questioning: the role of the architect and later the role of political power in the real and the designed city. From there, a statement of separation of politics and the city and thus the visible loss of interest in this one as space of political struggle.

Loss of interest is not so recent. Already in 1968, the militants understood it: 'Siege the Stock-exchange, all-in it and the capitalism will keep running'. It is the slow evolution of the informative sphere, today digital, which allows the various powers to control the economy of a physical space. Once transferred by telex, the vital functions of the stock market were already independent from the physical space of the 'Stock Exchange' itself.

Thus, even if today the power is still exerted in the cities, the control and the prevention of uprisings do not any longer have the importance they had in the nineteenth century for the safeguarding of the spaces of power. Today, cities face rebellions which can only partially impede the production of wealth and services but never significantly endanger the functions of the major bodies of power.

Demonstrations, barricades, political practices of the city can possibly lead to insurrection nowadays but it cannot be anymore than a symbol.
At the end of the Sixties, this was clear and yet the relation between activists and the city, has not changed for a long while.

We had to wait for Seattle, when activists finally realised that even 'media power' needs, at certain times, to 'crystallise' itself, 'to take place'. The first act of political struggle becomes then the construction of an ephemeral city; a town of tents called the 'no-global village'.

A place for lodging the 'troops', but firstly a place in which political ideals are tested: 'In an anarchic transitory village you are in an anarchic republic.'

We question the creation of a city as the first step in the fight. In 2003, in the 'no-global village' in the plain of Annemasse, during the counter-G8 summit, we tried to draw up a map based on the three questions asked of its inhabitants 'Where are you? Where do you come from? And who or what is your enemy?'

Smala

POURQUOI TRAVAILLER SUR SMALA?

Des tentes partout! Pendant les grands rassemblements altermondialistes, où ce travail a commencé, pendant d'étranges révolutions oranges, ou avec des sans-abri peu de temps avant des élections présidentielles... Des tentes... comme de nouvelles armes de combat politique?
Des tentes pourtant, déjà au XIXe siècle pour construire une ville qui fait la guerre: Smala.
La Smala fut, de 1841 à 1843, la capitale nomade de l'Algérie, une ville de tentes conçue par l'émir Abd el Kader pour et dans la lutte contre la colonisation française. Rayée de la carte par les troupes du Duc d'Aumale, il n'en reste rien ou presque, quelques documents comme autant d'hypothèses sur ce que cette ville put être: une manifestation politique, une université géante, la représentation sur terre de la Jérusalem céleste, une ville maquis, un schéma cosmogonique...
Après sa reddition, de 1848 à 1852 Adb el Kader, sa famille et ses principaux généraux furent incarcérés à Toulon, Pau, Bordeaux, Marseille et enfin Amboise.

Smala c'est aujourd'hui un projet itinérant de recherche artistique et urbaine qui tente de poser à la population de chacune de ces villes une question: Qu'est-ce qu'une ville, capitale mobile de l'Algérie détruite le 16 mai 1843 par l'armée française, peut faire résonner dans les villes où fut incarcéré son architecte? L'immigration algérienne bien entendu, mais aussi tous ceux qui peuvent éclairer et investir une des possibilités de la Smala: manifestants, universitaires, enseignants et étudiants, anciens maquisards...

Voilà avec quelle question nous voyageons de Pau à Marseille en passant par Bordeaux et Amboise. Grossissant «notre Smala» des réponses de ceux avec qui nous travaillons.

Quel livre? Quels tracts? Quel plan de manifestation?

Première étape à l'Université de Pau et des pays de l'Adour 2006: interroger la Smala avec les étudiants à travers un texte de

Kateb Yacine extrait de son roman Nedjma. Soit interroger une première possibilité de Smala: une manifestation politique devenue ville.

Ici, c'est à travers un texte de Kateb Yacine décrivant les gestes d'un étudiant des années quarante après les émeutes de Sétif que nous désirons interroger cette ville. Pour Yacine, pour qu'une manifestation devienne ville il faut: cacher un livre, enterrer des tracts puis tracer le plan de la manifestation future dans le sable.
Le travail devait à l'origine se dérouler avec l'association des étudiants algériens du campus. A notre arrivée nous trouvons l'association dissoute, les étudiants algériens injoignables. Mais le reste des étudiants de l'université, sans doute conscient de notre désarroi, lance un mouvement de grève contre le CPE (contrat première embauche). C'est donc au coeur du mouvement étudiant, dans les locaux occupés de ce qui est alors rebaptisé «Université Populaire Paloise Autogérée» que nous travaillerons. Avec les étudiants grévistes nous parlons de la Smala, ville en guerre contre la ville, de Kateb Yacine, de son personnage Lakdar, jeune manifestant pour l'indépendance de l'Algérie. A chacun nous demandons de réitérer les gestes de Lakdar. A chacun nous demandons, quel tract? quel livre est pour vous fondateur d'un combat politique? et enfin quel plan de manifestation future dessineriez-vous aujourd'hui dans le sable?
Des dizaines de tracts ou non-tracts sont rédigés. Les livres sont organisés en bibliothèque numérique. Neuf plans de manifestation comme autant de tentatives d'envisager la ville comme espace poético-politique ou comme autant de Smala sont réalisés. A la fin du mouvement nous proposerons aux services de renseignements de la préfecture l'organisation d'un festival de manifestations politiques. Ils acceptent puis se ravisent...
Parallèlement, des entretiens vidéo avec des Algériens vivant en France sont diffusés. Une conférence Occitan / Tamazight autour du rapport de ces langues au politique est organisée.

ECHELLE INCONNUE / PROJECT SMALA

Smala

WHY WORK HERE IN SMALA?

Tents everywhere! During large no-global gatherings, where this work started, during strange orange revolutions, or with homeless people, right before presidential elections... tents as a new weapon of political struggle?

However, tents already existed during the nineteenth century, in order to build a city for fighting a war: Smala.

From 1841 to 1843, Smala was the itinerant capital of Algeria, a town of tents designed by the emir Abd el Kader for and in the fight against French colonization.

Defeated and cancelled by the troops of the Duc D'Aumale, almost nothing remains about Smala, only few documents and many hypothesis of what this city could have been: a political demonstration, a giant university, the representation on earth of celestial Jerusalem, a resistent city, a cosmogonist diagram…

From 1848 to 1852, after surrendering, Adb el Kader, its family and his main Generals were imprisoned in Toulon, Pau, Bordeaux, Marseille and finally Amboise.

Smala is today an artistic and an itinerant urban research project which tries to raise a question to the population of each one of these cities: What is the resonance of an itinerant capital of Algeria, destroyed the 16th of May 1843 by the French Army, in the cities where its architect was once imprisoned? Algerian immigration of course, but also all those which can research and clarify some of the hypothesis regarding Smala: activists, academics, teachers and students, members of Resistance movement...

Here is the question we travel with from Pau to Marseille, from Bordeaux to Amboise. Enlarging 'our Smala' with the answers of those we work with.

Which book? Which leaflets? Which path for demonstration? The first stage took place at the University of Pau and the pays de l'Adour in 2006: to question the Smala with

students through a text of Kateb Yacine, from his novel Nedjma. Our aim was to question a first hypothesis of Smala; a political demonstration that became a city. Here, it is through a text of Kateb Yacine, which described the actions of a student in the forties, after the riots of Sétif, that we wish to question this city. For Yacine, a demonstration was the becoming of a city.

Here is the question we travel with from Pau to Marseille, from Bordeaux to Amboise. Enlarging 'our Smala' with the answers of those we work with.

In the beginning, the work was supposed to evolve together with the association of the Algerian students on the campus. Upon arrival we discovered that the association had been dissolved and the Algerian students were unreachable. But the rest of the university students, undoubtedly conscious of our distress, launched a movement to strike against the CPE (Contract First Employment). Therefore, it is in the middle of the students movement, in the occupied buildings of what was then renamed, 'Popular University Paloise Self-managed' that we began our work.

With the students we speak of the Smala of Kateb Yacine, a city at war against the city: Yacine's main character Lakdar is a young activist in the struggle for Algerian independence. We ask each of the students to reiterate the actions of Lakdar. We ask each of them 'which leaflet in your opinion or which book can be a basis for political struggle?' and finally also 'which plan for a future demonstration would you plan for today?'

Many leaflets or non-leaflets are written; the books are stored in a digital library. Eventually, nine demonstrations were carried out as attempts at considering the city as a space of poetic/political action as various Smala. At the end of the student movement we applied for a different demonstration at the Office of Prefecture, they first accepted but then changed their minds...

Meanwhile, some video interviews with Algerians living in France were broadcasted. A conference 'Occitan/Tamazight' was organised around question of the connection between language and politics.

Painted tents were installed on the campus.