In the spring of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic abruptly changed many aspects of day-to-day life worldwide and prompted a need for new types of designed spaces. As sanitizing, mask-wearing, and social distancing became critical in the midst of mandatory quarantines and closures, many establishments and organizations had to pivot to ulterior methods of operating, since sharing tight indoor spaces was no longer possible. The necessity of open air and spacious areas in which to operate prompted business owners and community members to look to their available outdoor spaces in which they could resume typical programming in a new venue – parking lots. These car parks, often considered the scourge affiliated with suburban sprawl or an overreliance on the automobile, were given new life. Civilian-planned, ad hoc, temporary architectural projects and uses demonstrated diverse manners in which asphalt expanses could be occupied, by people and cars alike, for previously unconsidered uses.

In the course of this essay, I examine the repurposing of two different parking lots during the COVID-19 pandemic and use the case studies to consider implications or other design solutions they inspire. In the first case study, the parking lot at the Lucky Devil Lounge in Portland, Oregon was converted into a drive thru strip club, extending and
reimagining the program of the permanent infrastructure. In the second example, the IKEA car park in Wetzlar, Germany was used as a worship space on Eid for Muslims in the community; this converted a private lot into an event space for a program distinct from the retailer’s typical functions. These adaptive and unconventional parking lot uses, considered within the framework of tactical urbanism and informal or generous urbanism, prompt a reimagining of the utilization of existing car parks during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

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