

Temporal Ad Hoc Dissident Architecture in the State of Exception. Gezi Park/Taksim Square, Umbrella Movement

Arquitectura ad hoc temporal disidente en el estado de excepción. Gezi Park/Taksim Square, Umbrella Movement

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Breve biografía

Ana Medina (1985) is an architect from the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador, developing her PhD research at Universidad Politécnica de Madrid. Her thesis explores contemporary social revolutions and their reconfiguration from public to political space in the current city: how architecture can be reconstituted as a critical practice against a background of different delimitation through the development of a radical spatiality. Ana has been Visiting Scholar at the Centre for Research Architecture at Goldsmiths University of London, member of the research groups Hypermedia, Architectural Communication and Cultural Landscape at ETSAM-UPM, and co-founder and editorial board member of Displacements, an x'scape journal. For more than six years, she has experience in planning, designing and coordinating projects in both public and private institutions.

Resumen

Plazas de protestas, calles de protestas, campos de protestas, parques de protestas. Ya sean públicos o privados, los espacios no son diseñados para llevar a cabo protestas, las protestas se toman los espacios, e inherentemente, se convierten en actos de disidencia. En 2011, las revoluciones globales (Primavera árabe, *Occupy Movement*, Indignados) se tomaron los espacios

públicos como propios, espacios donde se construyeron rápidamente campamentos y/o artefactos urbanos; los manifestantes utilizaron objetos de uso cotidiano y al hacerlo, conformaron objetos de desobediencia social y espacial. Esta arquitectura *in situ* simbolizó y empoderó a los protestantes con un profundo impacto en las ciudades, en este caso, en los espacios públicos. En momentos, nuevas estructuras emergieron en el paisaje urbano y organizándose rápidamente, la arquitectura *in situ* permitió un hacer de política utilizando técnicas radicales y pragmáticas. Bajo estas circunstancias particulares y excepcionales, el diseño se ejerce de manera singular y personalizada –la arquitectura imaginativa no permanece como un manual conceptual, todo lo contrario, ésta se puede llevar a cabo por todos, temporalmente– y toma lugar en el escenario más grande: la ciudad. Los escenarios para este artículo serán The Umbrella Movement en Hong Kong y Gezi Park/Taksim Square en Estambul.

Palabras clave

Arquitectura ad hoc, temporal, protesta, estado de excepción, objetos, disidente.

Abstract

Protests plazas, protests streets, protests camps, protests parks. Whether publicly or privately owned, spaces cannot be designed for protest, they are taken for protesting. It is inherently, a dissent act. In 2011, the global revolutions (Arab Spring, Occupy Movement, Indignados...) demanded public spaces as their own, where camps and/or artefacts were built rapidly; protesters used everyday objects and by doing so, they conformed objects of disobedience. This built-in-situ architecture symbolised and empowered protests to have a deep impact in cities, especially, in their public spaces. In just moments, these new structures emerged in the urban landscape and were rapidly organised by protesters. The in-situ architecture allowed people on making politics in a radical and pragmatic technique. How design works in this situations is always different –the imaginative architecture does not remain as a conceptual manual, it can be realised in practice by everybody and anybody temporally– taking place on the biggest stage: the city. The scenarios will be the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong and Gezi Park/Taksim Square in Istanbul.

Keywords

Ad hoc architecture, temporal, protest, estate of exception, objects, dissident.

“History might have been very different if Karl Marx had been able to send emails.” Online activist, 1999.



Fig. 1. Couple wearing gas masks posing for a wedding photographer. Photograph: Kevin Frayer, The Guardian. <<http://theguardian.com/artanddesign/gallery/2014/nov/15/photographs-week-turkey-syria-berlin-armistice-day>> (Consulted in February 2015)

Revolts, occupations, and revolutions spread worldwide in 2011 through the digital space. Dissident actions and spatial practices gathered and were replicated from Tahrir Square to Puerta del Sol, from the steps of St Paul’s Cathedral to Zuccotti Park, from the streets of Pearl Roundabout to Syntagma Square. People put their lives on risk across dissident actions in urban spaces, creating different spatialities where structures, objects, bodies, actions, physical and digital spatial practices, shaped a spatiality that is radical, in the contemporary context.

Jacques Rancière uses the term police to all those consensual acts by which a de-politicised society or its representatives manage its business with no

desire for change (Rancière 2001). For him, politics is an act of dissent: “The principle of political interlocution is thus disagreement” (Rancière 2010). In dissensus, there is a difference between sense and sense in its most basic definition, “a radical intervention in human affairs by which the entire aesthetic field is reorganised, and we see things we have not seen before” (Rancière 2010). Hence, dissensus is not just a model of simple opposition, but a means to open up a territory to allow for different identities to coexist and be choreographed so that they can play out their differences in a conflictual but nonviolent way (Hirsch and Miessen 2012).

Ines Weizman in her book *Architecture and the Paradox of Dissidence* (Weizman 2014) relates this conception with architectural imagination, in which politics of dissent is articulated and entered into political exchange. Following Rancière, “it becomes necessary to invent scene upon which spoken words may be audible, in which objects may be visible, and individuals themselves may be recognised” (Rancière and Panagia 2000), unfolding it to aesthetics and spatial practices. Weizman adds that dissident does not share a single ideology but an essential engine for politics, a discontent that is transformed into political action. This means that a political practice as revolts (which are dissident as a whole, while revolutions are transformed into political machines) are determined by radical and fundamental contest of the way in which subjects is governed (Weizman 2014). Furthermore, Michel Feher, ensuing Michel Foucault, explains that what dissent pursues is the mobilization of civic passion in a struggle for the radical reorganisation of force relations. It is the politics of the governed¹, a state when people accept the danger of being intimidated and prosecuted. When there is a heterogenic series of actions against the hegemonic forms of domination, dissidents use different tactics as activist practices. Hence, dissidence is not present in a material sense, it ‘haunts’.

DIY (Do-It-Yourself) drones, bricks, holograms, clothing textiles, ‘inflatable

¹ Series of Lectures by Michel Feher at Goldsmiths, University of London, 2015. Operative Thought. Lecture Thank you for Sharing: The Social Life of Human Capital.

cobblestone², umbrellas; everyday objects take a different shape, nature and meaning when people protest on public spaces, but there is also an opportunity for developing and creating new objects for protest. The potential of the dissident architecture-object, architectural object – is for an architecture that always ranges between the physical and the speculative. In this sense, the revolutions of 2011 (Occupy Movement, the Arab Spring, *Indignados acampadas...*) differed with former ones by being germinated first in the virtual space. They were global movements that produced changes in different aspects including the relation of people to public spaces, bringing back Lefebvre's "the right to the city" notion. These movements introduced spatial practices that were considered as disobedient and dissident for camping and staying in places they were supposed not to, which affected the local socio-spatial dynamics. Starting in Tunis, the wave of protests of 2011 was a chain effect that resonated in different cities worldwide almost instantly, thanks to the virtual space and the propagation of information. Camping zones in Zuccotti Park, Tahrir Square, Puerta del Sol, Syntagma Square, etc., became symbol of protest and resistance, while tents, fabrics, fences, plastic bags, and cardboards turned into precarious emblems of social dissidence. Protesters learnt how to inhabit open spaces for long periods as collective bodies, creating a common spatiality and adapting to changing situations as weather, number of occupiers, legal responses, and so on. Many experiences, techniques, tactics, ideas, and practices were shared in digital platforms and archives that helped people to understand better how to occupy a public space; thus, 2011 was innovative in methods of appropriating a space.

This global dissident body turned out to be a base for future occupations, a reference more than a guide to follow. Indeed, the occupation of Taksim Square/Gezi Park in Istanbul on May-June 2013, and the Umbrella Revolution in Hong Kong on September-December 2014, were scenarios of social and spatial uprisings that took a step further those of 2011. During these events, odd and flashy objects, gas cartridge-sculptures and graffiti, digital

projections and wireless interconnection were the motors of activists that were simultaneously creative and artistic, inducing a protest against the musty system of an official regime.

In Istanbul, the occupation started as a pacific protest against an urban plan that intended to remove Gezi Park –one of the few remaining green open spaces in the city centre– and rebuild instead the Military Barracks from the Ottoman era demolished in 1940. The plan involved a pedestrianization of Taksim Square, a shopping mall in the Barrack's ground floor, upper floors luxury flats, cultural centres, an opera house, a mosque, and a museum. Hence, removing Gezi Park and Taksim Square is as significant as commercializing Central Park in New York or Hyde Park in London. Meanwhile in Hong Kong, people claimed that Beijing was reneging on an agreement to grant open elections by 2017, for what people, especially students, demanded a 'true universal suffrage'. It was basically a protest against the proposed electoral reform, which was perceived to limit the democratic participation of Hong Kong people.

As it happened with the 2011 occupations, Gezi/Taksim and Hong Kong were incubated in the virtual space but they also created new architectural practices. Nonetheless, in this regard and having information, data, and experiences from 2011, these two events adapted collected tools in order to respond to their needs. By using everyday objects and wireless alternative Wi-Fi connection, protesters initiated a subversive design under a state of exception, where the architectural practice made in protests display the creation of new systems, a dissident object system that is called ad-hoc instant dissident architecture³. Tactics used when generating different situations transform the social and spatial conception of public spaces; they turned them into hybrid urban spots while banal objects conform a temporal architectural exception within the city. These systems could be planned or accidental, but the design of this dissident architecture perform

2 Inflatable cobblestone is an object created by Eclectic Electric Collective and Enmedio collective. It was used during the General Strike in Barcelona 2012.

3. Ad-hoc instant dissident architecture is a term defined by the author, which explores the temporality of, object and subject assembly in public spaces, which transforms the established order and meaning of spatial organization and everyday object.

a chaotic mobility of objects with limited resources and techniques of construction, resulting in the creation of new methods of designing. This architecture makes visible spots, places, objects, and techniques that are usually hidden and gives new tools to protest, an opportunity to provoke a new significance, organization and representation of publicness on the production of urban landscape.

Radicalisation of Gezi Park

Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, manifested his desire to transform Taksim area into a calmer district (Keyder 1999). That means to convert the area into a place where people consume, give a walk and hang out, not a place for meetings, assemblies, or strikes and demonstrations. Thus, when the plan to redevelop Gezi Park was revealed to the public, it exposed a state of commercialization for including a shopping mall, luxury flats, a cinema, etc. On 28th May 2013, approximately fifty environmental activists occupied Gezi Park to prevent its demolition, they sit-in green areas of the park and halt attempts to bulldoze the park by refusing to leave. The local police used tear gas and extreme force to remove these activists from the park; they took down activists' tents and cleared the space for bulldozes to continue with removing trees. Activists recorded these actions and spread through social media photographs and videos. Within few hours, hundreds of people started arriving to Gezi Park showing support to the activists. The size of the protest grew rapidly and clashes with the police increased. For days, security forces started a series of attacks, coming to a dramatic head in the early morning hours of 30th May 2013 around 5am, when the police set on fire protesters tents, musical instruments, and flags while most of occupiers were sleeping (Amnesty International 2013). This was the moment when the protests switched from an environmental topic to a social uprising against Erdogan's regime.

The protest not only became bigger but also different, it befitted a medium of accumulated anger expression. It gathered students and environmentalist, clerks and LGTB groups, unemployed and artists, activists and football fans;

indeed this last group caused an empowerment over the protests. *Besiktas* football fans (*Besiktas* is an Istanbul district located next to Taksim Square) supported protesters as a large wave. They have experience, as many other football fan groups, on planning parades on public spaces and clashes with police. When football fans started their way to Taksim, the police stopped them aggressively causing clashes that lasted 23 hours, 9 of them were uninterrupted resistance against gas and water cannons. Finally, *Besiktas'* fans could open their way to Gezi Park, settling conditions to protesters to occupy and reterritorialise the area (Cassano 2014)⁴. Protesters successfully blocked off nearly all the roads leading to Taksim allowing only pedestrian mobilization, they also built barricades and converted the area into a temporary police-free zone. This is the moment when *La Republique de Taksim* (Baquias 2013)⁵ was born; it was the initiation of a Temporary Autonomous Zone – T.A.Z. (Bey 1985)⁶.

The area of Taksim was suddenly a communal space, producing a spatiality within an unprecedented realm. Social fractions assembled together for the first time forming a new social structure in a symbolic space for all. And also did objects; objects that were used to serve for a specific function or task, suited into something different within this T.A.Z.

Fig. 2 presents an architectural urban landscape in which the understanding of objects emerged as means of disruption. Telephone cabs, for instance, which were immensely popular structures before the propagation of mobile phones, they have become during last years obsolete urban elements that

4. In this article, Jay Cassano, journalist and editor, makes a journal diary of clashes between *Besiktas* football fans and the police and how the city centre became a battlefield. Source: <<http://jcassano.net/2014/05/one-year-since-gezi/>>

5. This short article from the website Europe Solidaire, set up the name of *La Republique de Taksim* when referring to the map that some activists drew and were delivering to visitors in Gezi Park. Consulted in March 2014. Source: <http://www.europesolidaire.eu/article.php?article_id=1107>

6. Hakim Bey (his actual name is Peter Lamborn Wilson) is the author of the concept *Temporary Autonomous Zones* – T.A.Z. He is an anarchist that raves the subcultures and new socio-spatial connections, "the creation of temporary spaces that elude formal structures of control". T.A.Z. is a tactic that creates temporary spaces eluding control and surveillance. Through a non-hierarchical system, information is the key structure for creating new territories; indeed Bey relates creativity as the real empowerment for T.A.Z. <http://hermetic.com/bey/taz_cont.html>



Fig. 2. Capture from Documentary Gezi Park Protests in Turkey. (Consulted in September 2015)

occupy thousands of spots in the city because people barely use them. Yet, during the occupation, telephone cabs flattered as part of a system of barricades first and then as seats in Gezi Park. In addition, protestors took a bus at the beginning of clashes and used it as part of a barricade, and some days later, they turned the bus into an info desk. A temporary mosque emerged in the park, a movable food supply was made up with a tent, some fences, bins, and metal surfaces; even an open hospital was created with plastic straps. All kinds of unique structures popped up: bunk beds for sleeping, makeshift barricades constructed out of benches, tents, shelters made from fabric cut-outs, steel, wood, and plastic. The transformation of the use and significances of objects responded to specific needs of the occupation, demanding adaptation and immediate response of actions. *Herkes İçin Mimarlık* (Architecture for All) is a non-profit architecture organization based in Istanbul that during the occupation, this collective drew some of these dissident spatial practices. As a digital archive, they started documenting tents, shelters, barracks, and other temporal structures created within this zone. “Each unique structure that we encounter in the streets and Gezi Park has its own in-situ design and implementation process. Documentation of these temporary structures is of huge importance for

further examination, considering their limited life-cycle.”⁷

“To disobey in order to take action is the byword of all genuine creative spirits... I would say that there is good reason to study the dynamics of disobedience, the spark behind all knowledge.” (Bachelard 1990)

These objects added a factor to kinship between being artistic and being political discontent, not by itself but in communication with other objects whose significances and uses were transformed during the occupations. Thus, these events showed the urgency to reinvent things, spaces and relations. Urban elements sabotaged the conventional practices and became part of in-situ designs, highlighting new architectural practices made by anybody and everybody, transforming the nature of objects and public spaces with dissident practices. The radicalisation of the space, objects and practices brought an aesthetic of standard definitions of space.

On the evening of 15th June 2013, the police entered into the park by force by using plastic bullets, live ammunition, tear gas, water cannon, and beating protesters (Amnesty International 2013). These attacks were the most brutal so far during the protests; many people lost their lives, many were severely injured and many had permanent injuries. Yet, the spirit of resistance stopped the development of the urban plan proposed.

Umbrella Movement and Umbrella Man

Officially, the Hong Kong's protests in 2014 lasted 79 days, from 26th September to 15th December 2014. In one of the most important financial global cities, protests exploded being so called ‘Umbrella Revolution’. People demonstrated against Beijing setting the guidelines for Hong Kong's 2017 elections and claimed a “true universal suffrage” (Chan 2014). Students, workers, young and old, rich and poor people occupied the streets, followed by tear gas, pepper spray, police in riot gear, and shouting mobs.

During the pro-democracy demonstrations, an unusual protest symbol

7. Images taken from Dezeen Magazine. #OccupyGezi Architecture by Herkes İçin Mimarlık.

shaped the protests: an umbrella. Ho-Fung Hung, associate professor of Sociology at Johns Hopkins University, identified the use of umbrellas as sporadically protester's self-response to the extreme use of tear gas by the police⁸. These objects are daily items in the life of a Hong Konger, especially during summers when temperatures rise above 30°C and it rains most of the days⁹. It happened to be unusually hot and sunny during the middays of September 2014, so there were a lot of umbrellas floating around the city. During the first days of protests, a photographer shot a picture of a man walking through a cloud of tear gas holding an umbrella; it became viral and was called as 'The Umbrella Man' (Fig. 3) as the iconic 'Tank Man'¹⁰.

Days later, a statue of this Umbrella Man made by an unknown artist under the nickname of Milk. The statue is a roughly 3.5 meter-height of wood blocks holding a bright yellow umbrella with a right arm outstretched¹¹. Besides, people quickly adapted umbrellas into a tool for protecting themselves from tear gas, and they turned it into a symbol for protests, for what it was named as the 'Umbrella Revolution' or 'Umbrella Movement'.

The umbrella became a symbol, it was not only an icon image of demonstrations but also it enforced the creation of numerous designs and infrastructures with other objects like googles, tents, masks, post-it, and such like, to be barricades, shelters, sculptures, urban furniture, media centres, and so on. Protesters used them –besides protection of tear gas and pepper spray– to shield and to use them as canvas for art protest and to carry painted political slogans: "Police started seeing an ocean of umbrellas

8. Bloomberg News, Hong Kong protesters clash with rivals as tensions rise. <<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-10-02/hong-kong-leader-agrees-student-dialog-as-sit-in-goes-on>>

9. The Year's Weather - 2014. Hong Kong Observatory. Consulted in April 2016. <<http://www.hko.gov.hk/wxinfo/pastwx/ywx2014.htm>>

10. Tank Man: a man that stood up in front of a column of tanks in Tiananmen Square protest on June 1989, the morning after the Chinese military had suppressed the protests by force. As the lead tank maneuverer to pass by the man, he repeatedly shifted his position in order to obstruct the tank's attempted path around him. The incident was filmed and seen worldwide. Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tank_Man

11. Keith Bradsher, New Image of the Hong Kong Protests: 'Umbrella Man'. The New York Times, 2014. Consulted in February 2015. <http://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/10/05/new-symbol-of-hong-kong-protests-umbrella-man/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=1>



Fig. 3. Umbrella Man. Source: <http://qz.com/272854/what-is-the-meaning-of-the-umbrellas-in-hong-kongs-umbrella-revolution/> (Consulted in February 2015)



Fig.4. Umbrella Line. Photograph: Alex Hofford/EPA, The Guardian. Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/29/umbrella-symbol-hong-kong-democracy-protests#img-1>. (Consulted in February 2015)

on the front line instead of protesters,” said professor Ho-Fung Hung, “it is an artefact that is just effective in defending”¹² (Fig. 4).

As protests started taking the form of occupations, protesters began living [in] the streets. ¿Why in the streets and not in plazas or parks? Because Hong Kong has a lack of public spaces to assembly; most of them are private, mainly shops. Indeed, these protests took place first in the HSBC Plaza lobby¹³, a Privately Owned Public Space; a space of private property but open to public access under certain rules. As thousands of people were demonstrating at the time, they did not find a symbolic or representative place to protest, so they took the only space the city allows them, streets, avenues, and sidewalks. Here, the boundaries between public and private were blurred when it became an occupation, and safety zones and villages started building the Temporary Autonomous Zones – T.A.Z. Umbrellas were deployed as temporary roofs between pedestrian sidewalks, presenting different layers to this fringe public space. With all, the umbrella became a powerful image of protection and resistance, as the artist Kacey Wong said: “it’s a soft thing but it’s also very hard in terms of our determination to win this battle” (Zoe 2015)¹⁴.

Soon, people brought umbrellas in bulk and starting using them for sleeping, sheltering, making barricades, protection on the frontline, to write slogans on them, to be part of sculptures and so on; the way the umbrella was being used brought an “enormous feeling of brotherhood” as Wong said.

The resonance of Lennon Wall, dissident spatial practice

At the centre of the protest site, in Central Government Complex (designed by Norman Foster & Partners), one of the main landmarks in this dissident

12. Bloomberg News, Hong Kong protesters clash with rivals as tensions rise. Consulted in April 2016. <<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-10-02/hong-kong-leader-agrees-student-dialog-as-sit-in-goes-on>>

13. Umbrella Timeline. Consulted in April 2016. <<http://www.rfa.org/english/multimedia/timeline/UmbrellaTimeline.html>>

14. This article from Artnet relates the need of a symbol for protesters, which in this case is the umbrella. Consulted in April 2016. <<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/kacey-wongs-protest-art-goes-on-view-in-hong-kong-in-the-wake-of-the-umbrella-movement-273789>>

zone, protesters took John Lennon’s wall in Prague to Hong Kong¹⁵ (Fig. 5). People filled with colourful post-it notes (more than ten thousand pieces) the exterior staircase of the building, mainly with written messages about democracy and universal suffrage but also about solidarity, peace, freedom, song lyrics and epigrams; messages supporting the pro-democracy demonstrations as a fluttering collage that moves along the staircase of the government headquarters they were protesting against.



Fig. 5. Capture from YouTube video Lennon Wall Hong Kong. Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9nJDijvXzs> (Consulted in September 2015)

This urban installation reclaimed publicness in a new way. Protests usually involved graffiti and paintings on private or public properties, but the exceptional de/re territorialisation not only of the imaginary Lennon’s Prague, but also the materialization of the collaborative art protest fitted a forum for exchanging and making visible people’s desires and thoughts. The

15. John Lennon Wall is located in Mala Strana, Prague. After his death in 1980, someone painted his picture on an ordinary wall. Soon, people started writing on this same wall messages, quotes, lyrics, and paintings about peace, love and freedom mainly as the country was living under the Communist regime that banned western songs. The police tried repeatedly to whitewash over the portrait and messages, but everyday after, the wall was filled again with poems, pieces, and paintings of Lennon, even when there were CCTV cameras and overnight posting guards. Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lennon_Wall>

wall became a device for protest and the post-it notes were physical Tweets, it was paper Twitter. During the initial days of the occupations, protestors released an online document named OCLP: *Manual of Disobedience*¹⁶, which served as an informative document that referred to the legalities and illegalities according to the Hong Kong's urban law, indicating what protestors could perform and what actions were legally banned. This document indicated the limits in private and public property; it suggested avoiding demanding or destroying the physical materiality of buildings and infrastructures. In this sense, post-it notes covered the surface but did not affect the wall structure. These series of micro-dissident-actions turned not only streets but also buildings into an improvised outdoor gallery of politically inspired art. The city infrastructure turned out to be the protestors' canvas releasing new modes of publicness that resonate *from-and-to* new spatialities.

During the protests, tents, encampments, tarpaulins, and fabric tents perform the ad hoc instant dissident architecture, in which ad-hoc structures and activities suited the common space. Sanitation facilities, feeding spots, space for cooking, eating, media zone were present in Tahrir Square, Gezi Park, St Paul's Cathedral and so on; hence this architecture assembled into a kind of collective viral process. Though they were located in different spatial coordinates and at different times, their context and conditions set a number of processes that were resonated. During the 79 days of the Umbrella Revolution, the movement succeeded in creating a model of civil society based on non-violence, it appropriated a large part of the business district in Admiralty, separating affectively the government headquarters from the city. For days and nights, these dissident bodies built a temporal city, consolidating spatial and social structures in an expression of new spatial conditions, a temporal dynamic, and a multi-dimensional structure. Then, this dissident spatial practice is about context innovation, with innovation of content somewhat limited. Marshal McLuhan famous words: "the medium is the message" means that the person and social consequences are

the medium, that is "of any extension of ourselves, result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology" (McLuhan 1964). Reclaiming the public space in a dense, commercialized urban environment like Hong Kong, means something in and of itself, or as Paul Willis would say "raw materials of our social and built environment in the production of meaning" (Willis 1990). Regardless the message of the image of these spatial practices, it is the fact that the collective has taken the city and created new and different public spaces communicating them with people and the world.

Ad-hoc instant dissident architecture

When a protest becomes an occupation, banal objects start mutating their significance and there appear new explorations of their spatial limits. There is a chaotic mobility and displacement on the space, whose dynamics begin producing a promiscuous traveling across time and space. This act of civil disobedience through banal and common objects spawn protests illustrating that design not only shapes and defines products, but works as active agents of change in politics, communication, projection, social innovation, urban landscape and architecture.

Artists, designers, architects and public at large shape and define across their own creativity, the production of dissident spaces. The practical and informal structures that arose during the protests provide an unusual illustration of the basic and preconceived structures. In Hong Kong, protestors created a self-sustaining village within a month of the beginning of the protests, taking their call for democracy to the streets, setting up changing rooms, tents for sleeping or private spaces, a study area, first-aid stations and even their own security patrols. This reterritorialisation of public spaces in Hong Kong brought protestors to build barricades using any kind of objects as umbrellas, ladders, and plastic fences. Building barricades with any object was a primary action during the first days of the protests; the purpose was to obstacle mobility and visibility and to give a sense of protection (Fig. 6). Cling film and umbrellas turned into fledged

16 OCLP: Manual of Disobedience. Consulted in September 2015. <http://oclp.hk/?route=occupy/eng_detail&eng_id=28>

campus and carpeted stairs, water coolers served as amplifiers and Wi-Fi boosters, and strings attached to street lamps became drying racks to hang clothes and towels. The radicalisation of the spatiality brought an exquisite corpse village around the city, a giant instant architecture as a “counter-city within the city”¹⁷. In just moments, protesters built a new self-built urban state, with worship and infrastructure, with tools for protest and charging phones, for sleeping or doing homework.



Fig. 06. Tweet from @NamelessInChina. Umbrellas block an exit of Admiralt station. <https://twitter.com/namelessinchina/status/516444969956286465> (Consulted in February 2015)

This act of building a dissident public space is not made for protesting but for encouraging the city itself to be public and to provoke the conditions for a dialogue, a dialogue that has been replaced by static systems that

17. Adam Bobbette, architect and curator.

usually control the city’s behaviour. The occupations are not a scenario for protesting, they are living spaces that require social and spatial production through ad-hoc dissident architectures and the disobedience of object’s nature. The exceptional aesthetics of occupations expand beyond physical limits – involving the virtual public space – where the symbolism of textiles, umbrellas, fences, façades, are transformed into powerful acts of disobedience.



Fig. 7. Tents set up by pro-democracy protesters. Photograph: Vincent Yu. Source: Time. <http://time.com/3581690/life-in-hong-kong-occupy-protest-camps/> (Consulted in September 2015)

There could not be a manual for urban protest camp in conventional ways. The design is always different as it depends on the circumstances it is developed: the site, the time, the people involved, the social media replication, and the spontaneity. And it is a phenomenon that could occur around the world, it is not territorial, indeed it is exactly the opposite, it is reterritorial.

This reterritorialisation within occupations has a singular but common device: the tent. The tent, a structure that is pragmatic for temporal



Fig. 8. Protester assembling a bamboo structure during the Hong Kong's protests of 2014 - WuBamboo. Source: The Architectural Review. <http://www.architectural-review.com/archive/framing-the-issue-bamboos-structural-role-in-the-fight-for-public-space/8679223.full> (Consulted in February 2015)

occupancy, it is seen as an indeterminate mobile rapidly deployable that acts as an architectural strategy. It counterpoints the idea of home as static, nuclear, enclosed, solid, stately, and gives to people the power of generating micro-cities when expands the physical and imaginative limits to the architectural urban landscape. Fabricating the common ground that activates the instant non-hierarchical architecture, shapes the limits and possibilities of organic environments just in the centre of hyper-dense, commercial architecture as it happens in Istanbul or Hong Kong. When tents are placed in the public spaces, which is the momentum of urban shift from protest to occupation: tents are arranged in rows, fitted neatly between highways and streets, repurpose themselves as community noticeboards, and transform the asphalt into a canvas for political expression but also into a collective urban design platform (Fig. 7). By way of illustration, during the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong that lasted more than two months, the infrastructure that served only for vehicular mobility purposes

became a hyper-structure when people acted with dissident practices. They transmuted highways into libraries, classrooms, food supply stations, cinema, workshops, toilettes, allotments, art exhibitions, agora for assembly, flower gardens, mosques, mobile food centre; there were micro-cities practiced by all (Fig. 8). The habits in this dissident spatiality formed by the multitude, performed a spatial practice in common that empowered all the bodies.

The *ad-hoc* instant dissident architecture questions the nature of banal objects, when practicing in the space, an urban experience as a process entangled with people. These deployed spatial practices are means of sabotage and disruption that face the power of established architecture, and attempt an ideal to a way of inhabiting the city by exploring dissident relationships. Objects suit a practice of dissident design but also a central decorative and structural feature, while the extension of objects reaches a stage of creating new urban public landscapes. Indeed, tents and barracks served not only a certain physical purpose but also developed dissident infrastructures and spatial practices. When objects produce this ad-hoc instant dissident architecture, they induce different intensities on interactions on the city: the radicalisation of the space has introduced a new scenario for objects to take different forms, meanings and use in the contemporary city. This means: short-term actions induce long-term transformations. Micro-cities allow having different and new ways of relationships within the city in a global scope, their significance and dynamics remain, most of the times, in the space and some others in the collective imaginary, which permits the creation of dissident urban tools for restating the city. These processes, ideas, tactics, ad hoc instant architecture highlight moments that demonstrate how informal, mobile, temporary and tactical architectural urban exploration have constantly altered the social, political, economic, physical, digital, legal fabric of the contemporary city; it is as Nabeel Hamdi says: “disturbing the order of things in the interest of change” (Hamdi 2013). These spatial practices use a deliberate and accessible means for achieving desires (*commons*) while embedding flexibility into the experience and project process, a state that

acknowledges people to produce their own social conditions: the meeting of different elements countenances the focus of design-make; it is the sense of possibilities. This apparatus empowers everyday urban culture, actions and landscape, emboldening the radical spatiality for bodies to move freely by experiencing the space within a public sphere and processing culturally a dissident architectural urban landscape. Furthermore, the temporality and continuity of this spatiality depends on inside actions and interactions, in a temporal state. The discontinuity, arhythm, shock, disturbance is not an easy urban narrative; instead, they settle the conditions of power to produce urban practices as the spatialization of radicality.

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