The Street As a Living Space

Ugo Rossi[1]

He who is unable to live in society, or who has no need
because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a
beast or a god: he is no part of a state.
Aristotele

Abstract: The crisis of the public space in the 'modern' city has a history that goes a long way back, and such crisis is intrinsic to the mutation itself of the city and to the practice of planning of the modern city, which does not in fact, build any public space on the outside of a building. Little to nothing is elaborated to produce spaces of communal gathering which could be compared, even vaguely so, to the ancient agorà.
In recent history, dwellings keep on being the main topic subjected to transformation and experimentation, while the considerations on the outdoor space as instrument aimed to organize social life are still very few.
Amongst the numerous researches only few are addressed to the potential influence that open space could have in organizational terms, and on the relationships that it could generate, like the one that the Austrian architect, Bernard Rudofsky, will develop.
The motive that associates the series of exhibitions presented and curated by Rudofsky at MoMA in New York is the proposition of the street as a collective place. Rudofsky's works, research and exhibitions anticipate the awkwardness of the contemporary urban landscape, which generally excludes life outside the buildings, starting a process in which, paradoxically, contemporary city architecture is more and more a private business which belongs to the client and the architect who is not anymore responsible towards everybody. Rudofsky, by introducing a vast repertoire of communal spaces, like streets, arcades, lodges, stairwells, puts together a catalogue of possibilities and demonstrates in what measure and how such elements of construction of the city could have a fundamental role in the living space.

Keywords: Arcades, Bernard Rudofsky, *Charte d'Atène*, CIAM, Community, Jane Jacobs, Privacy, Serge Chermayeff, Streets.

The history of the crisis of public space in the 'modern' city is an 'ancient' one. it is a crisis intrinsic to the mutation of the city itself and to the practice of planning of the modern city, which does not in fact, build any public space outside of a building. The planning of the Parisian

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squares, ordered by Napoleon III, belong to the *Ancient Régime*, to the actual past of the pre-modern city.

The city in its 'making' (Reps, 1965), at the end of the nineteenth century, operated to find a solution to its own problems, using layout devices, in order to reduce road traffic, and in quantitative terms,to build offices, houses and industrial areas. If we look to America, where the city is almost entirely settled on new foundations, we find a city built on the representative edifice of a capitalist society – the skyscraper – where public space – viewed as non-productive – is eluded. It was not by chance that on the grid of streets, which shaped the city itself, undeveloped areas were almost completely saturated by public buildings and the only communal space was to be found inside the buildings themselves – the Hall or the Foyer – more often than not converted into a shopping mall. From here the love for Department Stores, and in Europe for the *Passages* (Benjamin, 1982) – a unique opportunity to move on foot, avoiding the street which ultimately and literally became a fast track lane for traffic and danger.

During the era of modernisation and the 'progression' of the modernist movements, the issues at the core of debate remain those pertaining to questions of living, planning and organising the development of the city. Amongst the many solutions put forward in the history of such phenomenon, those lingering to the present day derive on the one hand from the nineteenth century legacy of rules and regulations regarding sanitation and public order, and on the other from the resolutions of the CIAM conferences held between the two wars[2]. The CIAM II in Frankfurt (1929) focused on the *Existenzminimum*, while the CIAM III in Brussels (1930) explored "tall, regular or low houses?" (Gropius, 1931). The rules defined in Athens by the fourth CIAM (1933), Zoning and the matrix Housing–Spare Time-Work-Roads of the *Athens Charter* (Le Corbusier, 1943), govern the directions taken by housing and city construction in general.

It is no exageration to state that the solutions imagined for such

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2. Also undeniable is the influence on the process of urban transformation of such utopian theories as the Phalanstery or the Garden-City. Even though they are born of an escape from the city; as a matter of fact, the outcomes of these alternatives are not very different from those reached by the CIAM; both contribute to a city made of collective buildings and single family houses surrounded by nature and vegetation. See Jacobs, 1961..

topics, established at the CIAM during the 1930s, became so consolidated and widespread that current practices everywhere, to this day, reflect those indications and derive from these standards.

The spreading and sharing of this kind of approach have never been immunefrom objections and, above all after the Second World War, the need to change ways emerged forcefully. In 1959, the subversive *Team X* declared at CIAM XI in Otterlo the end of modernism as mechanical industrial development and focused on the concept of the ordinary-standard man, opposing the architecture codified by the CIAM conferences between the wars. Going against western civilization, unable to draw from mechanisation and progress the kind of happiness of which it should have been the bestowing agent to renovate and redeem the West and provide answers to instances of comfort and community. *Team X* produced researches on primeval civilisations and examples of informal architecture, for example Aldo van Eyck's work on the *Casbah Organisée* and the *Dogon* (Eyck, 1959; 1960), the collective housing of the *Cluster* (Smithson, 1957) and the *Mat Building* (Smithson, 1974). Other examples include the *Nid D'Abeille* by the ATBAT group, comprised ofGeorges Candilis, Shadrach Woods and Vladimir Bodianski (Candilis, 1954) and the 1956 *Terraced Crescent Housing* by Peter and Alison Smithson.

We are dealing with experimental proposals, often inadequate or unable to impose themselves as new devices for confronting the inertia of contemporary instruments, even more so still uniquely addressed to the edifice, despite contemplating a 'dilated' idea of the urban environment. Little to nothing was elaborated to produce spaces of communal gathering which could be compared, even vaguely, to the ancient agorà.

The urban ideas derived from the *Athens Charter,* in other words the ideas of Le Corbusier, are still operative nowadays, even though, as noticed by Jane Jacobs (Jacobs, 1958, 1960) they do not, as a matter of fact, build the city, but instead realise an alternative one. In reality, according to Jacobs, Le Corbusier developed a city constructed essentially of skyscrapers in a park, the *Ville Radieuse*. As Le Corbusier himself described it:

«Suppose we are entering the city by way of the Great Park [...]. Our fast
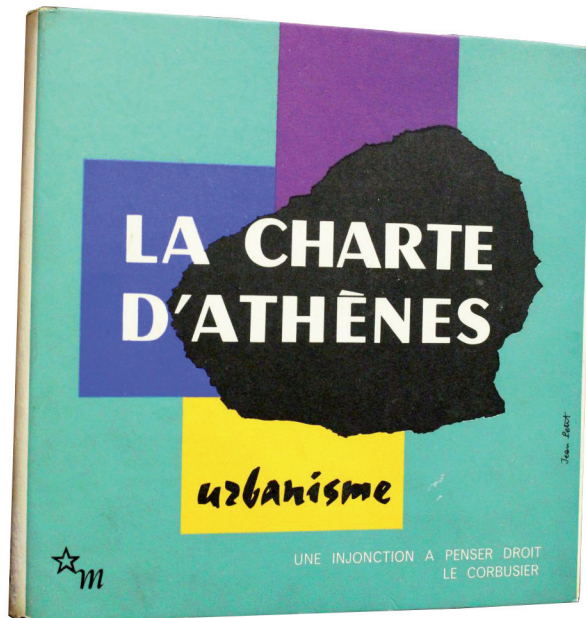
Le Corbusier, La Charte d'Athènes, Paris 1943, Cover
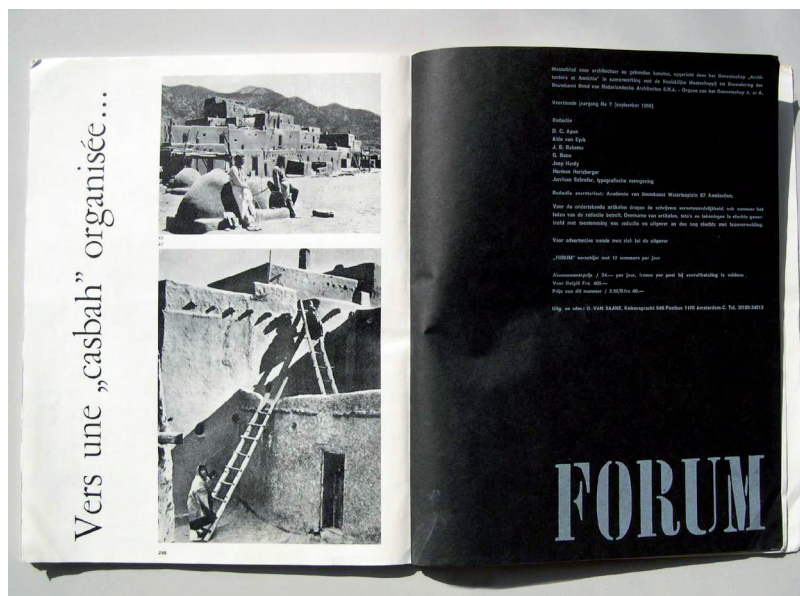
Aldo van Eyck, Vers Une Casbah organise, Forum 1959, pages 248-249

car takes the special elevated motor track between the majestic skyscrapers: as we approach nearer, there is seen the repetition against the sky of the twenty-four skyscrapers; to our left and right on the outskirts of each particular area are the municipal and administrative buildings; and enclosing the space are the museums and university buildings. The whole city is a Park (Le Corbusier, 1923)».

Jacobs, 'criticised' the practicality of the parameters employed by this type of urban planning methodology and disputed the results of planning through Zoning,which produces isolated buildings sitting in empty spaces. "They will have all the attributes of a well-kept, dignified urban cemetery […] in majestic isolation" (Jacobs, 1958, p. 157), contrasting them with local high streets and neighbourhood customs as social instruments able to influence the human habitat[3].

In the early 1960s, in the United States, the road became a central issue in terms of interests and studies. The research activities and collaboration between the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Harvard University, focused on the study of urban problems, led to the foundation of the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (IAUSP). An institution that, with the series *Joint Center for Urban Studies*, would publish a number of important books devoted to the road and the city: The Image of the City and The View from the Road by Kevin Lynch (1961; 1964), *Community and Privacy. Toward a New Architecture of Humanism* di Serge Chermayeff and Christopher Alexander (1964) and *On Streets*, edited by Stanford Anderson (1978). In *The View from the Road*, Lynch examines the road as a visual experience to investigate the consequences between form, function and image. The anthology *On Streets* collects the results of the studies begun in 1970 by a heterogeneous group of researchers[4], examining the semantic, structural, historical and social aspects of the street and interpreting it in terms of public space in the contemporary city rather than in terms of flux and traffic (Anderson, 1978, p. 5). *On Streets* "once more places before us questions about

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3. From 1952 to 1962 Jacobs works for *Architectural Forum*; in those years, she developed her own critique regarding the projects of Urban Renewal, which will lead her to write *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (Jacobs, 1961).

4. Writings by: D. Agrest, S. Anderson, V. Caliandro, T. Czarnowski, P. Eisenmann, W. Ellis, K. Frampton, R. Guttman, G. Levitas, J. Mangel, V. Moore, J. Rykwert, T. Schumacher, A. Vidler, G. Winkel, P. Wolf.
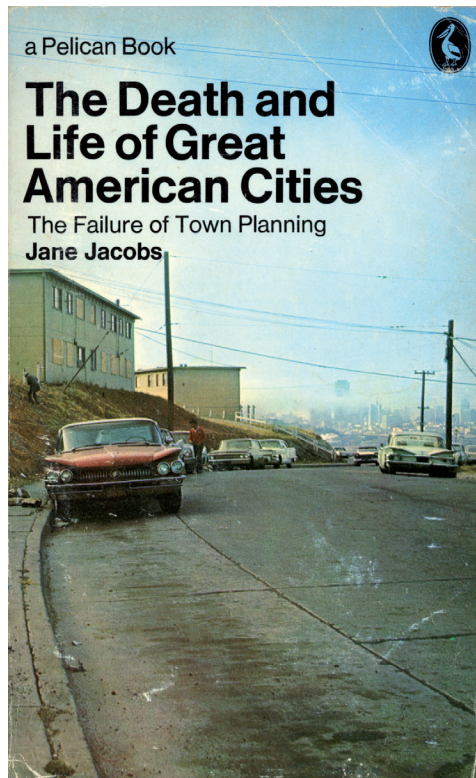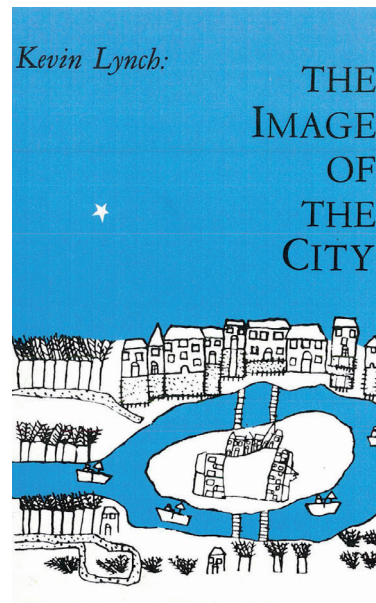
Jane Jacobs, The Death and Life of Great American Cities, New York 1961, Cover
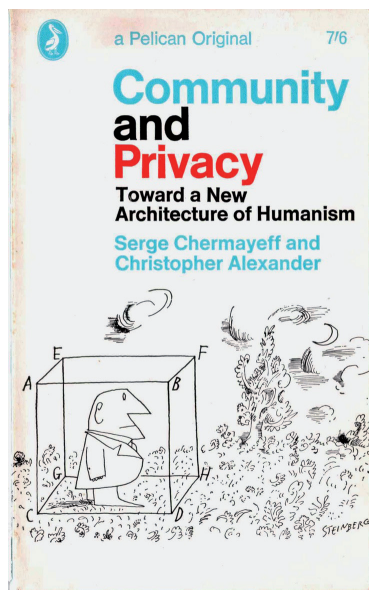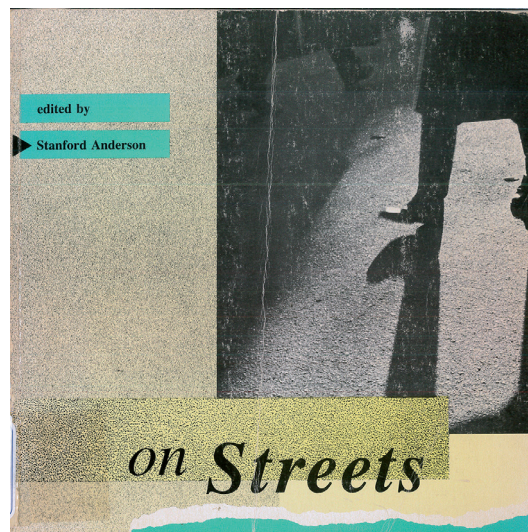
Kevin Lynch, The Image of the City, Cambridge, 1960, Cover

Serge Chermayeff & Christopher Alexander, Community and privacy. Toward a new architecture of humanism, New York, 1964, Cover
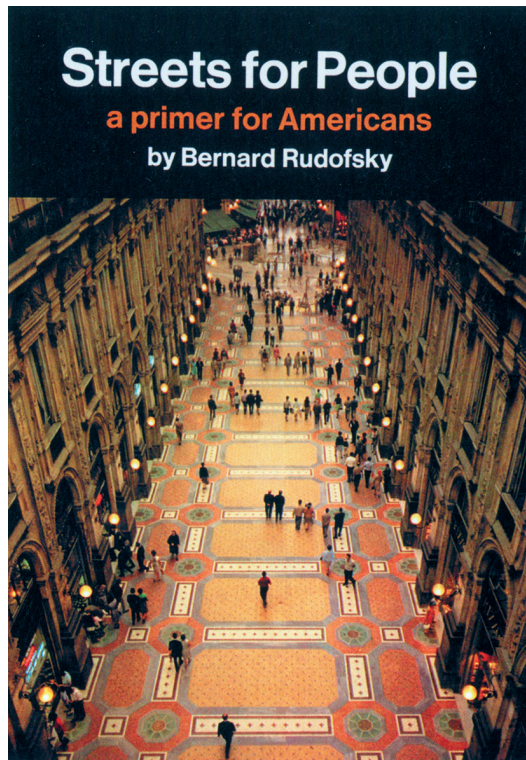
Bernard Rudofsky, Streets for People,
New York 1969, Cover

Stanford Anderson, On Streets,
Cambridge-London, 1978, Cover

[...] the appropriate architectural responses that would be equivalent to the successes of the past" (Simmons, 1981). In turn, Serge Chermayeff and Christopher Alexander investigated the relationship between the actual structure of the city and its influence on its inhabitants, with the goal of building a sort of ecology of humanity through the recognition of elements that constitute the contemporary city with regard to the individual's needs.

In his review of the book by Chermayeff and Alexander, published in Domus (Rudofsky, 1964a), the Austrian architect, curator and essayist Bernard Rudofsky[5] throws light on the proposal advanced by the authors, regarding a different possible form of analysis of living in general, able to develop a form of architecture at the human scale. The core issues are the privacy of the dwelling and the definite separation between public and private space, where the street, uniquely referring to the automobile and not intended as a space of relation, represents the main enemy. The authors assert that restoring the actual conditions that allow for privacy would make it possible to heal the world of mass culture, indicating the patio house as the ideal urban dwelling for the salvation of the American masses. Rudofsky had been designing and passionately studying this housing typology since the 30s. Opposing the idea of the 'machine for living in' and the mechanic reductionism of form-function, he proposed the house as a fenced garden – identifying open space as an element of architecture – declaring "we don't need a new construction, but a new way of living" (Rudofsky, 1938). However, the precise planning solutions for single homes and collective housing – which did not produce any real change in planning processes nor, for that matter, any alterations, perhaps with a few marginal exceptions, to social issues of dwelling– were not followed by any rational consideration on the necessity for the city to be simultaneously a collective and a social space. In recent history, housing remainsthe principal object of transformation

5. Bernard Rudofsky was born in 1905 in Zauchtl, currently the Czech Republic. In 1906 he moved to Vienna to study. He acquired his diploma in 1928 at the Technische Hochschule. In 1931 he acquired his Ph.D. on the barrel vaulted houses of the Cycladic islands. In his formative years he travelled a great deal throughout Europe and the Middle East. In 1932 he settled in Italy where he worked with Luigi Cosenza and Gio Ponti. In 1938, due to the Austrian Anscluss into the Third *Reich*, he fled Europe and sought refuge in Argentina and Brazil. In 1941, following the prize that he was awarded in a competition promoted by the MoMA he travelled to New York, where he would remain.

and experimentation, while considerations of outdoor space as a tool for organising social life are still few and far between.

Despite a large body of research, few deal with the potential organizational influence that open space and the relationships it could generate, similar to that which Rudofsky would develop during his time in America. Rudofsky stated, in particular with the exhibitions proposed and presented at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA), that truly unique collective space is found outside of buildings. Hence, moving beyond the specific housing solutions, the 'street' can represent an opportunity for experimenting with a different practice of defining the home and the ecity. By establishing a relationship between housing and the city it is possible to make a fresh start from the street, seen as a driving force toward collective living, concentrating on the real effects of architecture and not on inadequate abstract indicators.

The lietmotif of the series of exhibitions presented and curated by Rudofsky at the MoMA in New York is the proposal of the street as a collective space, as "the real utopia of a street for pedestrians" (Drexler & Rudofsky, 1961). The original programme included *Roads* (1961), *Stairs* (1963), *Architecture Without Architects* (AWA 1964) and *Streets, Arcades and Galleries* (1967), later cancelled.
The exhibitions are part of a much larger and more articulated project with the objective of presenting, as an alternative to the usual interpretation of the street as a place of transit, an idea of the street as a collective space where "the car is not considered a spiritual mother" (Drexler & Rudofsky, 1961).

The concept of inhabitable outdoor space is already present in Rudofsky's early projects, developed in the 1930s, where the patio and the garden are not just living environments for day to day use, like the indoor spaces of the house, but rather they are the house itself. The ideal reference points are courtyard houses, in Rudofsky's mind only in a *hortus conclusus* is it possible to enjoy direct contact with the natural elements – sun, air,water, vegetation – while remaining in a private place. His lack of interest in isolated buildings and the house as a work of art descends from the lesson pf Adolf Loos: architecture is not like art, "responsible towards nobody" – a private business regarding the client and the architect – "rather it is responsible towards everybody" (Loos, 1931,

p. 101).

Similarly, when Rudofsky confrontedthe metropolitan dimension, he strategically selected thosearchitectural elements that would contribute to achieving the utopia of a street to be inhabited. If in *Roads* he shows highways, motorways, junctions, street-buildings, building-streets, to reveal the impact of such structures on the city, in the exhibition *Stairs* he indicated - as possible factors of social appropriation and the construction of the spaces of the city spaces and the street – stairs and ramps intended as elements of design in their most complex of meanings:

«Stairs have, of course, other uses than just a climb. To this day the amphitheaters of antiquity and the vast stairscapes of the Old World are ideal gathering places [...]. Such stairs are not merely accessories to buildings but a sort of germinating ingredient – the leaven in the architectural dough» (Rudofsky, 1964c, p. 79).

With *Architecture Without Architects* (AWA) Rudofsky intended to extend the confines of knowledge and the interest of the world of architecture, emphasising how it is much vaster than that which is traditionally known, studied and considered by historians and architects themselves. He also states that some of the best examples of architecture were produced by 'ignorant' builders, lacking any education or theoretical foundation. Rudofsky does not hesitate to consider such examples to show the public, and architects, just how vast and open the lesson offered by uneducated builders can be:

«For instance, it simply never occurs to us to make streets into oases rather than deserts. In countries where their function has not yet deteriorated into highways and parking lots, a number of arrangements make streets fit for Humans» (Rudofsky, 1964b).

The expedients mentioend by Rudofsky are the topic of *Streets, Arcades and Galleries*. Depsite having been cancelled, the issues and research material propaedeutic to the exhibition would find their way into the book *Streets for People*, "dedicated to the unknown pedestrian" (Rudofsky, 1969a, p. V), which is a compendium, a detailed analysis and an

epilogue of the exhibitions *Roads*, *Stairs*, and *AWA*.

In *Streets for People* Rudofsky confronts the differences between the streets of the European city and those ones of its American counterpart, the latter planned to maximise private profits, with scarce attention toward public space, often little more than the allocation of leftover spaces between unbuilt plots. His interest was directed toward:

«the great outdoors, the pedestrian street, and the people one meets there. The subject is alien, to say the least, and so far has had little application in this country where the streets are roads» (Rudofsky, 1969a, p.1).

The book echoes the lesson learnt in his youth, during his travels through the cities and small villages of Italy. The words written in 1939 by Edwin Cerio, an author Rudofsky describes as a "researcher in the field of architecture and a poet" (Rudofsky, 1934), confirm the influence of the time spent in Capri:

«Capri's square [was] just the lounge of the islanders […] after the eight o'clock mass, the Square assumed its true aspect of center of the village […] and the town's activities started to bring about their full swing. Factions took their positions [some at the] *Caffé dei Due Mondi* […] some at *Vermouth di Torino* […], the less affluent would gather around the '*Pietra del Paese*' (village stone), and commoners occupied the church's steps. Therefore representatives of the whole population gathered in the Square, like the people's parliament of an ideal Republic» (Cerio, 1939).

The inconvenience determined by modern roads emerges from the confrontation with the comfortable streets and porticos of Bologna, the *Via degli Asini in Brisighella*, the *Galleria Vittorio Emanuele* in Milan, the North African, described by travellers as 'impenetrable', 'enigmatic' and 'totally foreign', yet "Even all unguided visitors, however, may find them eminently penetrable and no more enigmatic than supermarkets" (Rudofsky, 1969b, p. 84).

Rudofsky, in describing the elements that constitute the street – porches, stairs, arcades, curtains, fountains – builds a list of references and sets up the book in terms of juxtapositions, in a sort of comparative

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analysis between what is to be shared and what is to be stigmatised. The critical tension is well described by John Maas (1969) in his review:

«The reader is then introduced to a new world of urban delights in a dozen countries. Some of the examples are famous cities [...] others are real discoveries […] There are the pleasures of walking under porticoes, of promenading on the ramparts, of ascending and descending flights of stairs, of gathering at the fountain.
To the Italians, the street is […] still the scene of the religious procession, the flirtatious 'corso', the sidewalk cafe, the itinerant storyteller, the morning market, the ambulant vendor. Some of these experiences were never common in the U.S., and most have vanished from our city streets; the commercialized Thanksgiving parade is one of the few survivals».

Rudofsky's works, research and exhibitions anticipate the awkwardness of the contemporary urban landscape, which generally excludes life outside buildings, giving rise to a process in which, paradoxically, the architecture of the contemporary city tends more and more to be a private business which belongs to the client and the architect, no longer responsible toward everybody. By introducing a vast repertoire of communal spaces, like streets, arcades, loggias and stairs, Rudofsky organises a catalogue of possibilities and demonstrates in what measure and how such elements of construction of the city could have a fundamental role in public space.
Nowadays, this starting point has most probably been compromised. Although it could still represent a useful tool for operatively addressing places generally not considered as themes for the design of public space. It is an operative lesson for proceeding and building the spaces of the city, which are not only grandiose, self-contained and isolated consturctions, but also spaces for the community ,which should be the utliamte aim of the city.

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The Open Conflict Space
Survival Strategies for the Contemporary Mediterranean Town

Veronica Salomone[1]

Abstract: The so-called *Arab Spring* has conquered the main Mediterranean towns squares turning on unpredictable and intricate decolonization processes necessarily involving and upsetting local and global economies. Nomadic and informal ways of living overcome the colonial patterns by shaping brand new networks inside huge or tiny situations. Planning, by itself, can't give no more answers: the open conflict space, as a survival condition, becomes the sole available strategy able to set up again the Mediterranean context.

A new sight is needed for the link between two scales defines the open conflict space in which strategy becomes project. The geographic scale allows a study on the geo-political southern Mediterranean cities upheavals and the borderline condition, although territory marking gives it back its significance; the architectural scale, instead, arranges the open space borders by setting up town's ownership and management that are useful to the project.

The protests involving a large part of northern Africa, albeit through different circumstances and features, have given back squares an iconic value, since then too much stifled by regimes repression: from Tunisia to Syria, from Libya to Bahrein, from Egypt to Turkey.

The survey shows up the urban changes through these spaces complexities and deep meanings.

Keywords: conflict, revolt, informal, misunderstanding, town into town

Intro

Why do we take over those urban spaces? Is that choice led just by those *urban voids* dimension? How can *monumentality* affect a restoration project designation? Do we need some deeper reason to find in native, colonial, post-colonial and global urban development? Which is responsible for affecting changes in protest/consensus scenarios? Public imagery places or those bound to everyday life, where time is unbroken and rarified? Do changes, by turning on dynamic and diverse pulses, depend on different stories?

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In Egypt, *Tahrir Square* has become such a token for the *Revolution* it has been quoted by other popular movements like *15 Mayo* or *Occupy Wall Street* along with catchwords such as "We are all Tahrir". The occupation of the square transforms the open space, giving birth to the "the town inside the town": codes and rules are broken; there's a shift from the open conflict space to the shared one. By thinking of the square as a gateway, protesters are given back forbidden spaces, all through the 23 streets leading to *Tahrir Square* and the social networks.

Causes are to be searched mostly in a strongly privatized urban planning and in a lack of suitable open spaces that fosters social classes inequalities.
Open space becomes strategy, then, for it is a shifting space inside the city parts. An open space network project could get a survival strategy turning a conflict space into change for the contemporary Mediterranean town.

Revolting Mediterranean

«[…] A new Middle East is shaping, a new political architecture is molding. […]. We are used to the stereotypes by which we've always looked the world at, and now we'll be forced to build up again a new view. Let's hope consequences will be a chance for improving rather than for segregations and tensions»[2]. This is how the latest work by professor Franco Rizzi about the North Africa and Middle East situation the *day after* decolonization ends up. As it's not possible to compare the uprisings occurred in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Bahrein and Turkey, we are forced to think about ongoing changes complexities and about the role the protest space is given towards the transformations involving the cities. «Conquest, the common spaces usage and urban open goods are thus a constant clash output»[3]. The Mediterranean is uprising and occupying squares just to give the open space back that sharing and political confrontation role regimes have smothered so far. The *Right to the city* is claimed, as defined by Lefe-

2. Rizzi 2011.
3. Harvey 2013.

Cairo, satellite image of Tahrir Square and Egyptian Museum area (source Google maps).
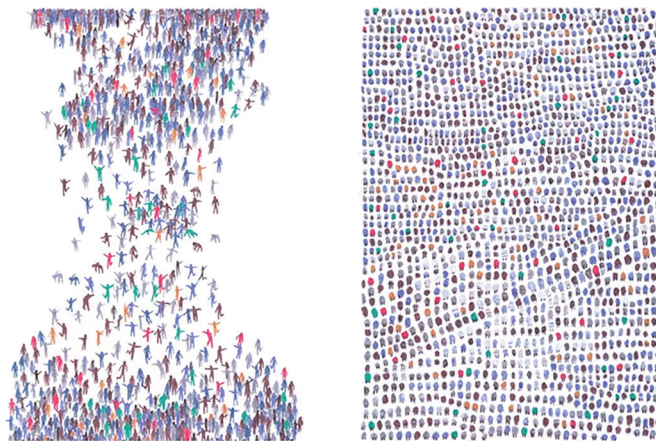
"Cairo", artwork of R. Carcangiu, 2011.

"No Walls Street", graffiti on the concrete blocks placed by soldiers on the streets of Cairo's downtown, 2012 (ph. N. NASSER /AP).

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bvre[4]. As David Harvey states in *Rebel Cities*: «Is a city (or a city system) just a passive place, the scenario (or the existing network) in which deeper political struggles end up meeting and showing up? Well, at a first glance it seems it does. But it's clear, as well, that some urban environment typical feature is keener on protesters' action than others»[5].

What are those features about? Which strategy is able to amend them?

The vague as a survival strategy

Matching a border suitable to some complex geometry can turn an undefined border into a flexible fence, which is able to get together different areas. Limiting a vague space is quite hard: it's all about transition, integration, vitality and *misunderstanding*.

Franco La Cecla writes about the undefined space *misunderstanding*: «The misunderstanding is the border shaping itself. It becomes a terrain vague, where identity, mutual identity, can be acknowledged. [...]»[6]. The meeting between different ethnic, social and political groups in these spaces does increase its following iconic and utopist value. The «dream and free wandering spaces»[7] of the Arab Spring Squares develop into open space strategy rebirth through the vague, temporary and mobilization practice. Absorbing the uprising space engenders some view and place diversity that reacts against the space limitations (created by safety systems). «What the word *raum*, space, is about is told by its old meaning. *Raum* means a place set free for settlers or a campsite. A *raum* is something cleared, freed within certain limits, called *péras* in Greek. The limit is not an ending point but, as acknowledged by the Greek, a starting point for its essence. That's why the main concept is called *horismos*, limit. Space is something basically cleared and bound within its limits. What is cleared gets gradually arranged and laid, still collected from a place, something like a bridge. As a result, spaces get their essence not from "space" itself,

4. Lefebvre 1972.
5. Harvey 2013.
6. La Cecla 2011.
7. Gracq 2001.

but rather from places»[8].

Designing the open space conflict: self-governance and symbolism in Tahrir Square

«Social movements belong to people and not to communication tools and technologies. Facebook, like cell phones, the Internet, and twitter, do not have agency, a moral universe, and are not predisposed to any particular ideological or political orientation. They are what people make of them»[9].

The 25th January 2011 uprising led several scholars and politicians to re-evaluate the social network's and the general Internet importance to the protests success. From 1990 Internet is an ever growing political forum, far away from the straight government prohibition (although it still leads continuous control and censorship policies)[10]. The Internet insight shifts from 0,7% in 2000 to 32,6% in 2011[11], by contributing to the *smart mobs*[12] creation as Howard Rheingold calls it. Delphine Pagés-El Karoui and Leila Vignal quoted on EchoGéo: «La pénétration de ces nouvelles technologies est récente et rapide en Égypte. En ce qui concerne Internet, une décennie a suffit pour faire passer les chiffres d'usagers de 450 000 en 2000 à 23,5 millions en janvier 2011, soit un taux de pénétration de 30 % de la population totale. Facebook comptait 6,8 millions d'utilisateurs en avril 2011 – dont 70 % de jeunes –, chiffre en très forte hausse depuis le début de l'année (ils n'étaient que 4,5 millions fin décembre). La chaîne satellitaire *Al-Jazira*, très regardée en Égypte, a été la première à diffuser des films réalisés sur des portables qui circulaient déjà sur le web, sa couverture de la révolution égyptienne étant clairement pro-manifestants. Plus massif encore, du fait de l'investissement financier et du niveau de formation moindres qu'elle nécessite, est le succès de la téléphonie mobile qui est venu compenser la mauvaise couverture de téléphonie fixe : en janvier 2011, on comptait 71 millions d'abonnements (taux

8. Heidegger 1976.

9. Linda Herrera, *Egypt's Revolution 2.0: The Facebook Factor*, in Haddad, Bsheer, Abu-Rish 2012.

10. Nur 2013.

11. Salama 2013.

12. Rheingold 2003.

de pénétration de plus de 90 % de la population, contre 12 % pour les lignes fixes)»[13].

There's no doubt Internet made its role on riots involving the *Arab Spring* squares, but with no physical place there can't be any revolution.

Tahrir Square is situated in the middle of the *Great Cairo* and west to the colonial city, it is accessible from 23 streets (amongst the main ones *Tahrir Via* and *Kasr Al Aini*) and two bridges. It has got an uneven shape defined from south by the *Mogamaa al Tahrir* neighbourhood and from north by the *Abd El Moneim Riad* zone. A meaningful void sneaking through the close historical centre and the agglomeration, between the narrow alleys of the Medieval Cairo and the informal neighbourhoods. Coerced by Mubarak government to get a mobility and transit function, the square is seen by the *Cairenes* as the centre of the town.

After the 1981 state of emergency law, the open space management has been limited and controlled in the whole town for decades and it's more and more referred to the *Melk el hokooma* term which means 'government property'[14]. The gathering of more than five people would mean a public security threat and a penal sanction for transgressors. This lead Egyptians to change their habits and the open space living ways: they haunt bridges, streets, sidewalks in a social way. On night time the mobility space leaves the place to collective activities which are to be removed the next day. Thus, the government interferes in the open space usage, by stirring up informality and allowing sharing places, such as mosques, baths and gardens to strip down. They are absorbed in the close urban building fabric and they lose their importance. The revolution has given back its shared places by setting back a strategic system for the open space.

The *Omar Makram* Mosque has retrieved its political and ideological mediation fundamental role as well as other buildings and minor places.

But, what does this strategy consist of? Which are its crucial features?

13. Pagès-El Karoui, Vignal 2011.
14. Salama 2013.

Tali Hatuka, an architect and professor from the *Tel Aviv University's Laboratory of Contemporary Urban Design*, stated in an interview «As the recent events in Cairo suggest, a protest space doesn't have to be nice or well-designed. A large-scale protest like this has shown that people will just hijack the streets and the roads. Public spaces are the only place in which people feel truly, physically unified. With so many protests going online, the physical element is critical for enhancing society's sense of togetherness and solidarity»[15]. She focuses on people using non necessarily designed spaces. In her survey, Hatuka questions herself on the main factors that fix on a protest planning. In an article of her issued on *Metropolitiques* she writes: «The fundamental decision underlying the design of any protest concerns the spatial interaction among participants and its symbolic meaning. This decision is crucial in intensifying the solidarity among participants»[16]. The spatial interaction the author is talking about doesn't necessarily need a tidy arrangement. Sketchiness creates a seeming chaos but, at the same time, engenders an eclectic, hierarchic and flexible frame able to hold together different groups, each by its own leadership. Dimension doesn't affect the protest space plan because the right *measure* is to be sought in the *distance* the event is perceived in. Globalisation and the power of media are now concerned. Purposely, it's useful to remind a picture taken by Yolande Knell from *BBC* during the riot days in Cairo[17]. The protesters' gathering is linked to an interactive system spotting on the miscellaneous thematic groups in the square. It deals with *auto-governance*, as shown by Costanza La Mantia in an interview released on *Domus*, a complex cooperative framework, an often pictured "town into town"[18].

If the uprising success depends on the temporary occupied space arrangement, causes are to be searched in the square shape itself and its symbolic value.
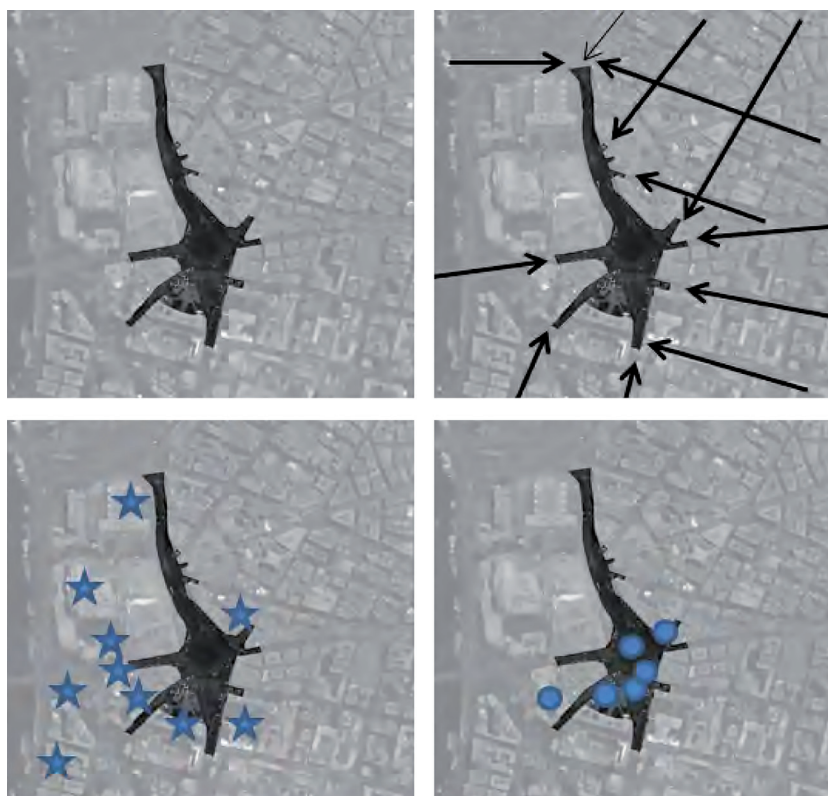
«The recent revolution in Cairo has made Tahrir Square a household name. No one, not even a historian who has written a book

15. Hatuka, Baycan 2011.

16. Hatuka, Baycan 2011.

17. See: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-12434787

18. Palumbo 2012.

Figure, accesses, references and nodes of Tahrir Square during the protest. Analysis by Hussam Hussein Salama.

Tahrir Square in the "interactive' image by Yolande Knell (BBC) during the protest, 2011.

on the city, could have imagined that this aptly named public space would nurture a spark that would set the entire Middle East ablaze»[19].

Tahrir Square, *Liberation* in Arabic, got this name only after the Egypt breakout from the British army in 1952. The square was a swamp in the desert and under the Napoleonic occupation was used as a camp for the French army after that a Nile containing system made it dry. Ismail had the square being involved in a Haussmann Paris inspired urban project, albeit carried out quite differently. The designed suburb had its name after *Ismail*, as well as the inner square. Only after the Egyptian Museum construction on the north-western side, the space got to get its shape. In 1946 yet became a riot scene and in 1952, after severe building destruction because of a huge fire, Nasser expelled the British from Cairo: *Ismail* became *Tahrir*[20]. According to Egyptian historian Nezar AlSayyad, the square gained its name only after the 25th January 2011 uprising. «Tahrir Square got its name by a presidential decree in 1955. It was supposed to be a sign of Egypt's liberation from the British-who actually left in the 20s-and also from the monarchy of King Farouk. Actually in Tahrir Square there is a large pedestal that was put in place in the time of King Farouk that was supposed to have a statue of him on top. But it never got built and power changed hands so President Nasser decided to keep the pedestal with nothing on it as a reminder of the failure of the Egyptian monarchy. But honestly it's not really clear to me what liberation the presidential decree was recognizing. In my opinion Tahrir Square didn't earn its name until January 25th, 2011»[21]. The lack of symbolic spots in town allowed the Egyptian to ransom, through protest, that lost meaningful role the square had and that was lost under the Nasser and the latter Mubarak rule. The square, made of an ensemble of spaces and close to the most iconic poignant elements, it never ceased being a clash and quarrel scenario. The spatial patterns and views that set and cross the square give it an additional value of freedom. «L'une des leçons largement oubliée de la révolution égyptienne serait peut-être celle-ci: alors que l'on célèbre les cyber-révolutions arabes et la victoire de l'espace
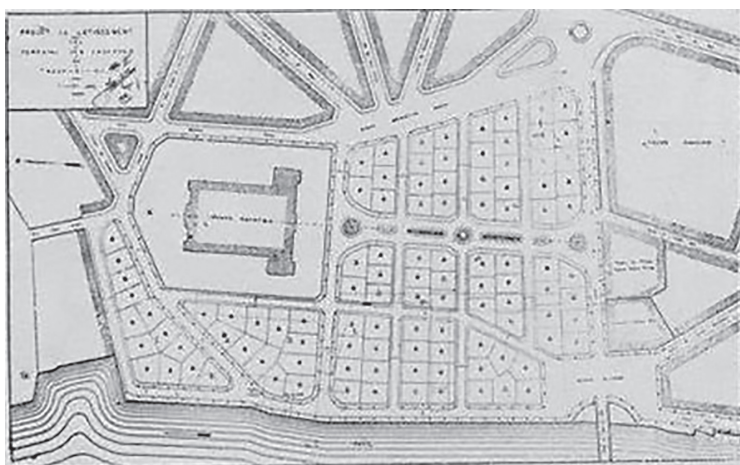
19. Alsayyad 2013.
20. Alsayyad 2013.
21. Alsayyad 2013.
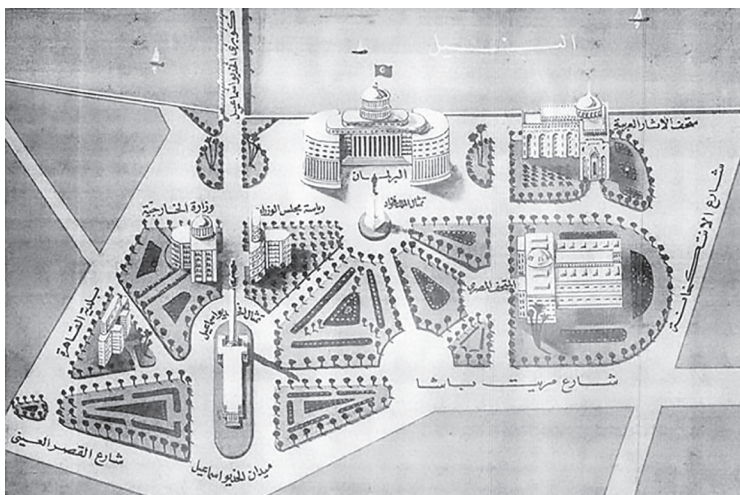
Cairo, the Square and Gardens in the plan by Arch. Muhammad Dhul-Faqqar Bek, 1947.

Cairo, perspective of Tahrir Square towards Egyptian Museum in the 1904 project.

Cairo, plan of Tahrir Square in the 1904 project.

virtuel sur la tyrannie, l'appropriation de l'espace physique et concret des lieux centraux et symboliques de l'histoire des peuples est toujours aussi nécessaire pour combattre l'oppression et fonder une société nouvelle. Dans l'ère inaugurée par le printemps arabe, la géographie a de beaux jours devant elle […]»[22].

Project Vs Informal: projects and contests

«There is this air of uncertainty that is surrounding us all […]. There is a fear of losing control of the square in general, that a competition would be structured the way it was during the old regime. We think we have some solutions to that»[23]. Following the 2011 riots, proposals for a protests' casualties monument were made. Amr Abdel Kawi, one of the *Al Tahrir Competition* and the design magazine *Magaz Magazine* co-founder, expresses his doubtful and concern feelings. The contest was advocated by several organizations such as the Cairo Governor or the *Sawiris Foundation for Social Development*. It took seven months before the Egyptian government decided to let the public opinion participate. Nasser Rabbat, Islamic Architecture professor at the *Aga Khan University*, wonders about the need of a public contest for a place whose iconic value resides in its non-defined, non-designed, undone status: «If Egyptians value their ability to express their freedom, then maybe the creative chaos of the square might be its best asset»[24].

In article appeared on *Al Jazeera* on the 1st February 2011, it is stated: «The essence of Tahrir Square is very well put by an Egyptian writer, Samir Raafat. He wrote in the Cairo Times: "Maidan al-Tahrir cannot sit still. Whether reflecting the city's moods or the leadership's political agenda, the nation's most important plaza has gone from faux Champs de Mars to Stalinesque esplanade. Whenever a new regime feels the nation's capital needs a new look, the Maidan has been the place to start"»[25]. The iconic strength of the square leads regimes to rethink about it and shape it in their image. Nevertheless, a study by

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22. Pagès-El Karoui, Vignal 2011.
23. Interview to Amr Abdel Kawi in Hope 2011.
24. Interview to Nasser Rabbatin Hope 2011.
25. See in Sitography, Repertory 01.

a *Middle East Studies Department of New York University* student, Mohamed Elshahed , shows that no politician or designer succeeded to give the square an unique devise or iconic value: «Yet no one politician or architect has been able to lay claim over the design and symbolism of Tahrir Square, which remains as a collection of fragments from many failed or unfinished plans and urban fantasies»[26]. To corroborate his statements, Elshahed lists a number of undone projects for the square. Considerations came from an urban project made by Moussa Qattawi Pasha, an architect from the early XX century. He suggested the English barrack to be demolished, the Egyptian museum to be adapted and the *Ismail* neighbourhood to be completed. The designer seems to be not interested in restoring an open spaces network inside the colonial fabric. Funds were unavailable and the dispute about keeping or not the British building went on till 1947, when Muhammad Dhul – Faqqar Bek published a plan to redesign the *Qasr el- Nil* zone on the *al- Musawwar* newspaper. Only the Mogamma government building was made according to the designer aim. After the 1953 revolution, Sayed Karim suggested to tear down the Egyptian Museum only to build up a hotel replacing the former barrack. This plan was not accomplished either. *Tahrir Square*, once again, seems not to benefit from necessary circumstances for a formal planning. Informality redesigns living spaces and sets up again new and complex social management systems. «Egypt's first true popular revolution in 7,000 years is an opportunity for an architectural revolution that not only captures the moment and but also takes Tahrir into the future without repeating mistakes of the past»[27].

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