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August 13, 2013 | 100 URBAN TRENDS

100 Urban Trends: Temporary Architecture

BY MARINA OTERO VERZIER

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Tadashi Kawamata's Art Favela at Art Basel offers a recent example of the politics involved in temporary architecture. Video still: TagesWoche, *Polizei räumt Favelabesetzung auf dem Messeplatz*, 2013

In this *series of articles* based on the Lab's *100 Urban Trends* glossaries, our writers are focusing on "trends" that are meaningful to them, and sharing insights on urban issues that shape our lives. Today's trend: *Temporary Architecture*.

All architectures are temporal: they change over time, and are subject to continuous material transformations, circulatory processes, and shifting receptions and practices. And yet, some works seem less permanent—and, we might say, more compelling—than others. Installations, pavilions, and other interventions inscribed in the accelerated and inescapable dynamics of creation and destruction resonate with our images and expectations of innovation and constant flux. Today, recalling the practices of the 1960s and '70s, we are drawn by—as Archigram wrote about their Instant City—"the loveliness of the idea" of an architecture "appearing out of nowhere, and after the 'event' stage, lifting up its skirts and vanishing."

Temporary structures display a particular performative character and a disinterest in eternal life, which generates an apparent loss of all sense of monumentality. We see them landing, or blossoming, in public spaces without the need to follow the rules and regulations that generally apply to permanent constructions, and without the obligation to respond to the local socioeconomic and political conditions.

This type of architecture can hold a subversive and anti-system potential while, paradoxically, paraphrasing the material and spatial implications of finance capitalism in today's economy. The camps assembled by the Spanish Indignados in La Puerta del Sol in Madrid, the Occupy Wall Street movement in Zuccotti Park in New York in 2011, and the Gezi Park encampment in Istanbul in 2013 allowed the reappropriation of urban

space and rise of a collective voice expressing common concerns. At the same time, their temporary structures might recall the living conditions of millions of people around our globalized world, from homelessness and immigrant informal settlements to refugee camps; conditions in which spatial permanence and occupation are contingent on short-term commitments, precarious labor conditions, foreclosures, conflicts, or even warfare.

Whether it is serving the revolutionaries or existing as a parody of contemporary global crisis, temporary architecture echoes our dreams and uncertainties—and both last. Apparently impermanent structures, whose materiality is questioned through temporality—pushing the limits of architecture itself—leave a legacy of permanent transformation. So do itinerant constructions, summer pavilions, and pop-up structures, restlessly circulating in media, provoking experimentation and showing a speculative ability to find the sites of “opportunity.” These interventions become “permanent” without the need to remain in one place. This opens up new possibilities in understanding the relationship between architecture and site, and architecture and time, but also evidences architecture’s political implications and possibilities. Temporary architecture looks toward what is yet to come.

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