BLACK SWAN SPACES

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"Is it not the confrontation with the unexpected which makes the city such an exciting place?"[1]

Ecosystem Patterns

There is a long history of making parallels with nature in an urban context. These relations usually transfer the logic of nature into the built environment by copying aesthetic patterns or searching for semiotics. Vast amounts of utopist thought perceive the city as an organism, constantly finding metaphors and looking for better infrastructural features of modern urban conglomerations.

Efforts to examine the city through its performability are particularly common in the sphere of urban planners that "predict" urban development based on economic and demographic growth. These efforts often ignore spaces that have been arranged as a set of unpredictable situations and mutations in conventional urban development. Is it possible to read the city by using the powerful symbol of the "Black Swan" phenomena?

Black Swan Spaces are created outside of a planner's radar. They are unexpected, indeterminate, and have no official function or program. They are marginal territories, niches for resistance characters, destinations for those who refuse the totalitarian nature of planning and urban politics.

Black Swan Spaces, as black swans themselves, have their own aesthetic qualities—they are not simply spatial anomalies, especially when we look into their socio-political meaning. Ignored by elites and forgotten by citizens, those "more then gaps" in urban development generate new cultural values, unknown to common anthropological studies.

How and Why Do Black Swan Spaces Appear?

First of all, the inability of urban planners to quickly respond to processes such as stagnation or recession, demographic turbulence, new climate realities, and increasing armed conflicts, can be understood as a starting point for the configuration of Black Swan Spaces. Secondly, the current egocentric position of architects as central figures in building processes (near Pop stars, hence the emergence of the term "starchitect"), and the entirely different and difficult reality in which the role of the architect is marginalized and manipulated contribute to the growth of so-called architecture without architects. Finally, the human factor itself and behavior patterns developed from simple rules (like in John Conway's Game of Life) define models of urban evolution. These are spaces that have been born without being planned, spaces that die without a decision to demolish them, spaces that survive radical changes in their environment by adopting new rules.

Given that networks generate today's dominant organizational patterns, Black Swan Spaces exist in a state of tension. The transnational character of resistance contributes to this debate; grassroots activism and micro-politics went far beyond the concept of community gardens and materialize in entirely different cultural settings using the advantages of the blogosphere.

Not necessarily the product of urban failure, Black Swan Spaces should not be confused with ordinary shifts in an architectural program or space recycling concepts that turn post-industrial landscapes into clusters of knowledge production; their creation is unforeseen, has no clear scientific explanation, and involve a wide spectrum of factors.

1. Kenny Cupers and Markus Miessen, *Spaces of Uncertainty* (Wuppertal: Müller + Busmann, 2002).

THE ΔNXIOΞS PΓOP

Users as Indicators and Interplay Factors

Changes from public-private into restricted-neglected spatial relations generate new planning models that "destruct difference and contradiction in the name of preservation," and support social exclusion.[2] Typical users of Black Swan Spaces reject imposed architecture and initiate new programs that have no intention to be successful (in normative terms) or recognized by authorities. Going beyond survival strategies, new tenants also build sustainable communication systems and transfer these developments to new locations. They are not urban pioneers that simply bridge the holes in urban development, rather unknown heroes that repossess abandoned spaces and impose new socio-political values without coquetting with authorities.

Black Swan Spaces can also be transitional places for marginalized social groups (Fig. 1), places of informal economy (Fig. 2), or even places for illegal gatherings and entertainment (Fig. 3). What is obvious is that users serve as indicators of missing programs and urban polarization. Their micro-political statements in colonized spaces should be recognized by urban theorists not just as irregularities, rather as vital answers to urban uncertainty.

Furthermore, parallel to squatting strategies is the innovative nature of reclaiming, in which architecture acts as the scenography for the theater of everyday life. Different subcultures, marginalized society, and urban pirates bring voices of diversity into neglected territories, confronting the "banalization" of public life and the order of bureaucratic systems.

The appearance of Black Swan Spaces could be also understood as "poetic shock," reminding us that urban contradictions and paradoxes are equal part of the urban arena, right beside the planned city embedded in parameters and land-use policies. Dealing with the unexpected in urban areas, we also have to consider "individual logic of cities" where certain cultural and economic preconditions distinguish surprise.

As Black Swan Spaces are ephemeral and difficult to grasp, our only task is to interpret the messages that informal urban actors are throwing, without capitalizing on them for the sake of urban renewal and other forms of spatial control.
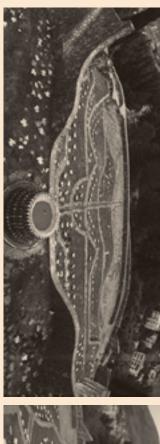

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

2. Cupers and Miessen, *Spaces of Uncertainty.*