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Table of contents/Sommario

Editorial/Editoriale	
Acupuncture and tactical urbanism in the regeneration of cities/ Agopuntura e urbanistica tatti- ca nella rigenerazione delle città Antonio ACIERNO	7
Introduction/Introduzione	
Artistic experiments of urban acupuncture/ <i>Esperimenti artictici di agopuntura urbana</i> Alessandra PAGLIANO	17
Papers/Interventi	
Residual Urban Spaces and new Communities of Social Practices/ Spazi urbani residuali e nuove	
comunità di pratiche sociali Paolo GALUZZI, Martina MAGNANI, Elena SOLERO, Piergiorgio Vitillo	31
Urban System Analysis Through Behavioural Perception: Case of A City in Global South/ Analisi del sistema urbano attraverso la percezione comportamentale: caso di una città nel sud globale Mainak GHOSH, Sayantani SAHA	51
Artistic experiments for small-scale actions and widespread purposes/ <i>Esperimenti artistici per</i> <i>interventi puntuali e azioni diffuse</i> <i>Anna Lisa PECORA</i>	75
The reprogramming of the city and the territory by the informal and small scale: the pavilions of Alexander Brodsky/ La riprogrammazione della città e il territorio dalla scala piccola e informale: i padiglioni di Alexander Brodsky Fernando MORAL-ANDRÉS, Elena MERINO GÓMEZ	89
Representation and Communication Strategies of the Urban Staging, between Visual and Perfor- ming Arts/ Strategie di rappresentazione e comunicazione della messa in scena urbana, tra arti visive e performative Massimiliano CIAMMAICHELLA, Gabriella LIVA	105
Anamorphic installations for urban metamorphosis/ Allestimenti anamorfici per metamorfosi urbane Greta ATTADEMO	119
Introduction to perceptions mapping: the case of Salerno, Italy/ Introduzione al perceptions mapping: il caso studio di Salerno, Italia Ruba SALEH, Christian OST	137
Sections/Rubriche	
Book reviews/Recensioni	163

Events, conferences, exhibitions/ Eventi, conferenze, mostre

167



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The reprogramming of the city and the territory by the informal and small scale: the pavilions of Alexander Brodsky*

Fernando Moral-Andrés, Elena Merino Gómez

Abstract

Alexander Brodsky is a Muscovite architect who has developed his activity on the border between his discipline and art. After having developed a remarkable career together with his partner Ilya Utkin in which they performed some of the most relevant works of the so-called Paper Architecture, he began an independent journey.

Within the whole of his work we will study six interventions that, sharing some resources, attend to different dynamics of urban and territorial transformation. The selected works are framed between 2001 and 2017 and their titles are as follows: 95th Restaurant, Ice Pavilion, "Cloud Café", Pavilion for Vodka Ceremonies, Rotunda and "101st km: Further and Everywhere" Pavilion. All of them, except the last one that was implanted in London, located in Russia.



All these interventions present a constructive precariousness and a programmed temporality that defines an ephemeral destiny. These pavilions refer us to different informal settlements that are located in the vicinity of Moscow and that, habitually, have been self-built by their users. Although, formally, they present similarities, from a functional point of view, we find substantial differences: a group of them seeks to meet simple needs of citizens who enjoy certain territories, almost-wild, and another materializes and satisfies experiences of transcendental order and iconic All of them have been able to reprogram certain contexts in a relevant way during periods limited in time.

KEYWORDS:

Alexander Brodsky, ciudad pública, reprogramar, precario, efímero

La riprogrammazione della città e il territorio dalla scala piccola e informale: i padiglioni di Alexander Brodsky*

Alexander Brodsky è un architetto moscovita che ha sviluppato la sua attività nelle frontiere tra la sua disciplina e l'arte. Dopo aver sviluppato un considerabile percorso assieme al suo collega Ilya Utkin, lungo il quale entrambi hanno realizzato alcuni tra le più rilevanti opere del cosiddetto Paper Architecture, lui ha cominciato un viaggio indipendente.

Nell'ambito del suo lavoro complessivo si studieranno sei interventi che, nel condividere alcune risorse, rispondono a differenti dinamiche di trasformazione urbana e territoriale. Le opere selezionate si inquadrano tra il 2001 e il 2017 e i loro titoli sono i seguenti: 95th Restaurant, Ice Pavilion, "Cloud Café", Pavilion for Vodka Ceremonies, Rotunda and "101st km: Further and Everywhere" Pavilion. Tutte, tranne l'ultima menzionata, costruita a Londra, sono in Russia.

Tutti questi interventi presentano una precarietà costruttiva e una temporalità programmata che definisce un destino efimero. Questi padiglioni ci rimandano verso diversi impianti informali situati nella vicinanza di Mosca e sono normalmente autocostruiti dagli utenti stessi. Anche se formalmente presentano delle similitudini da un punto di vista funzionale, si individuano differenze sostanziali: uno dei gruppi tenta di soddisfare le necessità basiche dei cittadini che usufruiscono certi territori, quasi selvaggi, e l'altro materializza e riempie esperienze dalla natura trascendentale e iconica. Tutti loro sono stati capaci de riprogrammare alcuni contesti in un modo rilevante durante periodi limitati nel tempo.

PAROLE CHIAVE:

Alexander Brodsky, città pubblica, riprogrammare, precario, effimero

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Fig. 1. Alexander Brodsky in his Moscow office (Source: http://petrflikr.petrantonov.com)

7. Moral-Andrés, E. Merino Gómez - The reprogramming of the city and the territory by the informal and small scale: the pavilions of Alexander Brodsky

The reprogramming of the city and the territory by the informal and small scale: the pavilions of Alexander Brodsky

Fernando Moral-Andrés, Elena Merino Gómez

Introduction

Alexander Brodsky is an architect who has developed a unique border trajectory between the work of his discipline and that of art. On this tour we must point out how

> he, in his beginnings, also wanted to be a painter, but eventually he would graduate in architecture in his hometown, Moscow.

> During the period between 1978 and 1993 he works jointly with Ilya Utkin. They produced some of the most relevant creations of the so-called Paper Architecture. Part of the graphic work of that period today is in key centers of contemporary art such as the Tate Modern in London.

> Also within this joint stage, his work for the "Opening Project" (VV.AA., 1992) convened by the Europees Keramisch Werkcentrum, EKW in Den Bosch (Netherlands) is notable for being one of his latest collaborations and for being a intervention where some of the parameters with which they defined their drawings jumped into an urban work.

> After dissolving as a professional tandem and, after staying for four years in the USA, Alexander Brodsky began his new individual tour by opening his architecture office in Moscow in 2000.

The work produced from his office must be studied from a multiple perspective. It is not a conventional office and its works either. They develop a series of jobs with special requirements from their promoters and from the functional programs they must attend. In some cases, the latter reflect basic needs that the way of understanding, by Alexander Brodsky the architecture, elevates them in qualifying pieces of the place. This complex reality helps us to understand

how especially singular works can arise, from small scale but of great transformative capacity. The works developed from the office of the Russian architect can reach the range of specific infrastructures but also a more transcendent level such as memorials. In all of

Fig. 4 - Tarusa House, Kaluga (RU), 2006 (Source: https://www.archdaily. com/243403/house-in-tarussa-bureau-alexander-brodsku)



Fig. 2 - Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin, Villa Nautilus 1990 Presented by Frayda and Ronald Feldman (Tate Americas Foundation) 2013 © Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin (Source: https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/display/alexander-brodsky-and-ilya-utkin-0)

them, it manages to define a new area for the city and its inhabitants within a limited period of time. This way of building the territory in a limited time is based on simple, even poor, construction systems. Alexander Brodsky defines strategies that contrast sharply with much of the current urban dynamics.

He will combine his artistic activity with installations and exhibitions of different scope with an architectural production where we locate some residential projects such as the Green Cape of 2004 and the Tarusa House, of 2006 (Brodsky, 2009). In both, the resolution of a functional program of single-family housing is approached where issues as decisive as the organization and articulation of the dependencies among themselves or the resolution of what we could consider as enveloping, characterize buildings far from conventional within residential areas, Muscovites and the Kaluga Region, where they are erected.



(Fuente: http://www.bossche-encyclopedie.nl/overig/ *beelden/het%20portaal.htm*)



We can make a brief reading of both: Green Cape presents an elevated platform, a plant above ground level, which characterizes the house. On it there is a kind of independent pavilions, two similar to some small cabin frames and a third, stony, with traces of mastaba. Under the indicated platform a glazed body seems interrupted by the start of the aforementioned heavy factory body. At the extreme of the house we find the most open spaces and it is in its central area where a functional distribution with a motley character appears. Tarusa House is characterized by presenting a main volumetry, again in the shape of a cabin with gable roofs and with a perimeter, without accessories and small pillars distributed homogeneously on all four sides of the perimeter. Within this maximum volume there is a wooden body of straight geometry and flat roof and arranged asymmetrically with respect to the central axis of the roof. The area of maximum use of sunny hours has balconies and terraces on the first and second floor. This body, characterized by the massive use of wood, has different setbacks that also affect its interior spatial configuration.

In both cases we can find certain resonances with postulates developed by Adolf Loos in some of their homes from the beginning of 20th century. Certain spatial concatenations of the Russian author present a possible derivative of some raised by the Austrian. In both cases, the use of simple volumes and light building systems refers us to a tradition of buildings destined for storage or to barracks of precarious residence. An ancestral architecture, basic, possible self-construction and designed to meet the immediate needs of its users and residents. Alexander Brodsky presents a rereading, intellectualized and contemporary, of these bases. A process where intuition and memory are key and where the insignificant is valued (Dana et al. 2011). The architect's own study reflects this intellectual reality through a unique concurrence of objects and materials (1).

Infraestructures

Alexander Brodsky has worked on different small-scale interventions that have marked his career since 2000. The Apshu Club of 2003 is proof of this. Here, verandas and painted glass were reused as basic elements of the intervention (Brodsky, 2009). This local reality has also been transferred abroad as we can locate in the small Bus Stop in the Austrian town of Krumbach in 2014 where on this occasion the design is protected by quality materiality and within an operation of significant impact media by the names of architects involved as is the case of Sou Fujimoto, one of the authors of the summer pavilions of the Serpentine Gallery and Wang Shu - Amateur Studio, Prtizker Prize for Architecture, to name a few of them.



The Russian author declared, in 2012, that he is often influenced by the temporal spirit of certain structures (Brodsky, 2012). This reality, enunciated and practiced, has generated a series of minimal interventions that have been able to build a new place, a new area with a relevant impact on the city and its inhabitants, although not all of them have shared the same parameters.

Fig. 5 - Bus stop, Krumbach (AT), 2014. (Source: https://wewastetime.com/ tag/alexander-brodsky/)



Fig. 6 - Klyazminskoye Nature Reserve (RU) (Source: http://wikimapia. org/5312105/Klyazminskoye-Reser-



Fig. 7 - 95^o *Restaurant, Klyazminskoye Natural Reserve* (RU), 2001 (Source: http://hiddenarchitecture.net/95-degrees-restauran/)

The Klyazminskove Nature Reserve is located north of Moscow and owes its name to the Klyazma River, the main natural agent that has defined a particular territory in conjunction with the Moscow Canal.

In the aforementioned reserve we find a place of leisure and recreation mainly occupied by Muscovites. Water sports, golf, mini-zoo and a rosary of hotels, restaurants and cafes make this resting sector for the Russian megapolis. In this area, Brodsky has developed three pavilions that could be considered as three infrastructures that complement and extend the network of facilities that are located in the Reserve from a particu-

alization and briefness, in time.

Between 2000 and 2001, he proposes the 95° Restaurant, on one of the banks of this place. The program to be solved also has a use of jetty and the whole set destined to give service during the summer season (Brodsky, 2009). It has three levels: wharf floor, forest floor (bar - kitchen) and gazebo floor (dining room). The general structure is solved with a network of beams and wooden pillars capable of supporting slabs where, in a scattered way, closed volumes appear inserted in terrace areas. The facade materials are poor as metal sheets and Plexiglas but their most relevant formal feature is the slight inclination of the supports, 5° above the vertical, to adapt to the traces of the surrounding trees according to a formal intuition of the author (Moral - Andrés, 2015). It is a body destined to be a point of services for the users of the place. A kind of imperfect place able to meet the simple needs of any person while infiltrating a first-order nature. An intervention outside the architectural rules found in the restoration establishments of the Reserve. Being temporary and with a prospect of gradual degradation, it resisted time more than planned (Dana et al. 2011). The project acquires a border formalization between the natural structure of the forest and the artificial framework of the architecture. Alexander Brodsky creates a new body, almost a new typology, that dissolves in place. The different nuances of the project lead to the definition of a hybrid place between two different realities. An enclave that does not replicate building dynamics that have distorted this territory. The restaurant assumes, as its own, environmental values linked to a specific physical reality. The work complements, fleetingly, a territory capable of assimilating new functions but needing not to lose its essence.

In the same area, but with a short and winter use, he builds the Ice Pavilion. A body is constructed with parallelepiped geometry, structure of small wooden struts and metal mesh enclosures as a cage. Water was sprayed on it, which, with the low temperatures of the place and the station, built an authentic ice enclosure. A space where you can serve drinks to skaters that furrow the ice river (Moral - Andrés, 2015). A minimal pavilion, ephemeral and with a precise function. Alexander Brodsky transforms a natural environment into a facilities and user concentration place. With his proposal he is able to artificialize nature so that citizens can have a continuity in the services that they can usually enjoy in the city.



Fig. 8 - Ice Pavilion, Klyazminskoue Natural Reserve (RU), 2002 (Source: http://www.uncubemagazine.com/ blog/7871351)

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Fig. 9 - "Cloud Café", Klyazminskoye Natrual Reserve (RU), 2003 (Source: https://www.flickr.com/photos/ypalmin/3664200119)

We are facing a work that arises from the specific conditions of the place and its winter season. Again, Alexander Brodsky, anchor, deeply, his piece in a unique context without strongly altering the parameters that structure it as such. The architectural body assumes a previous reality that is articulated with tools of territorial scope such as temperature and luminosity.



Memorials

Three years after the first of these interventions, again in the same area, he raises a temporary construction under the name of "Cloud Café" next to the water where the land has a slight slope. The program is again a minimum catering equipment, a tiny coffee for use by vacationers who go to the Nature Reserve. Six rows of wooden supports define a gabled body that later was covered with plastics its cover. Plastics similar to those of shopping bags that sought to give it an appearance similar to that of a cloud that finished landing on the spot. The bar is defined with concrete blocks and the kitchen is camouflaged because its walls are covered with mirrors to reflect the context in which it seeks to ambush. Its life cycle exceeded the expected and reached several anniversaries on the same property and with the same utility. The intervention seeks to be mild, almost ethereal, accentuating its condition of accidental building. A proposal that materializes the particular reading of the place made by the architect.

These three interventions present a series of repeated patterns: constructive precariousness, ephemeral character, anchorage to the place and infrastructure functionality. The three operations, simple, and protected by similar dynamics developed in the area, but of another scale and ambitions, have been able to link with a specific place while transforming it. All of them are subject to the relevant conditions that are located in the field of nature but also, temporarily, add properties that facilitate the sustainable enjoyment of the place by citizens.

Alexander Brodsky works with similar constructions, in terms of scalar and constructive values, but loaded by other types of functions, less prosaic, more transcendental and where memory is the definitive value to which one must attend. Between 2003 and 2004, again, in the Klyazminskoye Nature Reserve, he participated in the second edition of the ArtKlyazma festival. For this event he created the Pavilion for Vodka Ceremonies (Brodsky, 2009).

papers





nstruction is raised on the ground a little more than 1 m high, resting on four wooden pillars and with a very small volume of gabled shed. All of its envelope, except the ground, is built using recycled woodwork, rescued from garbage in different parts of

Fig. 10 - Pavilion for Vodka Ceremonies, Klyazminskoye Natural Reserve (RU), 2004 (Source: https://www.architectural-review.com/essaus/retrospective-alexan*der-brodsky/10024048.article*)

Fig. 11 - Pavilion for Vodka Ceremonies, Klyazminskoye Natural Reserve (RU), 2004 (Source: https://www.bmiaa.com/ planetarium-oleg-kudryashov-and-peter-markli-at-eth-zurich/brodskygorlenkogribnov_1_8-pavilion-for-vod-

ka-ceremoniesanton-gorlenko/)

Fig. 12 - "Rotunda", Nikola – Lenivets Art Park (RU), 2009 (Source: https://www.architectural-review.com/essays/retrospective-alexan*der-brodsky/10024048.article*)

the city of Moscow. Scraps of old buildings have been assembled to create a new reality. These have been complemented with simple glass and the whole set was painted with a simple hand of white paint that does not hide the precariousness of the object or the imperfections that define them. In its interior there is a minimum furnishing: a table to which each cup has been chained to be filled with the vodka deposited in an adjacent bowl. The function, the program to be solved, which refers us to the universally known as the Tea Ceremony, consists of bringing together two people who provide and end up drinking Russian liquor. We are facing an area that has been built with remains from other old buildings, we are facing a place for the meeting through a ceremony designed for the place. The component of memory through physical space and also through the discourse of those who live it structures a context gives the place of metaphysical functions. A milestone, where its intangible values could build a new place of enjoyment and reflection.

In 2009 at the Nikola - Lenivets Art Park, in the Russian Kaluga region, Brodsky built the Rotunda project to be part of the Arch-Stoyanie architecture festival (Architectuul, 2019).



He projects an oval geometry body with a lower perimeter open by a sequence of doors, practicable, coming from several demolitions located in the region. On the upper level it has an internal balcony where a series of windows with the same rhythm as the lower doors are also located. Visitors can also perch on the terrace of the building. The center of the space is occupied by a chimney and visitors can sit around it while they contemplate the landscape through this device with multiple patterned holes. Brodsky again confronts us with the memory of the loss, exemplified by the varied, imperfect papers

doors, which contrast with a wooden enclosure, painted homogeneously in white. A materialization that confronts us with the visualization of the loss of what was built and that was systematically eliminated after an eager improvement. It also puts us in a new way of approaching the territory, the average device between the place and the viewer. The intervention qualifies a fragment of landscape while promoting a new point of stay and meeting around a fire. This intervention recovers some of the parameters already contemplated in the Pavilion for Vodka Ceremonies with the variant of the aesthetic qualification of the territory: it is an icon with transformative traces from a social and territorial reading. In both cases the presence of the intervention is relevant in the place. None of them seeks to camouflage themselves in that context. They are two architectur-



Fig. 13 - Bloomsbury Square, London (UK), S. XIX (Source: https://geodis.hypotheses.org/38)



Fig. 14 - Bloomsbury Square, London (UK), S. XXI (Source: https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1000210)



Fig. 15 - "101st km: Further and Everywhere" Pavilion, Bloomsbury Square, London (UK), 2017 (Source: https://www.dezeen.com/2017/11/29/owen-hatherley-opinion-alexander-brodsky-pushkin-house-pavilion-russian-architect-former-fantasist/)



Fig. 16 - "101st km: Further and Everywhere" Pavilion, Bloomsbury Square, London (UK), 2017 (Source: https://www.pushkinhouse.org/blog/101st-km-further-everywhere)

al objects outside the site but from them the perception of both the natural landscape and the interior landscape, of each visitor, is accentuated.

The last of the interventions that make up this series is the one entitled "101st km: Further and Everywhere" installed in London, in Bloomsbury Square in 2017 promoted by the Puskhin Cultural Center intended to build a tribute to all those who were deported after the 1917 Revolution (Hatherley, 2017). We face again with a simple building, with a slight gabled geometry, with a simple wooden structure visible from the outside, with panels that configure the enclosure and that do not touch the floor of the place creating an air socket, of something more than a meter high, which allows the incorporation of anyone who wants to know part of those centenary events and where the poets who had to exile articulate the space with their words. After having forcedly crossed the threshold-access base to discover a dark space where a series of small lamps have been arranged that illuminate, in an isolated and scheduled way, a series of sheets where can be read some poems of those writers affected by post-revolutionary political provisions. A movie starring a railway track is shown in one of the front boxes. This field reaches us from the memory of the work that the Polish Miroslaw Balka made for the Unilever Series of the Tate Modern in 2009 and which was entitled "How it is" and where the Jewish tragedy of World War II became evident (Cumming, 2009). Alexander Brodsky built a new temple of remembrance and memory, this time connected with a literary culture but using a precarious pavilion online similar to others of those addressed here. The Russian author creates an intervention that transforms a square into a place of homage and tragedy. An ephemeral device that is anchored in a transcendent discourse.

Final contexts

The previous works have presented a series of interventions that have transformed, punctually and temporarily, the different areas in which they were built. All of them have linked their physical existence to different social demands, some derived from some leisure or cultural facilities.

In the first set, the proposals constructed, distant, in concept and style, from the usual constructions of this enclave, confirmed a new nature. Delectable pavilions that, slightly, altered the conditions of the place so that it could serve the citizens. A sort of cubicles that would verify the thesis of "wild urbanism" emphasized by Diller Scofidio + Renfro (Merino-Gómez, Moral - Andrés, 2017). These new contexts remain fundamentally natural. There is no remarkable destructive process that alters them and several of their components determine the final reality constructed: either by the emulation of the logs or by using water as a facade material. Alexander Brodsky, develops, under specific orders, a precarious colonization of a territory full of works of greater scale and durability. These constructions combine functionality and respect for the characteristics of the place. The use of poor construction systems infiltrate devices that uniquely define the field without implying irreversible change.

papers

The latest examples raise a new dimension because they do not conform to the resolution of a specific functional problem, although they are intended to serve a series of tasks that are anchored to a particular memory, private and collective. Brodsky affects this variable from the materials used. They are still weak constructions but the use of, for example, carpentry recovered from demolition already connects us with a past and lost constructions, with realities linked to different values from contemporary and in which the author develops his work. In all three works the place is once again transformed, transcendentally transformed, without it having to resort to the use of an



excessive dimension. The author in the works defines a sequence of anthropological journey: in the Pavilion for Vodka Ceremonies facing each other, in the Rotunda, facing the territory, in Pavilion 101 km., facing history, a reality that expands progressively and where the perceptions of those who are integrated into the work finish completing it fully. They are interventions that, in these two variants that we have presented, reprogram a place, a territory, a neighborhood through the use of border strategies between architecture and art, capable of giving added value to their anchor point. Alexander Brodsky builds icons, socially substantiated, and capable of providing a new experiential dimension in informal or obsolete urban structures. The involvement of the author with ideation and execution. It emulates those who build infra-settlements on the outskirts of Moscow and who assemble their interventions with the collection of materials from garbage. People who have a normal life in the city but who need to build, in a precarious way, a location from a rural and, essentially, natural setting. An area to feel deeply linked to (Dana et al. 2011). The interventions of the Russian architect redefine the territory from operations based on basic needs and values for society.

Fig. 17. Informal settlements near Moscow (RU), 1960 (Source: http://www.oris.hr/en/ oris-magazine/overview-of-articles/ [116]we-cant-predict-what-will-suddenly-inspire-us,1551.html)

ENDNOTES

1 In December 2013, these authors, together with a university group, visited Alexander Brodsky's studio in Moscow. The Russian architect talked to everyone while glossing little stories of some of his most representative objects: lamps, windows, etc. all this, enunciated from a deeply personal perspective.

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She holds a PhD in Architecture gained at the School of Architecture of Valladolid. She completed her predoctoral training at the Faculty of Philosophy and Literature at the Department of Art History, which concluded with an investigation related to architecture of Renaissance chapels. Her areas of knowledge are related to History and Theory of Architecture, Building Materials and, more extensively, to traditional building techniques. She has been a professor of Building Materials at the Universidad Europea de Miguel de Cervantes between 2002 and 2009. She is currently a professor of Materials and Construction Techniques, of History of Architecture and of Architectural Thought and Criticism at the Nebrija University of Madrid, where she is the Director of the Architecture Degree.