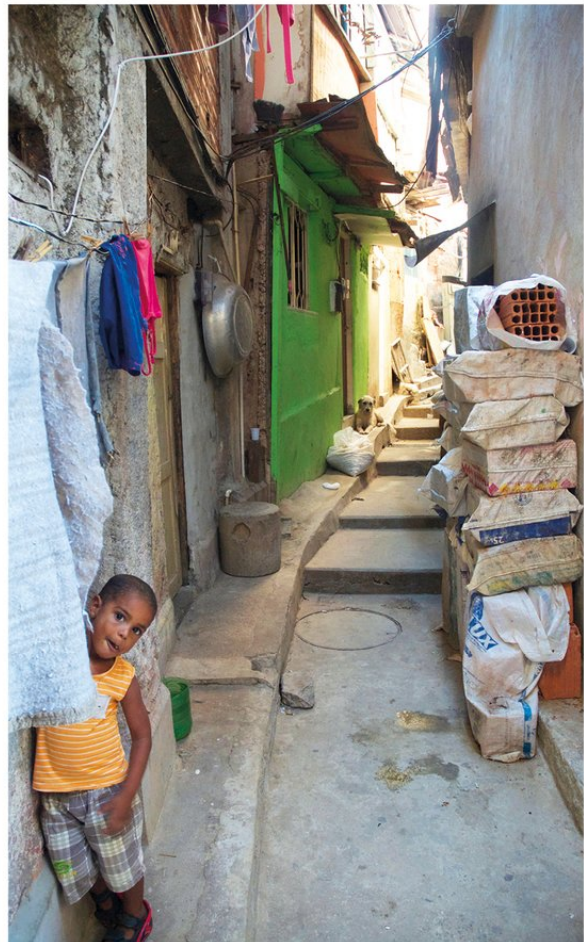


Roberta Lucente
Nicoletta Trasi

Disasters Otherwhere

New Forms of Complexity
for Architecture



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Points of view from the Doctorate seminar

This part of the Annexes shows the results of the work done by the PhD students of the XXX cycle – within the Seminar “Architecture elsewhere. The challenges of architecture in post-disaster areas”, directed by Nicoletta Trasi with Maria Teresa Cutri in 2016 – for the Doctorate in “Architecture. Theory and design” of the Sapienza University of Rome. This seminar is a further reflection in the frame of research work *Disasters Otherwhere*, edited by R. Lucente and N. Trasi. PhD students were invited to carry out theoretical and meta-project work on the topics addressed by the seminar and on the keywords: co-design; exception and difference; impermanence; instability; *varietas*; as well as on the themes that emerged in the Lectures of the invited guests: Antonio Rivero (Temporary shelters, the international competition for Antalya), Roberta Lucente with Nicoletta Trasi (Outcomers, newcomers: temporary shelters or permanent asylum could become an elsewhere ghetto), Alessandra Muntoni (The Europe of refugees), Marcello Pazzaglini (Disasters and social and architectural sustainability), Gabriele Rossi (Tanzania Kasirwa project- NGO feethechildren), Renzo Lecardane (The war infrastructure of the Atlantic Wall: Saint-Nazaire u-boat bunker), Valentina Piscitelli (Communicating the architecture of elsewhere worlds), Maria Teresa Cutri (Rome: 4 areas for a meta project) and the *lectio magistralis* by Cameron Sinclair (Housing the next billion).

Administrative Disasters and Tactical Alternatives

Shigeru Ban's Paper Concert Hall in L'Aquila

Mickeal Milocco Borlini

The *Paper Concert Hall* (from now on PCH) is of notable interest for the discussion on post-disaster architecture. This is not only because of the simplicity of its construction, but also because of the social relevancy it gained. The PCH has become a meeting place where politics, solidarity and sustainability come into contact. Moreover, its controversial building process is emblematic of what strategies to adopt – or to avoid – in post-emergency situations.

The PCH is a concert hall designed by Japanese architect Shigeru Ban (Pritzker Prize 2014). It's in L'Aquila, near the new premises of the Alfredo Casella Conservatoire, and it was built thanks to the funds given by the Japanese government in support of the city after the 2009 earthquake. The building consists of an elliptic room inscribed in a square of about 25 metres; a pyramidal covering crowns it, held up by 44 steel pillars sheathed by cardboard tubes; in addition the area has an extension of about 700 square meters with a steel main framework, buffered with clay bags¹.

Sustainability and solidarity. The PCH is a temporary building, and it can be disassembled and re-converted. It is exemplary for the discreet way it embeds into a landscape devastated by a natural disaster. Moreover, it is the child of a new principle of social assembly, giving back to the community a public place to meet.

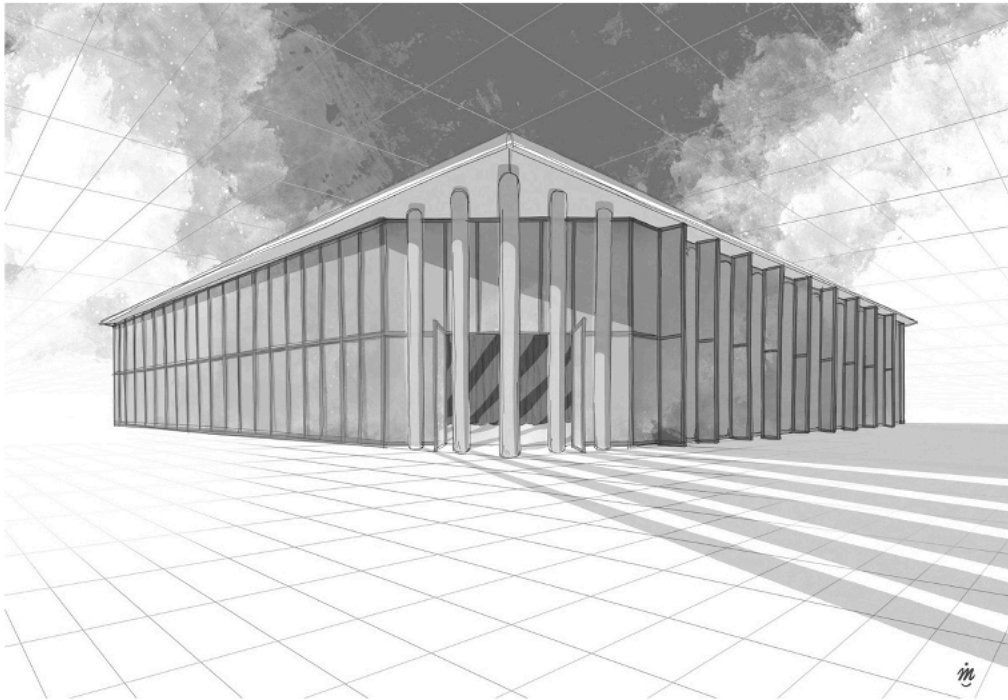
The Japanese government submitted the project for the building immediately after the 2009 earthquake, as proof of solidarity with the citizens of L'Aquila. In 2009 Ban submitted the first draft, which was subjected to numerous alterations and delays². As some articles report, the final cost of the structural project was over half a million euros and it was officially opened in mid-2011 – after a complicated bureaucratic procedure – with a charity concert directed by the Japanese director

¹ See Benedetti A., “Shigeru Ban Architects – L'Aquila Temporary Concert Hall”, in *Divisare*, 2011.

² See Calcagni A., “Auditorium Shigeru Ban finalmente agibile”, in *Il capoluogo*, August 6, 2013.

1. Paper Concert Hall, S. Ban, L'Aquila, Sketches (courtesy © Fabrizio Ferraro, 2020).

2. Tactical Urbanism, Umbrella street decoration Calle de la Fortaleza, Old San Juan (photo: Mario Roberto Durán Ortiz, (CC BY-SA 4.0).



T. Nishimoto³. Ban's project was generated by a *therapeutic idea*⁴ for communities in need, and it is based on the concepts of plurality, assembly and recovery of human dignity. The emergency in Abruzzo in those years was dealt with in a context of generalized bureaucratic neglect⁵; the PCH is a small but significant example of this ill-advised management by government agencies.

A controversial story. Through an interpolation of information between some interviews released by the architect and between the interventions of the same Ban on different platforms, in the next paragraphs some useful concepts are exposed for a better understanding of the architectural and bureaucratic processes that the project has encountered along the way⁶.

The beginning of the concept can be matched with the desire to avoid the dispersion of students and musicians on the territory following

³ Dragone R., "L'Aquila: pronto a gennaio l'auditorium di Shigeru Ban", in *Archiportale*, December 2010; "Concerto all'auditorium realizzato dal Giappone", in *Il centro*, May 3, 2011.

⁴ Picchi F., "Shigeru Ban: sonata per L'Aquila", in *Doppiozero*, 2014.

⁵ "Auditorium di Shigeru Ban ancora inutilizzato: l'appello alla città del Conservatorio Casella", in *Newstown*, 2013.

⁶ See Dragone R., "L'Aquila: pronto a gennaio l'auditorium di Shigeru Ban"; Ban S., "Emergency Shelters Made From Paper", in *TEDxTokyo*, 2013; Picchi F., "Disaster Relief Project #1: interview with Shigeru Ban", in *Domusweb*, May 6, 2011; Picchi F., "Shigeru Ban: sonata per L'Aquila", in *Doppiozero*, April 3, 2014, Milan.

the collapse of the former City Concert Hall, thus proposing an architectural alternative to be built in the shortest time possible *giving back to the community* an important area of aggregation and culture⁷. After a first period of planning, Shigeru Ban went back to L'Aquila with a three-dimensional model and he gained the support of both mayor and government (Berlusconi). Thanks to the connection with the Japanese Embassy and the transfer of the G8 summit to L'Aquila, Japan confirmed the project funding.

During the implementation phase a structure model made of scaffolding and sandbags buffering guaranteed also better acoustics to the concert hall. The original project used the Japanese architect's famous paper tubes. During this phase the Civil Defence (CD) was also involved, and its intervention was crucial for the alterations (and manumissions) to the original design; the CD at the beginning was opposed to the use of paper tubes as structural framework and even after having reached an understanding – according to the architect's statement – the CD withdrew from the project without a clear reason⁸.

After a short while, the architect discovered that his project, confirmed at the G8 summit⁹, was going to be cancelled without explanation. Later, as reported by R. Dragone, the reasons behind the project's cancellation were uncovered: the use of the paper tubes (regardless of the fact that this had been already approved) and the budget; the latter became insufficient without being confronted with the project and the CD decided to cancel it, despite Ban stating more than once that he had numerous alternatives, and despite the CD having received the funds already from the Japanese government (500,000)¹⁰.

Ban tried to find a solution and contacted the CD, which exhorted him to change the project after explaining the aforementioned problems. That he did. Seeing as the project was public and the funds had been already allocated, local and national administrations had to uphold the agreement.

Soon after, the CD hired a contractor for the project, but Ban and



⁷ See Calcagni A., "Auditorium Shigeru Ban finalmente agibile".

⁸ See Picchi F., "Shigeru Ban: sonata per L'Aquila".

⁹ Baiocchetti G., "L'Aquila, G8: chi ha mantenuto le promesse?", *Il capoluogo*, December 26th 2015.

¹⁰ Dragone R., "L'Aquila: pronto a gennaio l'auditorium di Shigeru Ban".

his team weren't tasked with the building supervision. As the architect himself recalls in one of his interviews, this situation prevented him from managing the project; he could only see the working drawings after the contractor had been hired – and they were quite different from the original project; immediately after Ban contacted the Japanese ambassador again and asked for his mediation with the Italian CD, in order to restore the original project but the contractor – seeing as a part of it was almost complete – asked for an additional 150.000 euros to go back to the previous design¹¹.

It was already late 2010 and to accelerate the building's completion, the architects and the contractor found a compromise: they designed a new constructing solution, made possible by new funds raised by the CD and especially by the population¹². Eventually the project was finished on time.

Solid alternatives. This work by Shigeru Ban can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand there's the positive aspect of *collective architecture*, of its reversibility and substitution; of an architecture integrated in a devastated context, in order to bring back social aggregation and hope in day-to-day life.

On the other hand, there's the need for simplification strategies and bureaucratic control, to avoid the transformation of a natural disaster into an administrative disaster. These situations crush the citizens' hopes for reconstruction, whereas a community such as the one of L'Aquila needs to find a new, serene daily life.

As U. Eco recalls, it's possible to see these not-so-transparent political dynamics as “part of a generalized crisis of State and Community, which gives rise to an extreme individualism, where everyone is each other's antagonist. In this individualist context, every reference system disappears, and everything dissolves in a sort of liquid state”¹³.

After analysing all this, it's possible to venture a solution. Only self-constructing and self-funding seem like viable, “solid” solutions in emergency situations, eluding the never-ending bureaucratic process. Thus, let us consider what happened as a lesson for every architect. When working on a project, it's also necessary to analyse the context, its political history and bureaucracy, and to include them in the project itself. The Italian case shows the need for diversified application strategies. To build something in the complex Italian situation means that the architect must evaluate who and how will build, too. The question to ask is: “Is

¹¹ See Picchi F., “Disaster Relief Project #1: interview with Shigeru Ban”, Picchi F., “Shigeru Ban: sonata per L'Aquila”; Ban S., “Emergency Shelters Made From Paper”.

¹² See Calcagni A., “Auditorium Shigeru Ban finalmente agibile”

¹³ Eco U., “La società liquida”, in *L'Espresso*, May 27, 2015.

it worth it?”. This way, it may be possible to avoid wasting energy, time, and money.

In recent years, for example, citizens have participated in a myriad of *tactical urbanism* projects. They are small-scale, low-cost projects, to improve the neighborhood. The objective is also to make public administrations aware of the necessity to simplify their intervention process.

Specifically, the word *tactical* evokes immediate, quick reactions. Tactical urbanism is born out of a desire for gradual change, a collection of local ideas with feasible and real objectives, and a development of cooperation with public institutions.

Tactical urbanism is a grassroots approach and is based on making people involved. It promotes a type of social and urban activism.

The famous sentence “*Fassin dibessoi!*” (We’ll do it on our own!), used by the people of Friuli in the aftermath of the 1976 earthquake, was – maybe – a poetic preview of the matters discussed.

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MAIN EVENTS, EXHIBITIONS AND WORKSHOPS (2012-2019)

- International Workshop: *Arquitectura y catástrofe*, 25-27 June 2012, CUIIMPB – Centro Ernest Lluch, Barcelona.
- Exhibition: *Uneven Growth: Tactical Urbanisms for Expanding Megacities*, 22 November 2014 – 25 May 2015, MOMA The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Exhibition catalogue: Gadanho P. *Uneven Growth: Tactical Urbanisms for Expanding Megacities*. MOMA, 2014, New York.
- XXV World Congress of the International Union of Architects: *Architecture Otherwhere*, 3-7 August 2014, Durban (South Africa). Proceedings available at <http://www.uia2014durban.org/index.htm> and in Del Nord R. *Healthcare OTHERWHERE. Proceedings of the*