

May 2012.

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During the pre-Olympic year some general unrest in the city of London, and especially in the areas of East London, started to be quietly cultivated among its inhabitants parallel to the great cheer and expectation caused by the prospective of the Games.

The signs of this collective negative latent feeling were not too clear or easily recognizable, as well as the whole Olympic official “preparation” process was highly opaque to most of the citizens.

The silent belligerence of this process and its catalyzers worked in the shadows of bureaucracy and speculation: evictions, demolition of unofficial landmarks, occupation of old warehouses by wealthy art gallerists, massive rise of rents, construction of expensive blocks of flats in the midst of neighbourhoods lacking basic services, suspicious express planning permissions, boosted gentrification, etc. started to be part of the everyday reality.

August 2011 riots was probably the most conspicuous phenomenon born out of this hidden unrest: it was suffocated by the dominant system in scarcely 3 nights, and it never had a message or a concept behind it –it was more an inarticulated and spontaneous scream harshly condemned by society, which never wondered seriously why such a striking event broke out in the bosom of a western civilised society.

All these Olympic considerations added up to an already quite irritated atmosphere in the context of the so called worst economical, social and moral crisis in modern societies since 1929.

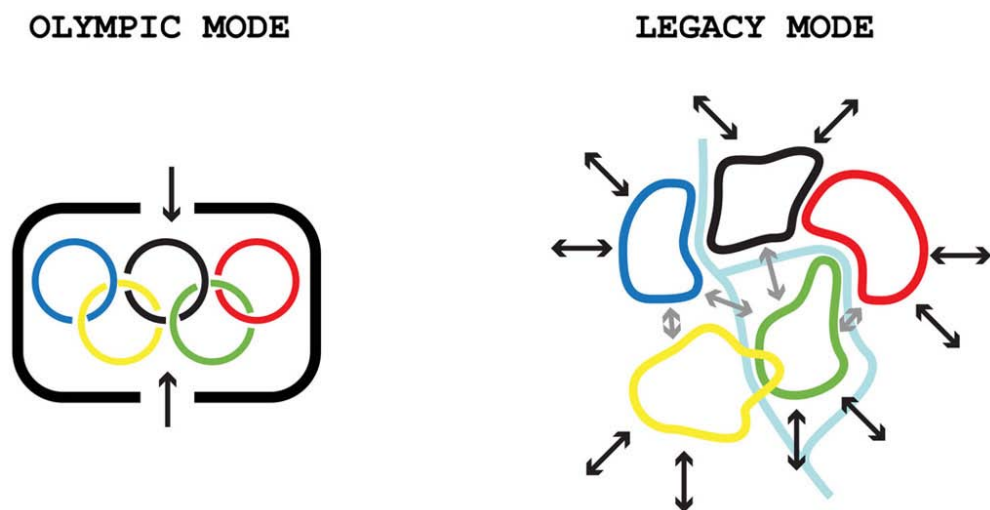


Image courtesy of KCAP Architects & Planners

The successive modern Idealisms based on new gods and paradigms had all suffered violent failures: blind faith in Rational Reason and Technological Evolution, absolute confidence and total power delegation in Pater State, bitter indulgence through Postmodern Cynicism, reborn techno-faith generated by the Asian Tigers and the DotCom enterprises... and eventually the adoration of the Globalization phenomenon interpreted and practically implemented mainly on Neoliberal principles.

In this atmosphere of general discontent, low (economical) classes from East London could still watch through their TV devices some startling revolutionary events taking place far away in the outer world: auspicious uprisings all along North Africa, long time unseen revolts in Spain, mass strikes in Greece, occupation of Wall Street... in short: Conflict. People calling out for Urban Change.

It was by the end of April, beginning of May when things started to get serious.

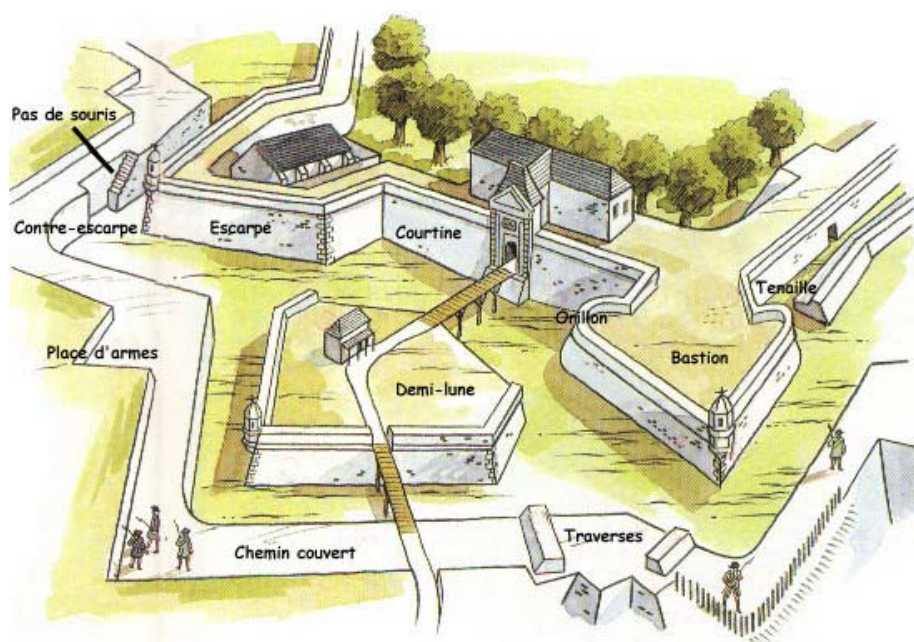
There grew up two different –although somehow intertwined- manifestations of a rebel movement: the middle classes occupied and squatted the parks under the pretext of consecutive spring festivals, in protest for the unaffordable rising of the tuition fees; while the lower classes decided to organize themselves into independent self-sufficient City-(E)states, in reaction to the speculative movements threatening to expel them from the area.

The latter decided to fight against external interests, transnational enterprises and supra-regional powers regaining the private space of their homes (strengthening the collectiveness of the neighbourhood and reinforcing the sense of community); the former decided to reconquer the public spaces (quickly developing a locally based consumption chain based on the concept of regional sustainability).

They were *The Green Squatters* and the *City-(E)stater*s, as sensationalist tabloids baptized them.

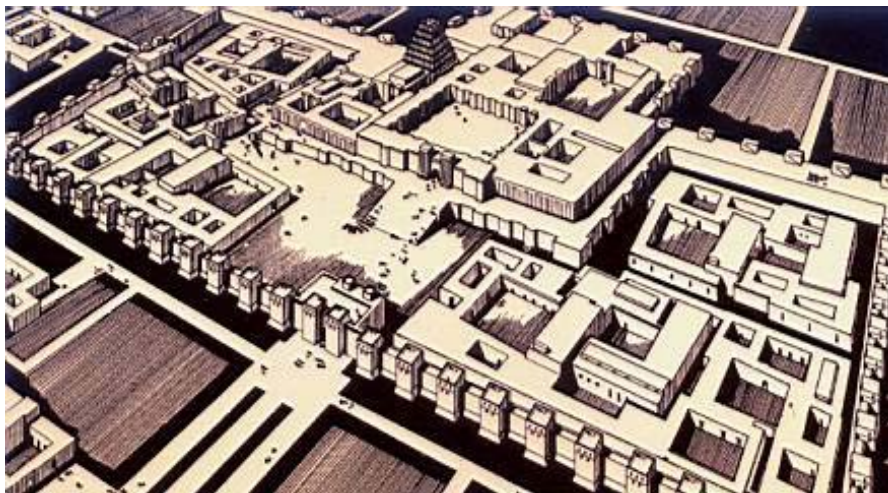
However, these microtopias didn't last long: they evaporated as quickly as they arose in a warm spring night, hardly a month of sweet dreams of a better world. When finally it arrived the time for the big Torch to be lighted, the masses religiously followed the triumphal ceremony with high excitement and enormous joy.

But between the ashes of that micro-revolution we can find –thoroughly documented in the internet by all sorts of social networks and alternative media- the temporarily successful germ of a new society, a tested and proved one-month prototype for a new Urban condition.



Squatting a park is not the same as squatting an old building, where even if you have no services, no insulation and some broken glasses you always count on a roof to protect you and walls to enclose your own colonized space: pre-set defensive devices that also facilitate the sense of habitation. Thus the *Green Squatters* had to start their settlements from the scratch while coping with the (un)reliable Elements, forced to rethink (in order to rebuild and ultimately to re-dwell) the basic principles of their brand new community: lines, limits, organization, order, hierarchy, uses, energy, waste, etc. within a large besieged green tabula rasa.

Being initially camouflaged under the appearance of a Festival, this revolt set up itself as a big open convivial event, and progressively took the form of a massive camp village: tents, sheds, light cabins, caravans and all kind of ready-made structures integrated in the greenery and shaped a colourful and apparently chaotic new landscape. Further modifications of the green carpet were necessary in order to improve the neutral conditions of the settlement, strategically combined with the random masses of trees: fast implementation of inhabiting devices such as energetic bunkers, artificial storage mounds, productive trenches, meeting burrows, etc.



As for the *City (E)stater*s they already had a heavy pre-existent legacy with which to start from, the micro-cosmos of their labyrinthical Council Estates which allowed them to commence from a privileged position towards external intrusions: nevertheless they did have to update and reconfigure all these inherited though dysfunctional elements in order to adapt them to the new born order. The fences from the perennial street works became The Walls, and the assembly of several storeys of rubbish bins was their Bastion. They reallocated all the cells so that they got the spaces for a cosy Temple and a small Parliament, and the courtyards were transformed into a permanent Agora only partially converted into an Arena or a Market on the weekends. Roofs were also rediscovered for energetic purposes, and the often dismissed packed-with-old-bicycles balconies were re-activated as self-productive orchards...