

# OCCUPYING PUBLIC SPACE: DURATION AS A FORM OF RESISTANCE



**ANATOMY OF PROTEST**



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# THE METHOD: OCCUPY TO EXIST

Occupying public space means **turning a moment of anger into a lasting political fact**. Where a demonstration passes through, an occupation takes hold, forcing those in power to choose between repression and negotiation.

Its primary weapon is neither numbers nor violence, but **time**.

From Kyiv to Buenos Aires, through Cairo and Istanbul, this method has proven its power across continents.



# CHOOSING THE GROUND: THE SQUARE AS SYMBOL



In November 2013 in Kyiv, students set up camp on the *Maidan* (Independence) *Square* to challenge **President Yanukovych's authoritarian turn**. In 2011, hundreds of thousands of Egyptians converged on *Tahrir Square* to demand **President Mubarak's resignation**. In Buenos Aires, the *Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* have circled the square every Thursday since 1977, in front of the seat of power, to **hold the military dictatorship to account**.

In all three cases, citizens chose the **central square of their capital** as their stage, a deliberate act of political geography that made their presence **impossible to ignore**.

# DURATION AS ARGUMENT: TWO SUCCESSES

Holding the Maidan for three months, through a crackdown that killed over a hundred protesters, turned the occupation into an irreversible signal. In February 2014, Yanukovich fled Kyiv in the night – **the next day, parliament voted to remove him**, 328 votes to zero. At Tahrir, the same dynamic played out in eighteen days: **an unrelenting occupation forced Mubarak to resign** on 11 February 2011.

In both cases, the occupation had built its own **autonomous infrastructure** (kitchens, medical care, self-defence) making it **resilient** under repression and embodying the idea that the movement would not be worn down. The **permanence** of the occupation proved that the protest was not a passing mood, but an **organised collective will**.



# WHEN OCCUPATION IS NOT ENOUGH

In May 2013, some **fifty environmentalists camped in Istanbul's *Gezi Park*** to block an Erdoğan construction project. Police brutality turned the sit-in into a **national uprising**: 3.5 million people took to the streets across 79 provinces. The park was saved, but Erdoğan did not fall.

**Without clear leadership** or a **political objective** beyond the street movement, the occupation **wore itself out**. Yet Gezi shaped a political generation, brought together a cross-cutting opposition, and preserved the park. An occupation can fail to bring down a government while **planting the seeds of long-term resistance**.



# STRENGTHS AND LIMITS



## Strengths :

Occupation creates **continuous visibility**, forces power to **show its hand**, and when sustained **turns resistance into an accomplished fact**, as in Kyiv and Cairo.

## Limitations :

It is **exhausting**. It demands **discipline and resources**, and **collapses without a strategy** for what comes next. And even when it topples a regime, nothing guarantees that what follows will be better: in Egypt, Mubarak's fall paved the way for Sisi's dictatorship.

Occupying a square can change everything. **Building a lasting rule of law is another story.**

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