

The Radicality of Use

Practices of transformation based on the occupation and appropriation of buildings

reutilizar
lugar
interacción
temporalidad
reprogramación
reuse
place
interaction
temporality
reprogramming

La intención de este artículo es plantear la radicalidad en la arquitectura contemporánea a través del análisis de prácticas de transformación espacial basadas en el uso y observadas en la ocupación y la apropiación colectiva de edificios en desuso. En contraposición de la arquitectura tradicional, que se apoya en herramientas de representación abstractas y preconfiguradas, estas tácticas emergen como respuestas espontáneas de abajo hacia arriba, reflejando la efectividad de las prácticas grupales en la reprogramación de espacios. Utilizando una metodología cualitativa basada en la observación directa, entrevistas con los participantes y el análisis de documentos, se examinan tres casos europeos de ocupación donde se identifican prácticas de transformación del espacio a partir del uso. El éxito en los resultados de estas intervenciones demuestran que hoy en día la ocupación y apropiación se utilizan positivamente como un medio para aprovechar los recursos infrautilizados y alterar el statu quo. Son las propias prácticas las que se vuelven una herramienta con la cual cuestionar el espacio normativo predeterminado, evidenciando una espacialidad surgida desde las bases, y reafirmando el campo social y la identidad de grupo como generadores de lugar. Centradas en la experiencia y la vivencialidad, las prácticas de cada grupo específico modifican el espacio y lo reprograman sin grandes intervenciones materiales, obligando a incluir las dimensiones sociales y simbólicas cuando analizamos la transformación sobre el objeto. A partir de las evidencias, se observa la radicalidad de las diferentes producciones espaciales, demostrando la vigencia del uso y las prácticas como medios alternativos de hacer arquitectura.

The purpose of this article is to explore radicalism in contemporary architecture through an analysis of space transformation practices grounded in the use of space, particularly observed in the collective occupation and appropriation of disused buildings. Unlike traditional architecture, which relies on abstract, preconfigured representational tools, these tactics emerge as spontaneous, bottom-up approaches, highlighting the effectiveness of group actions in the reprogramming of spaces. Adopting a qualitative methodology that includes direct observation, participant interviews, and document analysis, this study examines three European cases of building occupation, where the transformation of space is driven by its active use. The success of these interventions demonstrates that occupation and appropriation are now being utilised as positive tactics to repurpose underutilised resources and challenge the established spatial order. These approaches become tools for questioning predetermined normative spaces while reaffirming social dynamics and group identity as fundamental in the process of making Place. By focusing on experience and presence, these social groups' efforts transform and reprogramme spaces without requiring significant material interventions, compelling the inclusion of social and symbolic dimensions in the analysis of spatial transformation. The evidence highlights the radical condition of these space productions, demonstrating the continued relevance of use and practices as an alternative means of making architecture.

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INTRODUCTION

In the late 1960s, leisure, knowledge (*connaissance*), and art were largely uncontrolled spaces, serving as focal points for the radical practices of that era (Lefebvre 1978). In contemporary times, however, these sectors are experiencing accelerated institutionalisation, shaping even the most intimate and routine spaces through prefigured configurations derived from abstract, instrumental representational tools. The resources and tools employed by architectural disciplines to represent these spaces are increasingly distanced from the experiential and participatory practices of individuals.

A radical resource for re-establishing this relationship is to revalorise 'use' as a mechanism for spatial transformation. This process occurs both organically and explicitly in the occupation and

appropriation of buildings, where social practices are not merely an additional variable but are instead the primary force in making Place, even supporting the reproduction of these very practices (Giddens 1984, Abu-Lughod 1968). In the reuse of a building designed for a specific function, radicality is generated through the disruption of determinism achieved by the practical transformations involved in reprogramming. This transformation is not only material; it additionally marks a fundamental shift within social and symbolic dimensions. Today, practices of occupation and appropriation are a positive means of utilising underused resources and challenging the status quo. These practices serve as tools for questioning normative, predetermined spaces, enabling the creation of new activities and, in most cases, providing collective spaces for the community.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGIES

The aim of this work is to define radicality in architecture by identifying differentiated transformative practices observed in the use of space. This study focuses on contemporary active examples, analysing three European cases where reprogramming for cultural purposes has been successfully achieved through occupation and appropriation.

With the premise of using case studies as an opportunity to empirically demonstrate certain theoretical concepts or principles (Yin 2017), three cases were selected after an initial assessment of fifty European cases of collective reprogramming. An XY Cartesian coordinate system (Fig.1) was used, with the horizontal axis representing the degree and type of intervention and the vertical axis representing the form of occupation. The characteristics and relevance of each case were then systematically evaluated. These cases were intentionally selected to represent different forms of intervention within various dynamics of occupation (as reflected in the diagram), while observing common effects and transformations.

Three cases were chosen because the research is structured on a logic of replication within a multiple-case study approach. In this way, each individual case becomes the subject of a full case study, where convergent evidence is sought to support the study's findings and conclusions. Furthermore, the case selection is justified by data repetition across different developmental models in different countries within the same region, each with diverse processes and outcomes. This variation in development aids in observing and comparing replication in different contexts, allowing for the recognition, a priori, of constants present in cases that are structurally similar but empirically diverse (Yin 2017).

selection of these three definitive cases is their relevance as activity catalysts, that is, their success as case studies. Cases chosen for in-depth analysis had to be reference points in their field of expression, reaching certain momentum within their groups, transformations, and the spatial identity produced. This factor demonstrates the value and relevance of transformations achieved through use.

Consequently, through this case selection, I illustrate the transformations emerging from collective use in the process of occupation, which I consider to constitute contemporary radicality in architecture. This article enumerates and contrasts the elements distinguishing this radicality from predominant disciplinary architecture, highlighting alternative processes for generating Place and spatial identity.

The cases analysed are:

Mercato Sonato. Bologna, Italy. A neighbourhood market built in the 1950s that, thanks to the temporary occupation by a symphony orchestra, became one of Bologna's most important cultural centres dedicated to music, with a primary school of 400 students and over 8,000 members. The building is undergoing demolition.

Plantage Dok. Amsterdam, Netherlands. A squat from 1998 that, through an assembly-based horizontal structure, managed to transform an old printing house, built over a Reformed church, into a building with residential units, artists' studios, and a cultural centre. It is a landmark case of a collective squad that managed to purchase the building and transform it into a Place representative of its own practices.

Wagenhallen. Stuttgart, Germany. A case of a railway carriage workshop that was reprogrammed by a group of artists into studios, housing, workshops, and a communal space. Due to the success of the temporary occupation and the ongoing transformation process driven

by practices, the building was converted into an artists' workshops and a significant cultural site in constant growth.

The purpose of this article, based on an empirical study of these three cases and supported by theory, is to identify spatial transformation practices arising from use, while contrasting them with institutional and hegemonic practices.

This research was conducted through a qualitative approach, centred on direct observation of the cases, participant interviews, and document analysis. A total of fourteen interviews were carried out with key individuals involved in the three spaces, alongside an analysis of one hundred and fifty documents, including photographs, architectural plans, articles, and press interviews, and finally, forty hours of observational study. Based on this evidence, several practices have been identified that stand in contrast to the generic approach to architecture. Radicality is proposed here as an alternative to traditional architecture, emphasising the importance of social practice and temporality in spatial transformation. This approach to architecture can create an architectural footprint expressed through reprogramming and the use of space, rather than relying solely on material interventions.

STATE OF THE ART

Occupation - Reusing vs. Building (Context).

If there is a position that challenges architectural tradition, it is the decision not to build at all. Reusing an existing space, instead of constructing a new one, is a subversive act against the dominant economic approach in architecture. Nevertheless, the reuse and reprogramming of existing buildings have notable historical precedents.

Not too far back in time, the political and social events of May '68 inspired activists and architects to explore potential tactics for occupying and appropriating buildings as well as urban space. These radical practices, set in

opposition to the political and economic model of the time, centred on a critique of modernist architecture, which not only championed functionality and aesthetic composition but also bolstered social discipline, facilitating, and experimenting the city's transformation processes, both in terms of policy planning and civic governance and design¹.

Within this context, radical concepts emerged, such as Price's anti-building, Tschumi's misuse, or Lefebvre's *détournement*, all of which revalued action and social practice as central components of architecture, shifting the focus away from the formal and material.

These critical practices not only established a political, social, and activist vision of architecture but also progressively legitimised everyday use as an essential component of spatial transformation and appropriation, which ceased to be designed for a specific, predetermined function. While developments like 'Learning from Las Vegas' revealed a spectacular renewal of architecture's historical association with graphic and sculptural arts, emphasising symbol over space (Anderson 2016, 33), social practices slowly began to emerge as dissident expressions within an increasingly exclusionary and superficial system. Dissent and radicalism grew in parallel with rising inequalities. What initially appeared to be an alternative to the modern movement instead became a space that simulated freedom and emancipation through the illusory power of image and consumer satisfaction. In doing so, it ultimately reinforced the reproduction of a new phase of multinational capitalism² In practical terms, as industrial cities in Europe transformed into post-industrial centres in the 1970s and 80s, occupying disused buildings became a subversive tactic.

This approach addressed housing shortages, created cultural spaces, and highlighted the inequalities emerging from the global economic system. On the one hand, areas with

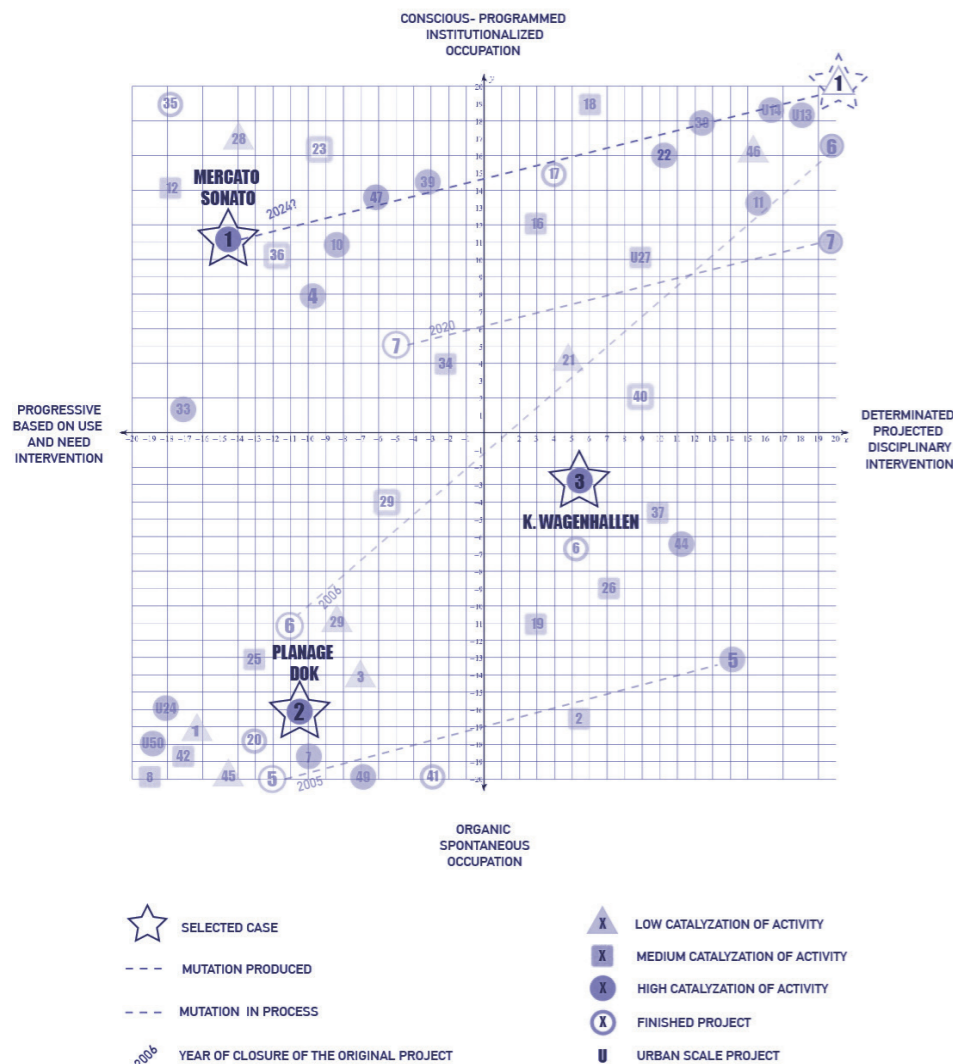


Fig.1 - Cartesian axis diagram for case analysis created by the author.

Finally, another key factor in the

high demand and limited vacant spaces emerged; on the other, areas of stagnation and shrinkage developed and disused buildings appeared (Oswalt et al., 2014). As a result, there was an increase in industrial and infrastructure buildings (located historically in central areas of cities shaped by Fordist industrial development) that became obsolete, fell into disuse, and entered into a new social, economic, political, and urban process.

These processes are observed in the three cases of occupation and reprogramming proposed for analysis. Each is located in areas that were once residual - revealing the inherent differences and contradictions of the system - and were appropriated and reprogrammed out of necessity and the reality of social practices. Both Mercato Sonato and Wagenhallen are examples of temporary occupations agreed upon with the city council as part of plans to revitalise degraded areas through reprogramming. The only unauthorised case is Plantage Dok, a 1998 squatted space that, through struggle and organisation, managed to purchase the occupied building.

Proportionate to the increase in systemic exclusions, we observe the development of an alternative spatial practice based on use and need (desires, affections, differences...) rather than on the functions (mathematical, technical...) of modernity or the superficial image of postmodernism (Till 2013). Within this framework, occupation

and appropriation function as bottom-up spatial practices that integrate physical realities, legal and cultural structures, political dimensions, philosophical foundations, and the routines of everyday life. Today, what began as radical utopian theories and was implemented through social struggle is reflected in tangible, effective elements of spatial appropriation. This demonstrates the ongoing relevance of use and social practices as alternative means of creating architecture and community.

EVIDENCE

Interaction - Practice vs. Abstraction (Mercato Sonato)

Today, the occupation of disused buildings, understood as residual spaces of uncertainty, creates opportunities for interaction and enables self-organising structures that, determined by the occupants, can drive significant spatial changes at small and medium scales (Miessen 2011, 68). When we speak of occupation and appropriation, we understand these practices as part of an active process of material and symbolic spatial transformation through use, interaction, and physical presence. An example of this process is seen in the Mercato Sonato project (Fig.2), a former market in the San Donato neighbourhood of Bologna, which was transformed, through a city council initiative, into one of the city's most important cultural centres for music through collective in-person practices.

The occupation of Mercato Sonato illustrates significant aspects regarding the value of collective presence in space. The building, once disused, was occupied by an established symphony orchestra with a defined identity and organisational structure. This is reflected in the way transformations are organised, where changes occur not through abstract modes of representation but through joint practice itself (Miessen 2011, 102).

The actions carried out by the Senzaspine Orchestra, responsible for the occupation, can be understood within a micro-context. In this context, a set of shared understandings emerges from continuous and pre-existing interactions, providing the cultural foundation for the action that shapes the space (Fine, 2012, 160). Unlike what may occur in a project designed from disciplinary abstraction, Mercato Sonato was transformed by the group's own practices. The empirical experiences gained through the use and development of their activities became the primary resource for shaping a new place. This process involved re-signifying the space through the group's own practices, resulting in a transformation that is primarily symbolic and social, rather than material. Material changes are mostly seen in the organisation of technical supports such as lighting, sound, stage positioning, storage, dressing rooms, and the division of classrooms for the school. However, the most significant transformation is observed in the change of meaning attributed to

the central space of the market. The space had been converted into a large public square where both the orchestra and the audience gather, as well as a venue for various activities, including meetings for group decision-making. This central space represents the Senzaspine group and, around its centrality, emphasised by the stage and the ability to accommodate the full orchestra, all the secondary spaces are grouped: workshops, kitchen, bar, classrooms, dressing rooms, and storage areas. Collective activity, primarily focused on use, transforms the space in a process that combines the practices and characteristics of the group. These practices, which demand physical presence, stem from the identity of the group, its needs, and its specific variables. In this particular case, it can be observed that the collective structure of the orchestra (divided into groups by instrument type, coordinated by a conductor) is mirrored in the general coordination system of the space. Beyond each band member having value and a vote, the overall direction and coordination is led by a central figure (Fig.3) who holds the baton and organises the collective desires, which are defined by different musical sectors.

In the area, the building was always recognised as the local market. However, since the Senzaspine occupation, the space has been transformed into a public space of music. The central space, which once housed market stalls, was transformed into a centre for various activities. Here, the space hosted concerts, neighbourhood assemblies, and art exhibitions, as well as music workshops and classes.

In the Mercato Sonato project, all material transformations were carried out by the group themselves, based on the specific needs of their activities, on demand. The main hall, the largest space, served as a large theatre with the stage at the back of the building. The need for an administration and management area, as well as storage and classrooms, required smaller and more enclosed spaces.



Fig.3 – Senzaspine band inside the central space of Mercato Sonato on 2nd June 2024 – Source: Photo by the author (2024).

All the open stalls along the perimeter were adapted with light partitions to segregate them as needed (Fig.4).

Until recently, the Senzaspine Orchestra had around 500 musicians, a music school with about 400 children, and 8,500 affiliates³. Through their agency and by means of a non-designed space, they managed to revitalise an abandoned building and bring together the culture of music in Bologna at the neighbourhood scale. In this particular case, the level of appropriation and spatial identity generated demonstrates that continuous group relations, enhanced through occupation, sustain collective effectiveness in space transformation practices, without the need for prior design or predetermined structure.

What is unique about this case is that the effectiveness and value of the occupation were so significant that the city council decided to build a new project with the same cultural programme, but by completely demolishing the existing one. This time, the process is antagonistic: a tabula rasa and a predetermined design that does not take into account the previous occupation⁴. The case of Mercato Sonato is, therefore, significant for observing these two opposing processes. On the one hand, it reflects the success of an alternative architecture that manages to reprogram an abandoned building through group practices, producing transformations at symbolic and social levels mainly, with almost no relevant material intervention. On the other hand, there is an integral demolition. a building designed

MERCATO SONATO - BOLOGNA, ITALY.

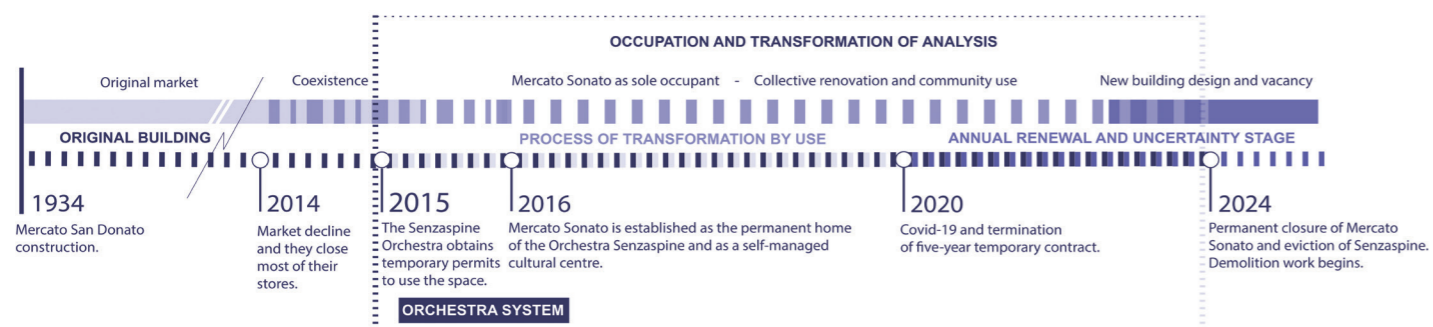


Fig.2 – Temporal development of the spatial process - Timeline by the author.

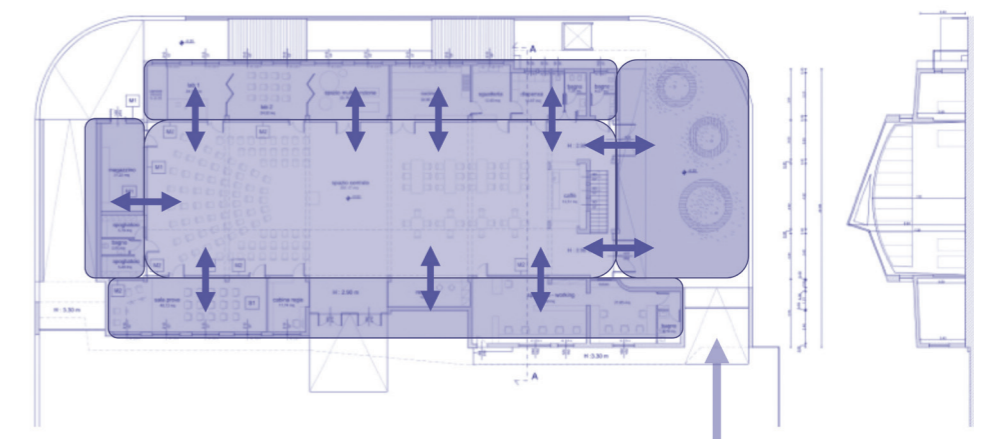


Fig.4 – Floor plan of Mercato Sonato – Source: Tomasso Ussardi Archive - Edited by the author.

PLANTAGE DOK - AMSTERDAM, NETHERLANDS.

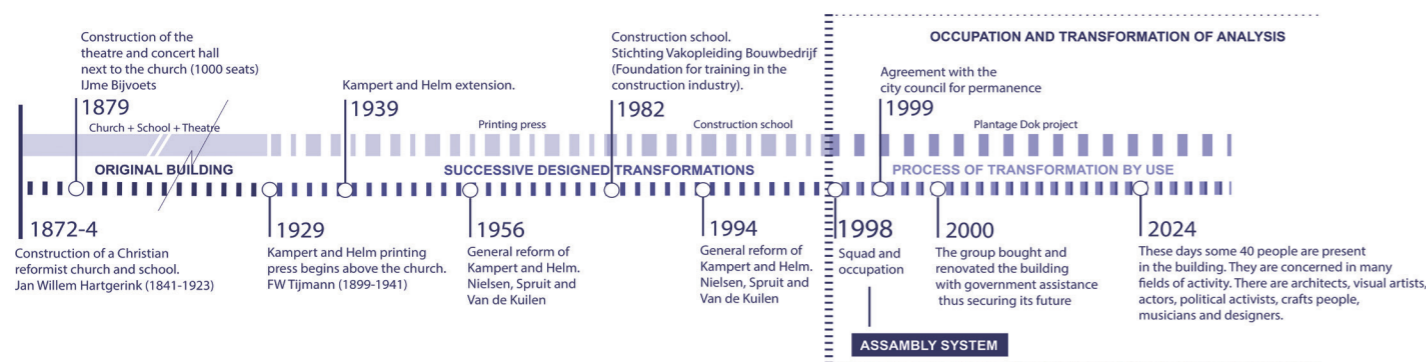


Fig.5 – Temporal development of the spatial process - Timeline by the author.

from scratch that determines and limits the uses of the new spaces by not having the necessary capacities or volumes to accommodate the entire orchestra, nor the audience size that Senzaspine gathered. This shortcoming highlights the lack of observational tools within disciplinary architectural practice.

Mercato Sonato is an example of radical architecture because it demonstrates how to produce Place from the actual use of the building, re-signifying the space through the practices and customs of the orchestra. It constructs space identity as a reflection of the group's identity and organisational system, in contrast to the subjective and biased decisions made through a process of abstraction and subjectivation based on tastes, technical skills, ideas, and external preferences. All the transformations observed in the process of occupying Mercato Sonato were carried out by the group itself according to its actions, uses, and needs, which should now be part of a new identity and occupation process. This is because the original market building no longer exists, and thus, part of it has been destroyed. What remains is the most valuable: the experience of transformation, the radicality of their methods, and the identity built in parallel with the material space.

Symbolic Transformation - Place vs. Neutral Space (Plantage Dok)

The concept of neutral space is closely associated with the instrumental and technical, due

to its pragmatic and utilitarian nature. As its essence suggests, it refers to a space without distinctive or expressive features. Associating neutrality with a space requires disregarding its political, relational, and social aspects, distancing it from a human-living place. However, this approach is frequently observed within the abstract space that architecture uses as a tool and methodology for production. The outcome of this is the negation of politics within architecture, a biased and partial perspective of space, the exclusion of the social as a key factor, and the detachment of the discipline from the actual needs of use.

As opposed to this view, the occupation and appropriation of space is seen not only as a bottom-

up subversive tactic to break with the architectural disciplinary structure. It is understood as a repositioning and reaffirmation of the field of social practices and group identity as creators of Place, challenging the notion of abstract, neutral space.

If we speak of spatial radicalism, the case of Plantage Dok in Amsterdam, serves as a reference model for organisation and transformation of space, maintaining an assembly system for decision-making since 1998 (Fig.5). The building occupied by Plantage Dok began its history in 1870 with the construction of a reformist church and theatre on two adjacent lots, which over the years have experienced various material and symbolic transformations.



Fig.6 – Photomontage of the main hall at Plantage Dok, formerly the old church, used for a concert by Instant Composers Pool – Old photo: Gemeente Amsterdam Stadsarchief. Colour photo: SITP (Space is the Place, 16th November 2023) – Collage by the author.

Today, it is a building with multiple activities and uses, reflecting the group occupying it and its organisational system. It is a collective project where it becomes evident how the politics and characteristics of the group constitute the building's meaning through the uses emerging from their collective practices.

The case of Plantage Dok is particular because, over time, two distinct types of transformation are visible. From the original church, the building was reprogrammed three times, becoming a school, a printing press, and a vocational training school. All of these transformations were carried out through pre-established designs, mostly involving significant material and formal changes. After its occupation in 1998, a new reprogramming process emerged, focused on the use of the space as housing, workspaces, a café, and a central communal area. The nave of the original church, which remained throughout this entire process of change, served as the heart of the transformation (Fig.6).

This final transformation has minimal material impact. It is primarily approached from the dimension of the practices themselves (the social dimension) and the symbolic representations generated by a narrative and

identity process characterised by the presence and interaction of the intervening group. A concrete example of how places are incessantly produced, not only when design professionals shape the function, but also when ordinary people extract from the continuous abstract space, a delimited, identified, and named space - a significant Place- (De Certeau 1996, Etlin 1997). The building is divided into two sections (Fig.7): one for workshops and studios, and the other for housing. All shared spaces have been intervened and transformed collectively, from common areas to more private spaces. The transformations are collaborative, with all colleagues working together to contribute or offer assistance, beyond individual decisions in private spaces. In this context, it is important to emphasise that, being artisans⁵, the construction resources are broad and significant in terms of spatial identity, as each modification or improvement is influenced by direct, hands-on practice.

However, Plantage Dok is also a case that requires considering the original building as a starting point for the occupation. This approach not only challenges the neutrality of the occupation practices and their participants, but also questions the neutrality of

the existing materiality itself. This means understanding that practices are products of collective activities but are filtered and conditioned by the materiality of the occupied space. In this sense, the building is divided into two distinct and clearly defined sectors. The ground floor houses the workshops (such as print workshops, music studios, artist studios, design spaces, and carpentry - Fig.8) featuring a large floor with large spans. The upper floor, in contrast, accommodates housing for artists and families, with a more compact layout due to shorter spatial modulations.

The ground level of the project retains from the original building a modular plan with large spans and skylights in the ceiling, providing good lighting for the entire workshop area. Given the participation of multiple activities and diverse productions, this open floor was gradually subdivided over time to meet the growing demand for workshops of varying sizes. These spaces, along with the circulation areas, surround the central space of the former church, the community square (Dokzaal - Fig.6), adapting to different needs.

On the upper floors, the need to adapt the large offices into housing required internal divisions, primarily to create private rooms functioning as bedrooms, while the kitchens and



Fig.7 – Axonometric view of the Plantage Dok building. Source: Collage by the author based on an image from Gemeente Amsterdam Stadsarchief.



Fig.8 – Atelier at Plantage Dok - Source: Photo by the author (2024).

bathrooms remain mostly shared. This scheme of collective housing and artistic production workshops reflects what Plantage Dok is and proposes as a community and cultural project.

As there is no association structure requiring administrative or leadership figures, no space was allocated for offices in the occupation. Its assembly-based organisational system reduces spatial needs to a place for gathering, debating, and voting on collective decisions. The various commissions, each with different responsibilities, gather in the workshop spaces, which serve as meeting rooms. The former central hall of the church became a versatile space, functioning not only as an internal area but also, alongside the café, as a public-facing space. The ability to rent this central area is the only source of income for the collective. Today, the building has 56 units, including artist workshops and housing. These units each represent one vote in the assembly, even if more than one person lives or works in the space. All decisions made, such as dividing costs, admitting new members, or the use of the main hall, are discussed and voted on during assemblies.

Plantage Dok is the only case among the three that originates from an occupation, making it an example of a space committed to dissident and subversive practice. However, beyond that, this space

demonstrates how the occupants transform existing material spaces into meaningful and socially relevant places through their use. The place is, therefore, interpreted as the trace of the transformation practices of a particular group. This concrete element, rooted in its identity, gives the occupied space its meaning and significance. As a result, the space becomes both the medium and the condition for the process of social, material, and symbolic transformation.

Temporality - Processual Architecture vs. Static Architecture (Kunstverein Wagenhallen)

Another example of radicality through architectural practice based on use is the interpretation of temporality in relation to space. This position, deeply rooted in the occupation of spaces due to their temporary nature (risk of eviction or periodic contracts), proposes a reimagining of things as processes to achieve the reconceptualization of places (Massey 2005).

The continuous transformation of space is recognized as its essence, in contrast to a static, formalist view of architecture that treats spaces as discrete, predetermined entities. The reduction resulting from the abstract vision of space in disciplinary technification does not allow for the interpretation of space as a dynamic social system, open to transformation. Instead, it reduces space to a static abstraction, where it is merely seen as something that awaits form.

The case that illustrates this alternative and radical view on architecture is that of Kunstverein Wagenhallen in Stuttgart, Germany. This occupation takes place in a former building that originally functioned as a train wagon workshop. After being abandoned, it was occupied in 2003 by a collective of thirty local artists, through an agreement with the city council. Initially, the occupation was temporary, meaning that the association formed by the group did not have guaranteed permanence in the space. This directly influenced how the occupants practised and perceived temporary spaces and how they progressively changed them.

At first, the group used an open-plan space to carry out the work required for the productions of each artist or designer. The main advantage was the versatility and vastness of the central space, with large apertures. This allowed them to hold exhibitions, meetings, events, and anything that required gathering large groups of people for cultural expression. The city council had granted them full freedom to use and modify the space. However, given the temporary and financial conditions, as well as the broad liberties the building provided, the group's actions were typical of occupying and appropriating an existing space, predominantly for internal use.

Driven by the desire to use the space in direct relation to its

availability, the practices became confined to the internal boundaries of the existing structure. The focus shifted to constructing small ateliers beneath a large roof. The tactic was less about creating new volumes or restoring missing elements, and more about utilising the vacant space and inserting elements into those voids. Beyond this internal tactic of utilization, in the case of Wagenhallen, we can observe a constant and continuous transformation of the space through the dynamic activities stemming from its multiple cultural and educational practices. The ongoing process of change and activity clearly shows that space and its meaning are not fixed. Rather, they are constantly evolving and shaped through practice, reflecting the fact that human action is always unfinished (Lees 2001).

The multiple changes and successful transformations resulting from the occupation of Kunstverein Wagenhallen led the city council to intervene in 2015 with an ambitious restoration and technical upgrade project for the original building.

This intervention, however, meant that by this time, the collective of artists had grown to approximately 100 members, which was four times larger than initially planned. Consequently, they were unable to use their workspaces.

As a result, a new process of adaptation and transformation began, where the entire collective had to temporarily relocate from the original building to the outer areas of the property. This marked the beginning of a new symbolic phase, where it became necessary to create a new space for use. It was established from scratch in the vicinity of the original building to retain ownership and presence over the new construction and the grounds.

The need led to the creation of a new communal space for collective use. This new common space was built from the ground up, now outward-facing, using available materials and driven entirely by practical needs and the necessity of use. The new transformation started with internal discussion groups, collective participation, joint

workshops, and a system of self-construction.

Over the following months, the process experienced continuous growth and dynamic readjustments. For the final stage of the project, the collective received assistance from a specialised group that provided technical data and general organisational support.

Today, both projects coexist, but not for long, as the city council plans to construct a concert hall on the exterior grounds of the building, with potential future developments including residential housing. However, Wagenhallen stands as an example of radical architecture because it demonstrates how diverse and continuous practices, developed within the fixed physical space, gradually shape its spatialisation from the ground up. These practices, sustained by collectively constructed expressions, insert time as an intrinsic variable of the space into the static and purely formalist vision of the architectural discipline. They reflect the shifting dynamics of actors, identities, and politics in a place, uncovering its

WAGENHALLEN - STUTTGART, GERMANY.

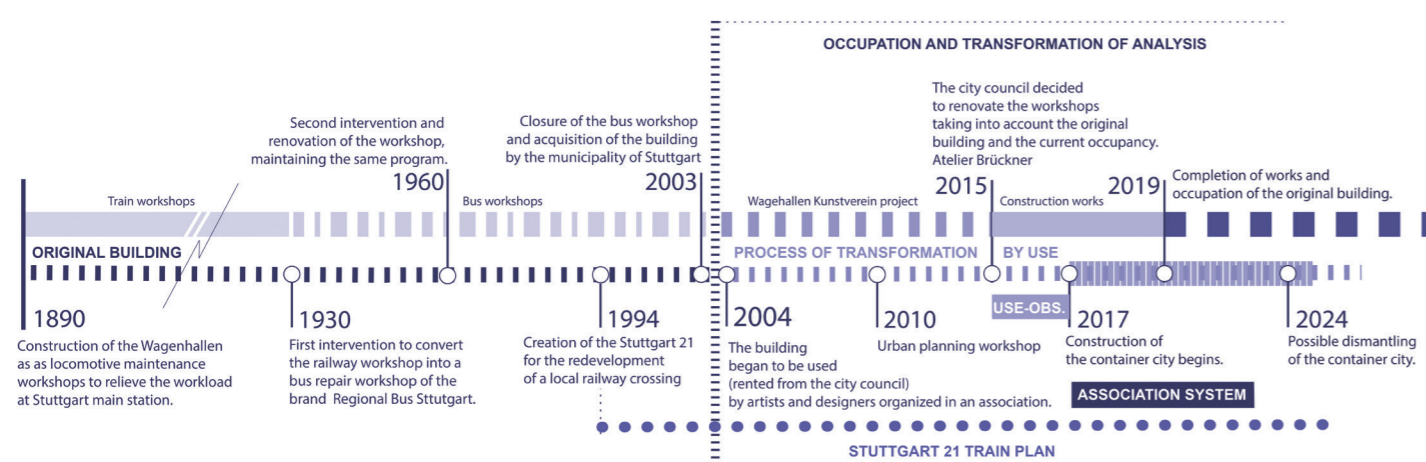


Fig.9 – Temporal development of the spatial process - Timeline by the author.



Fig.10 – Photograph of the original state of the main building, with a photomontage of the ateliers and studios intervention. Source: Color photo by the author (2024); black and white photo from Stuttgart General Archives; photomontage by the author.

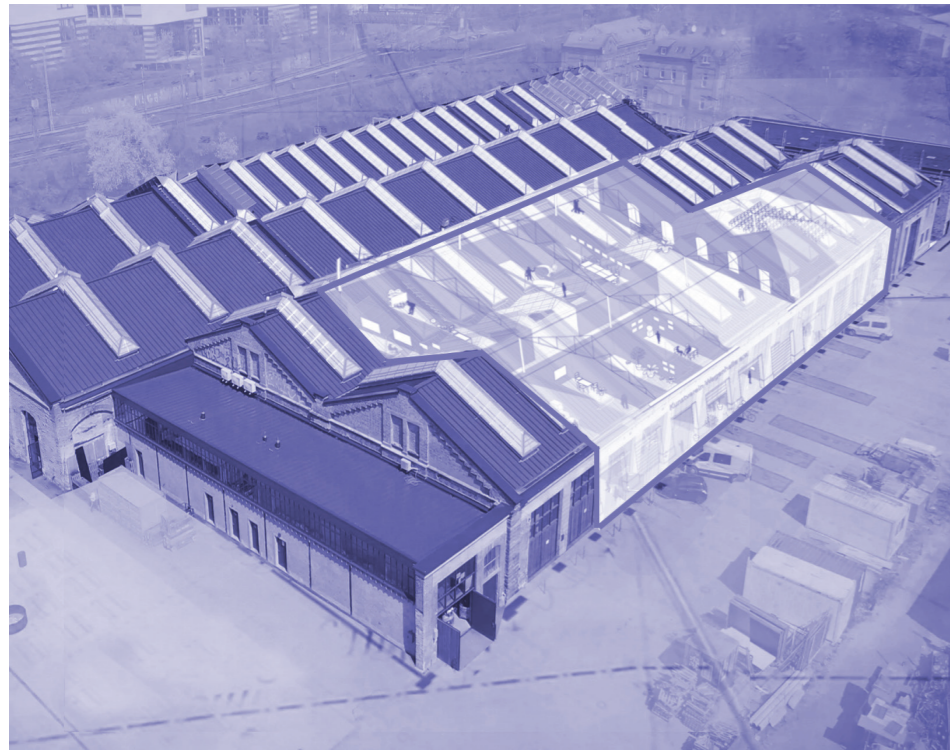


Fig.11 – Aerial view of the main building with an axonometric representation of internal ateliers - Source: Aerial photo by Atelier Brückner, axonometric design by Studio Malta, photomontage by the author.

emerging complexity.

The traces of use and appropriation expose the functioning of time and the overlap of different temporalities in all their historical richness. When analysing the practices of transformation in Wagenhallen, it is clear that they propose radicality by advocating for an architecture based on continuous transformation.

The dynamics of contemporary society are reflected in the space, organised and collectively built from interests, relationships, and conflicts.

There are numerous examples of collective occupations that illustrate space as an open, ongoing production. As a form of radicality, in disciplinary architecture, this means shifting away from thinking mainly in terms of predetermined designs and static spaces. Instead, it interprets space and its production as a continuous process, shaped directly by social practices and material objects.

CONCLUSION

The transformation of unused spaces through occupation and

appropriation by collectives with cultural purposes, as seen in Mercato Sonato, Plantage Dok, and Wagenhallen, highlights the powerful role of collective actions. The continuous reshaping of these spaces through everyday practices demonstrates how such actions challenge and redefine traditional architectural concepts. By focusing on the social practices within these processes, these cases exemplify radicalism through a space understood based on human experience and collective meaning, what we refer to as Place.

This approach reveals radical architectural tactics that bridge the gap between available resources and everyday life, reshaping how we study space by incorporating social elements as essential factors. It goes beyond the geometric and formal boundaries of disciplinary architecture by integrating temporality and process.

The reprogramming of spaces calls attention to the durability of a building and its potential obsolescence, no longer determined solely by its physical properties but by the evolving social system. This obsolescence is not a "natural process" but one influenced by

cultural categories and social dynamics. Despite its relatively durable and imposing materiality, the meaning or value of a Place is fragile-flexible in the hands of different people or cultures, malleable over time, and inevitably questioned (Gieryn 2000, 465).

In an era dominated by superficial and illusory constructs, a root level subversive approach requires challenging a hegemonic language of abstract representation and proposing tools that address its limiting perspective. Moving away from the conventional view of architecture as resistant to change, with function as its only criterion, I instead construct a social and relational space through practice (one that disrupts the false equivalence between space and representation). Actions, uses, and needs become the foundation for producing a Place.

Engaging in the occupation and appropriation of buildings inherently involves a stance on the significance of space, recognising its role in shaping social and political relationships. This strategic value of space makes its control a subject of dispute, with its production, transformation, and intervention driven by political intents. This is crucial for understanding the dynamics of conflict, change, and transformation in our cities and societies.

Building on this premise, the radical nature of the spatial transformation practices based on use, as observed and described in this work, suggests a critical position towards the hegemonic ways of producing space in contemporary architecture. By incorporating temporality, identity, interaction, and politics, these practices redefine architecture through social action itself. These effective case studies offer tangible and impactful ways of making architecture from everyday practices of use. The next challenge will be to determine how these practices can be adapted and transformed within a new, alternative and radical architectural approach that moves beyond traditional frameworks.

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NOTES

1. LE CORBUSIER, 1964. *La Ville radieuse, éléments d'une doctrine d'urbanisme pour l'équipement de la civilisation machiniste*. Paris: Vincent Fréal.

2. For further reading, see JAMESON, Fredric, 1992. *Postmodernism, or, the cultural logic of late capitalism*. Durham, NC, USA: Duke University Press and ANDERSON, Perry, 1998. *The origins of postmodernity*. London: Verso Books.

3. Mercato Sonato was part of ARCI (Associazione Ricreativa e Culturale Italiana), and membership in this association was a key source of its regular income.

4. The architectural firm chosen by the city council to design the new building held only two open participation meetings (without observing activities) four years before the construction of the project and at the beginning of the occupation activities (Source: interview with Matteo Parmeggiani and Tomasso Ussardi).

5. The expansion of the term can be found in works such as *The Craftsman* (Sennett 2008), which explores how the practice of craftsmanship relates to culture, identity, and social well-being, or *Art and Agency* (Gell 1998), which delves into the relationship between art, handcrafted objects, and social agency.

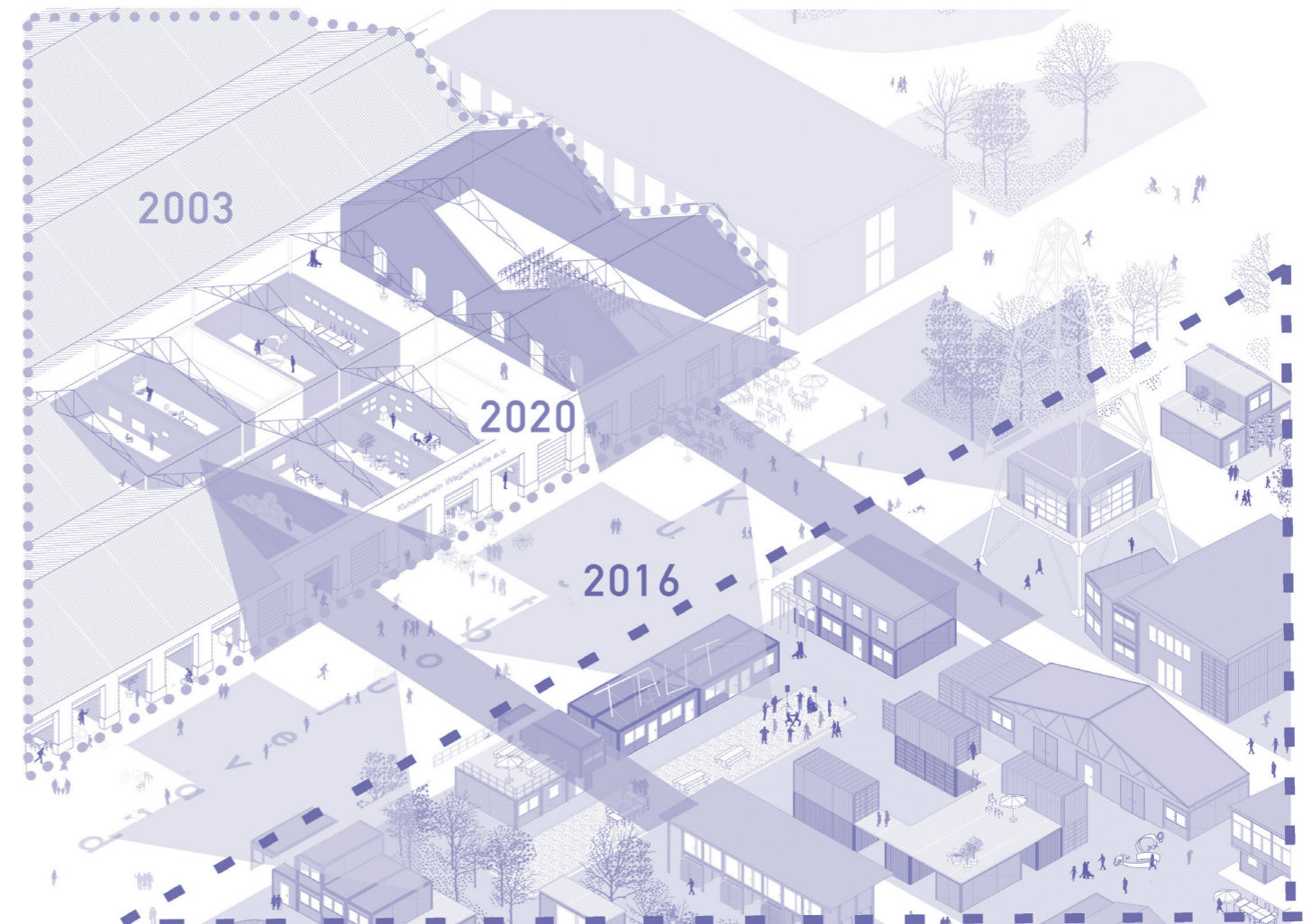


Fig.12 – 2003: Original occupation. 2016: Commencement of work on the main building and occupation of the exterior site. 2020: Return to the original building while maintaining both spaces. Source: Axonometric design by Studio Malta, edited by the author (2024).