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UNFINISHED CONFIGURATIONS: ARCHITECTURAL SPACE AS PROCESS, RELATIONSHIPS, AND EXPERIENCE

NIEDOMKNIĘTE KONFIGURACJE: PRZESTRZEŃ ARCHITEKTONICZNA JAKO PROCES, RELACJE I DOŚWIADCZENIE

Abstract

This chapter explores anti-finality and assemblage architecture as ongoing processes that remain open to users' experiences. It examines the potential of open-ended architectural configurations in creating adaptable spaces through selected European case studies and an original typology. The implementation of anti-finality and bricolage enriches spatial practices, enables programmatic reconfiguration, and shifts architectural value from formal perfection to social relations and emotions.

Keywords: *anti-finality, assemblage architecture, spatial experience, spatial indeterminacy*

Streszczenie

Artykuł analizuje temat antyfinalności i architektury asemblażu, traktowanej jako proces otwarty na relacje i doświadczenia użytkowników. Próbuje określić potencjał niedomkniętych konfiguracji architektonicznych w kreowaniu elastycznych przestrzeni. Wybrane europejskie realizacje zostały przeanalizowane w ramach autorskiej typologii.
Zastosowane w projektach antyfinalność i brikolaż poszerzają doświadczenia użytkowników, umożliwiają rekonfigurację funkcji oraz przenoszą ciężar wartości architektury z formalnej doskonałości na relacje społeczne i emocje.

Słowa kluczowe: *antyfinalność, architektura asemblażu, doświadczenie przestrzenne, niedookreśloność przestrzenna*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. ARCHITECTURE AS AN ANTI-FINAL DIALOGUE

Juhani Pallasmaa maintains that 'spaces are verbs'[1]. According to the semiotician Vladimir Toporov, however, 'in the archaic model of the world', the phenomena of space and time

[1] J. Pallasmaa, *Miejsce, przestrzeń i atmosfera. Postrzeganie peryferyjne i emocje w doświadczeniu architektonicznym* [in:] P. Sieniuć (ed.), *Miasto-Zdrój. Architektura i programowanie*, Warszawa 2019, p. 15.

constitute a continuum linked to human life, in which the creative factor – the 'drive towards life' and 'towards form' – is essential. The Russian semiotician employed these terms, linking space and time in a construct he described as a 'mythopoetic chronotope'[2]. The two categories mutually define one another: time, by 'spatialising', becomes the fourth dimension of space, whilst space 'temporalises', that is, it is set in motion and rooted in a narrative unfolding over time. The analogies between architectural poetics and the theory of literary narrative provide, in this regard, a theoretical foundation for the concept contained in the theses of this conference: 'Architecture does not exist simultaneously. Time changes it, or at least changes our perception of it'[3].

In its move towards experience, contemporary architecture often engages in a 'dialogue' with users – through methods of interaction, whether intended by its creators or not. This aligns with a key idea in the conference thesis: 'Architecture should intrigue us, rather than provide simple answers'[4]. Although the concepts of chronotope, event and architectural dialogue stem from different traditions, they all challenge the notion of space as a static and finite phenomenon. Another concept that illustrates the creation of conditions for future events – and thus the broadening of experience – is anti-finality. In a strictly designed, semantically defined space with functions unambiguously predetermined by the designers, the number of possible potential events is limited. This was the perspective adopted by the modernists, who, by implementing the concept of zoning and forms with clearly defined functions, minimised the number of interactions. By contrast, discourse on Ray Oldenburg's concept of the 'third place' discourse recognised spaces lacking a clearly defined functional purpose but possessing a context, while megastructures introduced the continuous transformation of interchangeable elements within a fixed overarching structure. The concept of anti-finality goes even further, realised through architecturally indeterminate spaces that are open to change, sometimes at odds with the original design intent. Uses not foreseen by the designer are permitted. A space that is open to future reinterpretations, which cannot be fully defined and retains the potential for unpredictable social practices, serves as a catalyst for social interaction.

The idea that space – even when understood in the architectural sense – is never permanently defined, but remains the result of changing social, tangible and spatial relationships, also links experiences to the theory of assemblage architecture based on the work of Deleuze and Guattari. An event within it is ontologically linked to space; it arises from relationships among people, spatial elements, and external factors (technology, climatic conditions, etc.). This shifts the understanding of architectural objects from closed entities to temporary configurations of various elements: people, institutions, technology, materials, flows, and events. This openness and non-hierarchical nature are accompanied by processuality – a long or even endless process of creation. Selected European projects, which have been identified by the author as 'assemblage architecture' – anti-final, experience-oriented and thus focused on interaction with users – are analysed in this chapter based on observations, design studies and the literature, structured within an original typology developed by the author

[2] W. Toporow, *Przestrzeń i rzecz*, trans. B. Żyłko, Universitas, Kraków 2003.

[3] International Conference – Defining the Architectural Space, *Thesis in English 2026. Architecture and Experience*, https://dpa.arch.pk.edu.pl/thesis-in-english-2026/ (access: 01.06.2026).

[4] *Ibidem*.

2. MULTIPLE CASE STUDY – TYPOLOGY OF INCOMPLETE CONFIGURATIONS

2.1. GARAGE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, MOSCOW (DESIGNED BY OMA, 2015): REFURBISHMENT – A 'PALIMPSEST' BUILDING DESIGNED TO ACCOMMODATE UNFORESEEN ACTIVITIES

The 'Garage' was developed by adapting a prefabricated concrete restaurant pavilion dating from the 1960s that had been abandoned in the 1990s. It was transformed into a space with approximately 5,400 m² of usable floor area, comprising exhibition galleries, a creative centre for children, a shop, a café, an auditorium, offices and a roof terrace[5]. By retaining the structural and material 'traces' of the original building, the architects cultivated an aesthetic of deliberate incompleteness (non-finito), presenting the post-renovation spatial composition as an ongoing process rather than a finalised artefact. The exposed structure and the new elements added – which contrast visually with original features – include concrete, steel and surfaces, some in saturated colours. Spaces of varying heights not only provide ideal conditions for exhibitions but also offer a variety of experiences. A 9 x 11-metre opening in the upper-level floor creates a double-height space (10 metres high) for the lobby, allowing extra-large sculptures to be displayed. A public circulation route on the lower level connects the bookshop, media library, auditorium and a café, envisaged as 'an informal living room'.

In addition, the building engages in a 'dialogue with its surroundings' through its fully glazed ground floor, semi-transparent polycarbonate walls above that offer a blurred view of the interior, liftable panels on either side of the lobby forming a 'gate' (through the main entrance to Gorky Park), and a large corner window.

OMA preserved the building's orthogonal geometry and austere industrial aesthetic, characteristic of Soviet modernism, while integrating original period fabric such as mosaics, tiles, and brickwork. Damaged ceramic tiles were preserved with only graffiti removed, creating a palimpsestic dialogue alongside the exhibited works of art.

The resulting spatial structure facilitates dynamic curatorial and spatial reconfigurations. Due to its formal design, the building functions as a space that remains open to interpretation. Its history is not concealed – it is an assemblage-like, formal palimpsest, while remaining open to future programmatic shifts.

2.2. FRAC GRAND LARGE IN DUNKIRK (DESIGNED BY LACATON & VASSAL, 2009–2015): EXTENSION – BLENDING HISTORY WITH NEW ARCHITECTURE TO ENHANCE THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

The facility, designed to accommodate unforeseen activities, is a public cultural institution whose development resulted from a competition held on the post-industrial site of a former shipyard. The existing AP2 boat storage hall, built in 1949, nicknamed 'the Cathedral' for its size (footprint approx. 70 × 25 m, height 35 m), was preserved after the

[5] OMA, *Garage Museum of Contemporary Art*, "OMA", https://www.oma.com/projects/garage-museum-of-contemporary-art (access: 14.09.2026).

shipyard's closure (along with industrial relics, such as the former gantry cranes) as one of the few remaining, unique testimonies to Dunkirk's industrial heritage[6]. Rather than pursuing a traditional regeneration project for the hall or making drastic alterations to the existing structure, Lacaton & Vassal rejected the concept of the building as a finished, perfected form. They recognised AP2 as a unique, symbolic structure, ideal for contemporary art exhibitions due to its geometry and natural daylight. They therefore constructed an adjoining twin volume of identical dimensions to house both exhibition and support programmes.

The assemblage-based approach was rooted in establishing a relationship between the existing structure, the new building, and the flexible use of the space. This configuration accommodates large objects at AP2, in line with curatorial visions, and allows events to be organised independently of FRAC; the new building provides the necessary support spaces. Crucially, rather than interfering with the industrial fabric, this approach allowed for the respectful preservation of the industrial heritage – without pretence or unnecessary alterations. The materials and raw aesthetic of both the existing and new structures are rooted in the DNA of industrial buildings. The architects' approach also allowed space for spontaneous, community-driven appropriations. As a result, it has become a venue for unforeseen activities and experiences, the outlines of which are visible through the translucent facade of the new building.

2.3. SUPERKILEN CITY PARK IN COPENHAGEN (DESIGNED BY BIG, TOPOTEK1 AND SUPERFLEX, 2012): A NEW PUBLIC SPACE – A DYNAMIC NETWORK OF PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Superkilen Park in Copenhagen resulted from an urban design competition for a 750-metre brownfield strip along a former tram corridor and depot, awarded to a consortium of architectural practices BIG and Topotek1 and the artistic collective Superflex. Located in the historically working-class, multicultural Nørrebro district with a long tradition of protests and riots, the project prioritized intercultural integration and social cohesion in the neighbourhood as central imperatives of the district's development plan, the competition and the park's design.

The result is an iconic, multi-award-winning example of a space composed of elements drawn from dozens of cultures, with no single 'correct' way to use it: at different times of the day, it can serve as a park, a venue for urban sports, or a meeting place. Each of these situations creates a different chronotope. The linear site was articulated into three sections with distinct thematic motifs and aesthetics: Red Square, Black Market – conceived as an 'urban living room' – and Green Park. The street furniture was chosen by local residents, in line with the idea of these elements as 'agents of integration'. Placing elements within the urban space, selected from their original geographical context, was intended to generate a sense of belonging and replace feelings of isolation. Simultaneously, the design invokes Marcel Duchamp's concept of the 'objet trouvé', recontextualising everyday utilitarian objects and signage into artistic interventions.

[6] Lacaton & Vassal, *RAC Grand Large – Hauts-de-France, Dunkerque*, "Lacaton & Vassal", https://www.lacatonvassal.com/index.php?idp=61 (access: 10.09.2026).

This assemblage incorporates 108 culturally diverse artefacts and 11 trees chosen by the community – including a Moroccan fountain, street furniture from São Paulo, Belgium, and Brazil, a Bangkok Muay Thai ring, a Mogadishu basketball hoop, a Chernobyl slide, and a Rochester doughnut sign. Restricting their intervention to spatial curating and layout, the architects assembled a postmodern bricolage where specific elements, such as a crescent-and-tooth neon sign from Doha or iconography from Moscow's Red Square, actively provoke discourse on cultural identity and symbolism.

Ultimately, Superkilen operates as an 'experimental space for negotiating identity', in which various models of use are intended to foster integration – sport as a means of breaking down cultural barriers, commerce as a method of globalisation, and outdoor activities in green spaces as the backdrop to public life.

2.4. FRICHE LA BELLE DE MAI IN MARSEILLE (DESIGNED BY MATTHIEU POITEVIN, ARM ARCHITECTURE AND OTHERS, 2001–): REDEVELOPMENT – THE BUILDING AS A PROCESS – A SOCIO-SPATIAL ARRANGEMENT WITH A BRICOLAGE CONFIGURATION

The site, which has undergone a long-term process of transformation on the site of the former Seita tobacco factory in a working-class, multicultural neighbourhood of Marseille, is a venue for public cultural events, a freely accessible space for urban sports and recreation, and home to around 70 organisations, covering an area of approximately 45,000 m². Belle de Mai is regarded as the poorest neighbourhood in France, marginalised since the 1980s, following the decline of local industry, yet retaining strong community ties. In the 1990s, the disused factory was spontaneously taken over by artists. This informal, temporary appropriation evolved into a formalised institutional vision, articulated in a manifesto (co-authored by among others, Jean Nouvel and Patrick Bouchain), which successfully diverted the complex from real estate privatisation toward civic preservation[7].

Since 1992, the complex – comprising five industrial structures, two villas, and a reservoir – has progressively developed into a cultural centre and an inclusive social and public space for the residents of the neighbourhood and the city as a whole. Jointly governed since 2007 by artists, residents, and municipal stakeholders, the site stands as a paradigmatic 'third place'. Currently, the Friche accommodates a sports ground, a restaurant, cafés, six concert halls, urban community gardens, a bookshop, a crèche, 2,400 m² of exhibition space, a rooftop terrace (covering 8,000 m²), educational facilities, a skatepark, children's play areas, a crèche, and a library.

Architect Matthieu Poitevin employed a strategy of bricolage, making the most of local resources (together with his team and other practices hired for specific projects). This approach, born of financial constraints, is also in line with the contemporary paradigm of the circular economy. The factory buildings were therefore 'hollowed out', to create space and admit natural light for the new functions, and subsequently redeveloped. The architect's idea was to create an 'in-between' space where the user is unsure whether they are inside or outside the building and experiences natural phenomena within the architecture[8].

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[7] Friche la Belle de Mai, *Le Projet*, "Friche la Belle de Mai", https://www.lafriche.org/la-friche/le-projet/ (access: 14.09.2026).

[8] *Ibidem*.

The result is a disorderly yet intriguing space, bustling with people and covered in murals and graffiti, where interventions have been aesthetically integrated with the original post-industrial structure. Whilst it lacks cohesion and aesthetic refinement, it aligns with the declared ideals of freedom of thought, discovery and experimentation espoused by the managing institution. The site remains in perpetual transformation. The latest project is Champ de Mai – a public, open space for outdoor events situated above the underground car park (designed by Kristell Filotico, Atelier Roberta, 2021).

2.5. TEMPELHOFER FELD IN BERLIN (DESIGNED BY MLZD ET AL., 2014–): A SITE UNDERGOING TRANSFORMATION – A PROVISIONAL 'SPACE FOR EVENTS'

The former airport, dating from the 1930s and designed by Ernst Sagebiel, was transformed after 2008 into a vast open urban space. By municipal and civic consensus, it deliberately lacks a single dominant functional programme. Its long-term development is being planned by numerous designers and decision-makers; the site hosts sport, recreation, community gardening, cultural events and demonstrations. This assemblage of functions and 'spaces for events' embodies deliberate anti-finality, allowing a different experience of the place to emerge – one that can be described as a true chronotope.

This area, which is undergoing constant transformation, has been presented as an open, inclusive space that helps to create a resilient and environmentally sustainable Berlin. It is framed as a place focused on experience and as a contributor to the city's identity as a whole – a 'symbol of democracy'[9]. The Vision 2030+, the site's strategic framework, envisages the creation of space for experimentation, with ambivalence at its core and as the guiding principle, alongside fluidity and the deliberate incompleteness of the space. As part of a public-private partnership, this site – which was originally a strictly protected facility and remains Europe's largest building, currently undergoing a long-term renovation – is set to become an open space of democracy, where users continually negotiate ways of using the space.

3. SUMMARY

Assemblage architecture, as demonstrated by the case studies analysed above, operates not through closed formal perfection, but through dynamic relational networks, programmatic fluidity, an openness to emerging connections and experiences, and anti-finality – defined as the deliberate absence of a terminal state. This latter characteristic manifests either through ongoing structural interventions (continuous reconstructions and temporal spatial practices) or through completed projects exhibiting such programmatic latitude and palimpsestic aesthetics that an ultimate state of completion remains imperceptible. Simultaneously, interventions within the existing built environment provide fertile ground for utilising pre-existing spatial artefacts and architectural bricolage, irrespective of the intervention's physical scale (be it an individual building, a complex, or an urban realm) or

[9] Flughafen Tempelhof*, Europe's Largest Listed Building – Preserving and Developing*, "Flughafen Tempelhof", https://www.thf-berlin.de/en/development (access: 14.09.2026).

the method of intervention (refurbishment, extension, or new insertion). An architectural assemblage is never definitively complete; it possesses a dynamic, continuously reconfigurable structure comprising components that, following Manuel DeLanda's assemblage theory, retain a significant degree of functional autonomy[10].

Within contemporary architectural theory, the paradigm of anti-finality encapsulates broader process-oriented frameworks that prioritise spatial practice over rigid formal closure, favouring the design of latent potentials over prescriptive spatial configurations: Oskar Hansen's 'Open Form', Cedric Price's architecture of indeterminacy, Ignasi de Solà-Morales's concept of 'terrain vague', and the theory of 'indeterminacy' ('determinate indeterminism'). While an exhaustive investigation of these theoretical intersections exceeds the scope of a single chapter, the framework of anti-finality unlocks profound possibilities for conveying heightened metaphorical resonance within built space. Furthermore, it facilitates a conceptual 'transcendence' of the urban condition (as articulated by Lucyna Nyka) in alignment with the theoretical construct explored herein: 'the promise of the existence of some other, unknown reality, which extends into uncharted regions, and of which one might acquire knowledge – this is the very essence of the city'[11]. Ultimately, architectural significance derives not merely from formal equilibrium or stylistic consistency, but from the capacity of space to evoke profound affective, psychological, and existential states of mind through continuous engagement with its inhabitants.



Ill. 1. Superkilen, Copenhagen. Photo by the author

[10] M. DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory,* Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2016.

[11] L. Nyka, *Wielowarstwowa natura miejska jako kontekst współczesnej architektury miejskiej*, [in:] J. Bogdanowski (ed.), *Miasto historyczne w dialogu ze współczesnością*, Nadbałtyckie Centrum Kultury, Wydział Architektury Politechniki Gdańskiej, Gdańsk 2002, p. 123.



Ill. 2. Friche la Belle de Mai, Marseille. Photo by the author



Ill. 3. Friche la Belle de Mai, Marseille. Photo by the author

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[7] OMA, *Garage Museum of Contemporary Art*, "OMA", https://www.oma.com/projects/garage-museum-of-contemporary-art, (access: 14.09.2026).

[8] Pallasmaa J., *Miejsce, przestrzeń i atmosfera. Postrzeganie peryferyjne i emocje w doświadczeniu architektonicznym* [in:] P. Sieniuć (ed.), *Miasto-Zdrój. Architektura i programowanie*, Fundacja Nowej Kultury Bęc Zmiana, Warszawa 2019, pp. 13–28.

[9] Toporow W., *Przestrzeń i rzecz*, trans. B. Żyłko, Universitas, Kraków 2003.

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