

## **Space through Bodies: Temporary architectures as corporeal structures of urban spatial production**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines how temporary spatial interventions co-produce urban space through their interaction with the body. These interventions are understood as hybrid constellations that affect both the physical and social dimensions of space. Drawing on theories of performativity, hybridity, and atmosphere, space is conceptualised not as a static container but as a dynamic field of relations shaped by embodied practices. Through three case studies, the paper illustrates how architectural structures, material configurations, and bodily presence intersect to generate spatial meaning and foster new urban encounters.

**Keywords:** Body and space interaction; relational space; architectural practice; spatial dynamics

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### **1.0 Introduction**

The perception and production of urban spaces is a dynamic process influenced by a variety of material, social, political, and cultural factors. Since the spatial turn, space has no longer been understood as a static object but as a relational and continuously shaped process that is constantly recreated through interactions between people and spaces. This perspective is largely shaped by Henri Lefebvre, who describes space as socially produced and emphasises that it is brought into being through human practices and social relationships (Lefebvre, 1974). This perspective is particularly relevant in the context of temporary spatial interventions in public space, which are not merely architectural modifications but act as hybrid agents that connect both human and non-human elements. The growing significance of these temporary, flexible spatial designs lies in their potential to respond to urban development challenges by redesigning public space, promoting social interactions, and enabling cultural negotiations.

The following paper examines how temporary spatial interventions, in interaction with the body, shape urban space and contribute to spatial production. The question arises as to how the body functions not only as a subject of spatial perception but also as an active co-creator of space and meaning. The central research question is: How do temporary spatial interventions, as hybrid actors, contribute to urban spatial production, and what role does the body play in this dynamic process? Accordingly, the paper aims to conceptualise temporary spatial interventions as hybrid constellations and to analyse the role of bodily practices in urban spatial production.

## 2.0 Literature Review

The idea that bodies and spaces are inextricably linked has been examined across various disciplinary fields, each approaching the topic with distinct theoretical and methodological frameworks. Central to many of these is the phenomenological tradition, which reconceptualises space not as a neutral, objective entity but as a dynamic phenomenon constituted through lived experience. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1966) underscores that space is never perceived from a disembodied standpoint; rather, it is experienced through the sensuous, affective, and cognitive capacities of the situated subject. Thus, space becomes a meaning-laden environment shaped by orientation, emotion, and bodily perception. In this view, spatial experience is never homogeneous or universal but contingent and relational.

Merleau-Ponty further elaborates space as a scenographic field in which the subject is embedded – not merely as an observer but as an active participant whose presence continuously shapes and is shaped by spatial conditions (Merleau-Ponty, 1984). The subject and space emerge as co-constitutive: the one cannot be fully grasped without the other. This relational model is expanded by Bruno Latour's theory of hybridity, which dissolves the traditional subject-object dichotomy by emphasising the symmetrical agency of human and non-human actors. In Latour's actor-network theory, space itself becomes a participant in action, endowed with the capacity to shape behaviour, perception, and social order (Latour, 2000).

Latour's framework reframes the built environment not as an inert backdrop but as a performative assemblage wherein agency is distributed across networks of people, materials, technologies, and practices. For example, spatial devices such as ramps or bollards do not merely serve functional roles; they structure conduct, regulate movement, and participate in the formation of urban norms (Latour, 2000). Accordingly, spatial production is not solely the result of human intention but a collective process enacted through hybrid constellations. The subject becomes entangled in spatial conditions that are simultaneously material and semiotic, sensory and symbolic.

Latour draws on Heidegger's concept of being-in-the-world to highlight the mood-based and pre-reflective dimensions of spatial experience (Heidegger, 1986). Space is not merely encountered cognitively but is affectively felt through atmosphere, a concept further developed by Jens Roselt (2004), who introduces the idea of interpassion: the mutual, affective entanglement of subject and spatial environment. In this interplay, actions, affects, and perceptions are co-shaped by spatial configurations that operate below the level of conscious awareness. This atmospheric dimension is also central to Gernot Böhme's aesthetics of atmospheres (1995), which conceptualises built space as an affective medium. Architecture, in this view, does not simply fulfil symbolic or functional roles but modulates mood, perception, and social behaviour. Atmospheres are not residual effects but integral components of how space is embodied, inhabited, and socially performed (Böhme, 1995). They arise from the interplay of materiality, light, acoustics, texture, and spatial arrangement – and as such, they structure social life in subtle but powerful ways.

Erika Fischer-Lichte extends this spatial-affective discourse into the performative realm. In her theory of aesthetic experience, she argues that space is not a static stage for human action but a co-creator of meaning within performative events (Fischer-Lichte, 2004). Through bodily presence and material interaction, space becomes dynamically enacted and re-signified. Her concept of communicative embodiment positions the body as a medium through which space is not only perceived but actively constituted. The performative space is therefore one of emergence – constantly shifting, dialogical, and emotionally charged.

Immersion, as described by Roselt and rooted in Jameson's cultural theory (1986), refers to the deep corporeal entanglement of the subject within space. In such states, users are not passive recipients of spatial stimuli but co-producers of atmospheric and social realities. This immersion is mediated by specific spatial cues and culturally shaped reception practices, demonstrating that atmospheres are never entirely open-ended but encoded within broader symbolic systems.

Taken together, these approaches frame spatial experience as a complex interplay of embodiment, materiality, and affect. The extension of Latour's hybrid theory to include atmosphere and performativity opens new analytical avenues: it invites us to see space not only as socially produced (Lefebvre, 1974) but as sensorially and symbolically enacted through iterative interactions between bodies and material agents. It highlights that housing design reflects emotional needs and lifestyle aspirations, not just functionality (Sulistiyono & Priiana, 2024).

In this context, temporary spatial interventions gain analytical significance. Their fleeting material presence often lays bare the relational and performative logics of spatial production. Such interventions do not merely modify the built environment; they intervene in the networks of meaning, perception, and practice that define urban life. They illustrate how bodies and spaces are not simply co-located but co-articulated – and how atmospheres and actions together configure the politics and poetics of space.

## 3.0 Methodology

The following section examines three case studies from different urban contexts in Germany that serve as exemplary instances of temporary spatial interventions. A qualitative, interpretive approach is employed to analyse the interplay between space, body, and architectural design from a performative perspective. The methodological framework is based on interpretive hermeneutics, aiming to uncover the spatial logics, affective resonances, and embodied practices within these interventions. Instead of presupposing a fixed understanding of spatial production, the study approaches it as a dynamic, relational process – one that emerges through situated action and bodily co-presence. Space is thus conceived as being in constant transformation, shaped through the repeated interaction between users, materials, and atmospheric conditions. Methodologically, the study follows a qualitative case-study approach based on interpretive analysis of spatial configurations, material arrangements, documented practices, and visual material.

## 4.0 Findings

The analysis of temporary spatial interventions in public space focuses on the interplay between body, space, and architecture from a performative perspective. The selected case studies serve to explore the central research question: How do temporary spatial interventions, as hybrid actors, contribute to the production of urban space, and what role does the body play in this dynamic process? The analysis aims to investigate how spatial configurations, material structures, and embodied practices interact and how these interactions may influence the perception, use, and social meaning of urban space.

### 4.1 Case Study 1: Kitchen Monument by Raumlabor Berlin (2004)

Figure 1 shows The Kitchen Monument, which is a mobile social sculpture by Raumlabor Berlin that has created temporary communities across Europe since 2006. At its centre is a pneumatic bubble that unfolds when needed, offering a flexible structure for events such as communal meals, discussions, or workshops. The intervention exemplifies how modular, open spatial design fosters engagement and enables users to socially appropriate space. The translucent skin creates visual and physical permeability between interior and exterior, inviting passersby to join. As a result, the space is not only physically altered but also imbued with social meaning through interaction. The Kitchen Monument shows how temporary interventions can reconfigure urban space not only functionally but also sensually and socially. Everyday practices such as cooking and eating together thus operate as performative forces in the temporary production of urban space.



Fig. 1: Kitchen Monument by Raumlabor Berlin  
(Source: Marco Canevacci, 2006)

### 4.2 Case Study 2: Floating University by Raumlabor Berlin (2018)

The Floating University (as presented in Fig. 2), also designed by Raumlabor Berlin and realised in 2018, was installed in a rainwater retention basin near Berlin's former Tempelhof Airport. It functioned as a platform for interdisciplinary exchange between art, science, and urban practice. Built from recyclable, modular materials such as wood, tarps, and scaffolding, the floating architecture supported varied configurations for lectures, experiments, and informal gatherings. Unlike fixed infrastructure, the Floating University remained in constant flux. Its temporary, improvisational character heightened the perception of space as a mutable, living constellation. The intervention reveals how material openness and social interaction generate spatial experiences that resist static or purely functional urban structures. The intervention shows how material openness enables users' bodily presence to actively reconfigure space in practice.



Fig. 2: Floating University by Raumlabor Berlin  
(Source: Victoria Tomaschko, 2018)

#### 4.3 Case Study 3: Festival Theaterformen Hanover by Endboss (2021)

During the 2021 edition of Festival Theaterformen, the Raschplatzhochstraße in Hanover – typically dominated by car traffic – was temporarily transformed into a cultural space for artistic and social encounters. The spatial design, developed by the collective Endboss (as shown in Fig. 3), featured a mirrored bar that served as a central stage for over 80 events, including dance workshops, performances, and conversations. The intervention reappropriated a functional, anonymous space and turned it into an open stage for shared experience and participatory engagement. The design encouraged spontaneous interactions between performers, spectators, and the urban environment. This example illustrates how even brief spatial gestures can generate new modes of perception and collective presence. By interrupting everyday use patterns, the intervention demonstrates how performative design can suspend dominant spatial norms and enable collective presence.



Fig. 3: Festival Theaterformen Hanover by Endboss  
(Source: Moritz Küster, 2021)

## 5.0 Discussion

The case studies demonstrate in nuanced ways how temporary spatial interventions shape urban space as a dynamic, relational, and corporeally co-produced process. Far from being static installations or neutral backdrops, these interventions act as hybrid assemblages of material form, bodily interaction, and social practice, through which space is continually enacted, transformed, and re-signified.

The Kitchen Monument exemplifies how open and modular design can facilitate social appropriation and foster collective practices. Its translucent, pneumatic skin is not merely an architectural shell but a semi-permeable membrane that invites passersby to become participants, enabling an affective gradient between public and intimate space. Through embodied acts such as cooking and eating together, the space becomes charged with meaning – situational, shared, and sensorial. These embodied rituals generate not only social connectivity but also spatial agency, turning the users into co-creators of space. Similarly, the Floating University engages users not just through its program but through its very structural logic. Constructed from flexible, reusable materials, the floating platform transforms in response to activity, weather, and use. Rather than offering fixed functions, it invites improvisation and continual renegotiation of spatial arrangements. This temporality and openness produce an urban site in perpetual becoming – one that reveals space as a fluid constellation shaped by human and non-human actors alike. The intervention of Festival Theaterformen on the Raschplatz overpass foregrounds yet another quality: the subversion of spatial conventions through performative design. A site of infrastructural anonymity is rescripted into a space of cultural encounter and collective presence. The mirrored bar and open layout dissolve traditional boundaries between stage and audience, performer and observer, and public and private. In doing so, they transform not only the function of the space but also the roles of its users, creating a relational field in which perception, participation, and affect are deeply entangled.

These examples converge in showing that space is not a neutral stage but a product of lived practices – a proposition central to Henri Lefebvre's theory of space as socially produced (Lefebvre, 1974). Space arises from the interplay of spatial practices, representations, and lived experiences. In all three interventions, the body becomes not a passive perceiver but an active agent in this production – a notion mirrored in Michel de Certeau's concept of practiced place (de Certeau, 1980), which foregrounds the inscription of meaning into space through everyday bodily acts. Judith Butler's theory of performativity (Butler, 1991) offers a deeper understanding of how these spatial meanings are constituted. Rather than being fixed or predetermined, spatial identities and functions emerge through iterative bodily acts that simultaneously reaffirm and destabilise norms. In the case of temporary architecture, these acts include walking, watching, cooking, and learning – activities that not only utilise space but redefine it. Performative space, in this sense, is not defined by architecture alone but by the dynamic of embodied repetition and emergence. This dynamic is inseparable from atmosphere, a concept elaborated by Gernot Böhme (Böhme, 1995). Atmospheres, understood as affective spatial states, arise from the relational interplay of material conditions, bodily presence, and spatial configuration. They are not secondary effects but integral components of

how space is experienced, inhabited, and remembered. Importantly, atmosphere and performativity are not parallel concepts but mutually constitutive: bodily acts generate atmospheric intensities, while atmospheres, in turn, guide and modulate the rhythm, direction, and affective tone of those acts.

Fischer-Lichte's notion of aesthetic co-presence (Fischer-Lichte, 2004) brings these threads together by emphasizing the emergent quality of space through performative interaction. In her framework, space is not a container for meaning but a field of embodied negotiation, where bodies, materials, and actions co-create sensorial and symbolic realities in real time. This co-presence is dramaturgically staged through material configurations that afford specific bodily engagements and relational arrangements. Here, materiality takes on a pivotal role. Following Latour's actor-network theory (Latour, 2000), materials must be seen as active agents within spatial assemblages. The translucent surfaces of the Kitchen Monument, the modular elements of the Floating University, or the reflective architecture of Festival Theaterformen are not merely design features. They function as spatial scripts – enabling, guiding, and constraining interaction, while also producing atmosphere and shaping perception. They dramatise space, making its transformation both visible and sensuous. The Raschplatz intervention is emblematic in this regard: its reflective materials not only alter visual perception but also blur the distinction between subject and environment, generating a participatory atmosphere where users become co-authors of space. This affective charge is not incidental but deliberately designed – echoing Fischer-Lichte's understanding of space as performative staging and Böhme's view of atmosphere as a spatial medium of affect.

Taken together, the case studies illustrate how temporary interventions operate as hybrid constellations of architecture, materiality, bodily practice, and affective resonance. They enact what could be called embodied atmospheres – spaces produced through the entanglement of sensory experience, social interaction, and spatial dramaturgy. These spaces are not merely alternative in form but critical in function: they question the normative orders of urban life, disrupt habitual spatial practices, and open up new modes of collective being. Temporary architectures, in this light, are not simply provisional structures – they are embodied critiques of spatial convention. They reveal how space is made, unmade, and remade through action, perception, and design. And they point toward a future in which urban spatiality is not determined solely by planners or politics, but also by bodies in motion, materials in dialogue, and atmospheres in flux.

## 6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The analysis of temporary spatial interventions makes clear that space cannot be understood as a static, neutral framework but must be conceptualised as a relational and dynamic process, constantly reconstituted through the interplay of bodies, architecture, materiality, and social practice. Space does not pre-exist action but rather emerges through it – through embodied, situated, affectively mediated, and materially bound practices. In all three case studies it becomes evident that temporary architectural interventions do not merely provide functional infrastructures but act as agents within processes of spatial production. They create spaces of possibility in which users are not merely consumers or passive recipients but actively inscribe themselves into space through their physical presence and actions. In this reciprocal dynamic, what this paper refers to as a hybrid constellation is formed – a network of bodies, things, atmospheres, and architectural structures in constant transformation.

The spatial theories that inform this work prove to be productive tools for grasping the complexity of spatial processes. While Lefebvre emphasises the social character of space and Butler highlights the performative emergence of social realities through bodily action, Latour expands the perspective toward a symmetrical actor-network theory, in which non-human elements (such as materials, technologies, and architectural structures) are understood as equally constitutive.

The interventions examined in this study exemplify such a conception. Their materiality – whether as a translucent bubble, floating platform, or mirrored bar – not only allows for different perceptions of space but also elicits bodily responses, releases affective atmospheres, and structures social interaction. Space here acts not only as a stage but also as a co-player. This underscores a central insight: space is not merely the result of design but an active agent in design processes, embedded in complex relations of power, perception, and materiality.

It is precisely through their temporality, openness, and adaptability that these interventions reveal a particular potential: they create experiential spaces that challenge normative spatial orders, question established uses, and enable new forms of participation. In this sense, they are not only architectural experiments but also political gestures – a form of embodied spatial critique, oscillating between appropriation, subversion, and social negotiation.

The performativity of these spaces is not only evident in the bodily presence of their users but also in the atmospheres generated through spatial-material arrangements. Atmospheres – in Böhme's sense – operate subtly, affectively, and often beneath the threshold of conscious perception, yet are crucial for the social quality of space. Temporary interventions render these atmospheric dimensions visible and experiential, showing how design operates not only aesthetically but also emotionally and socially.

Temporary interventions in urban space are not merely short-term constructions but embodied spaces of social and cultural negotiation. The body-thing constellations generated through these interventions exemplify how urban spaces are continually transformed through the interplay of human and non-human actors.

This perspective expands classical notions of space by adding a performative, design-orientated, and politically affective dimension: space becomes a medium of social negotiation – and design a practice of world-relation. Temporary interventions thus contribute not only to the aesthetic shaping of the city but also act as body-political impulses, destabilising established spatial orders and opening new possibilities for collective urban life. This study is limited by its qualitative focus on selected case studies and does not aim at empirical generalisation. Future research could expand this perspective through comparative and cross-cultural studies or longer-term observations of bodily engagement.

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## Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This paper contributes to the study of temporary spatial or architectural interventions in public space.

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