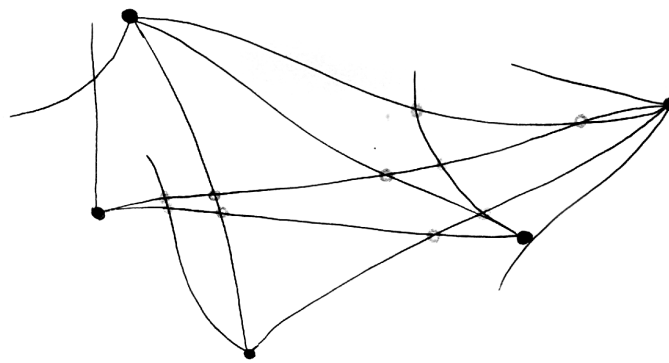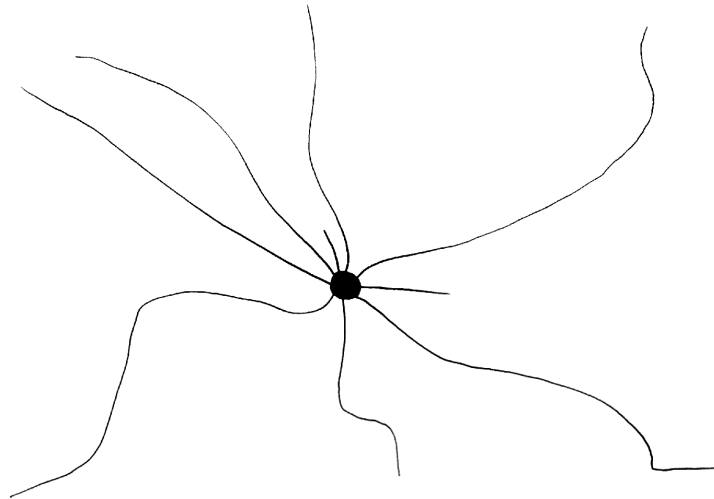# RESEARCH PLAN

Carolina Bongiorno

premises

building

all things in this world are a product of the formula:
(function times economy).

all these things are, therefore, not works of art:
all art is composition and, hence, is unsuited to achieve goals.
all life is function and is therefore unartistic.
the idea of the 'composition of a harbour' is hilarious!
but how is a town plan designed? or a plan of a dwelling?
composition or function? art or life????? 01

Antwerp, Hoboken, Blikfabriek. From center to margin, back to a center.

From the outset, we were asked to reflect on the concept of centrality and the original meaning of the centre as a historical and symbolic place, rich with collective values, where the physical structure of the urban fabric has been shaped by the layering of social, economic, political and cultural activities. The site visit mirrored a similar logic: beginning in the historic centre of Antwerp, lively and dynamic, and then moving towards the margin, still and quiet.

The implicit invitation to compare and the physical transition from the centre to the productive periphery immediately highlighted significant contrasts in the use of urban space. The centre is animated and vibrant; its distinct functions mutually support each other, creating a dense network of relational spaces that physically accommodate diverse social practices. In contrast, the margin reveals a fragmented mosaic of isolated and barely compatible functions, resulting in spaces that lack cohesion and are almost entirely unsuited to social interaction.

Here, at the edge's center, lies Blikfabriek, presenting itself as a temporary use of the former Crown factory site, a "vibrant incubator" aimed at bringing a wide audience together, adding value to a forgotten part of the city, and integrating into the neighborhood's social fabric. However, upon crossing its only entrance, any connection to the surrounding area seems to dissolve, along with its ambitious mission of revitalizing the neighborhood.

From these premises emerge the themes I intend to research: observations rooted in site specific impressions of Antwerp and investigation on the Blikfabriek, serving as foundations to inform and develop my personal interests.

compositions for urban life

Multifunctional condensers

The Blikfabriek serves as an emblematic case study that highlights an increasingly prevalent trend in contemporary architecture: the concentration of multiple functions within a single building. However, in this specific instance, this ambitious functional integration fails to effectively engage the surrounding neighborhood, raising questions about the motivations behind this lack of connection.
It may be a matter of scale, an inadequate program, or perhaps the impermeability of its boundaries limits its dialogue with the context, transforming the building into a closed container that absorbs functions that the city should naturally distribute.

In the modern city, certain forms of aggregation have been combined to create buildings that could be considered a kind of anti-typology. It is frequently observed that the eagerness to incorporate a variety of functions into a single structure, without careful consideration of their compatibility, results in underutilized projects that are poorly integrated into their surroundings.
This situation raises important questions about how and why this occurs in some circumstances while yielding different outcomes in others.

The dynamics observable in these situations could be understood in relation to the historical conditions under which multifunctional buildings emerged, prompting inquiries into the factors that shaped their development.
While examples of buildings with combined functions exist throughout history, such as dwellings with attached shops, hybrid buildings proliferated more rapidly in the 20th century, a period during which urban densities and evolving construction techniques increasingly influenced functional mixing, resulting in overlapping functions.

As previously noted, what typically brings vibrancy to a city is the rich fabric of diverse uses and activities. It is essential to question the consequences for the surrounding when all these functions are concentrated in a single building. Does this building maintain interaction with the broader urban context? How does the context itself respond to such an intervention? In certain situations, there is no guarantee that a multifunctional building will operate more efficiently than a monofunctional one; some buildings seem to respond better than others. These aspects raise critical questions regarding the criteria that guide the creation of a functional program and the reasons why integration fails in some cases.

Strength of weakness

Multifunctional condensers are often associated with a certain grandeur and magnificence, as the mixing of functions implies considerable dimensions and a degree of verticality. In this context, it is possible to consider that such buildings may represent an aggressive act towards urban space, perhaps by depriving the city of its vital characteristics or undermining the creation of meaningful relational spaces.

> *This is the strength of weakness; that strength which art and architecture are capable of producing precisely when they adopt a posture that is not aggressive and dominating, but tangential and weak.* 03

A visual illustration of these considerations can be found in the diagram presented on the cover. When all functions concentrate at a single point, the connections between individuals and various activities become dependent on that single point, resulting in fragile and disjointed relationships. In the case of the Blikfabriek, for example, connections remain limited to a specific target population and never cross outside of the building.
Conversely, it can be argued that a proper distribution of

functions may create a system of interdependent centers that, despite being perceived as "weaker," actually cultivates a considerably more robust network of connections.

From this perspective, the issues related to multifunctionality could expand beyond the single building to encompass the entire neighborhood. It then becomes interesting to ask which combinations of functions can genuinely contribute to creating solid and meaningful relationships within the urban context.
One could argue that a building does not necessarily have to embody a specific function but can remain open, becoming a place where the program shifts and adapts over time, without stifling the surrounding urban dynamics.
Perhaps, rather than imposing predetermined functions and forcing such connections, it might be insightful to investigate what happens when spaces without a predefined function are inserted into the urban fabric. Is it possible to consider that architecture can exist even without a specific function? Can we determine the indeterminate, the vague, the uncertain?

In this framework, approaches that reject centralization or the imposition of rigid and dominant structures offer a highly relevant critical lens. In *Il pensiero debole,* philosopher Gianni Vattimo seeks to dismantle absolute values and unchangeable truths in favor of a set of interpretations. This inquiry aligns with my interest in the idea of weakening structures rather than imposing them and how this concept translates into the creation of urban space, opening up new possibilities for connection and interpretation by individual citizens.
Similarly, Andrea Branzi's concept of *Weak and diffuse modernity* encourages us to see architecture as a collection of fluid, adaptable spaces that embrace seasonal or cyclical changes rather than a rigid, permanent program. A "residential forest" or a shopping mall repurposed as housing, as Branzi suggests, are provocative examples of an architecture that lives and evolves alongside the community.

04

methodology

What is observed?

The common thread uniting these interests appears to be the role of programmatic choices within the urban fabric and how they influence the creation of networks that can either strengthen or undermine the public domain.

This theme can be examined through the unfolding of three main concepts: *nodes*, *lines*, and *intersections*, particularly focusing on how they relate to each other.

Nodes refer to the actual functions within the city, which can be mapped in both the historical center and the periphery. This mapping will help identify what these functions are, where they are, if they're concentrated or dispersed, as well as trace spaces that lack intentional functionality.

Lines represent the physical connections between these functions, encompassing not only the streets but also the invisible social connections that they facilitate. It is important to investigate how streets are used, especially in peripheral areas, where the way of life afforded by the historical urban layout has become increasingly rare.

Intersections are places where spontaneous and interesting encounters occur. Understanding the locations of these intersections and the dynamics that unfold within them is essential for grasping the social fabric of the city.

Where is it observed?

The aim is to remain as site-specific as possible: the intention is to search for these elements in the very fabric of Antwerp. By focusing on a couple of different areas, this approach seeks to highlight how these elements manifest differently across central or peripheral zones, revealing spatial, functional, and social divergences.

How is it observed?

This investigation, initially grounded in a review of relevant literature, will be mainly supported by fieldwork.
Many on-site approaches could be employed, some of which are outlined below.

Choosing the *nodes*

Identifying relevant buildings and outdoor spaces that serve a function and finding places where unplanned activities or alternative uses take hold.
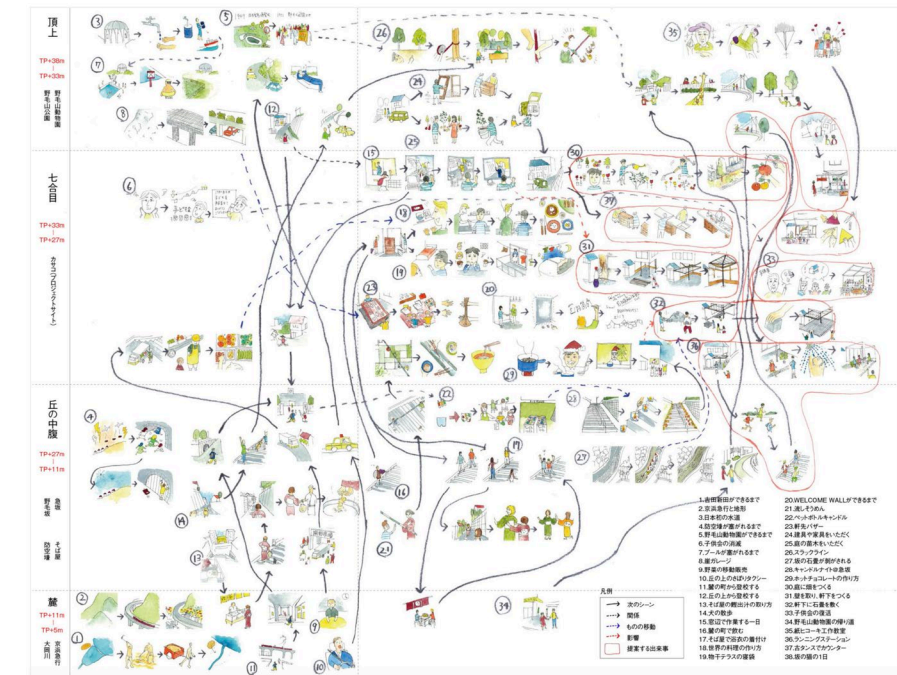
Tracing the *lines*

Connecting the nodes based on:
character mobility (interviews, daily life observation),
physical paths (walking),
material and cultural exchange,
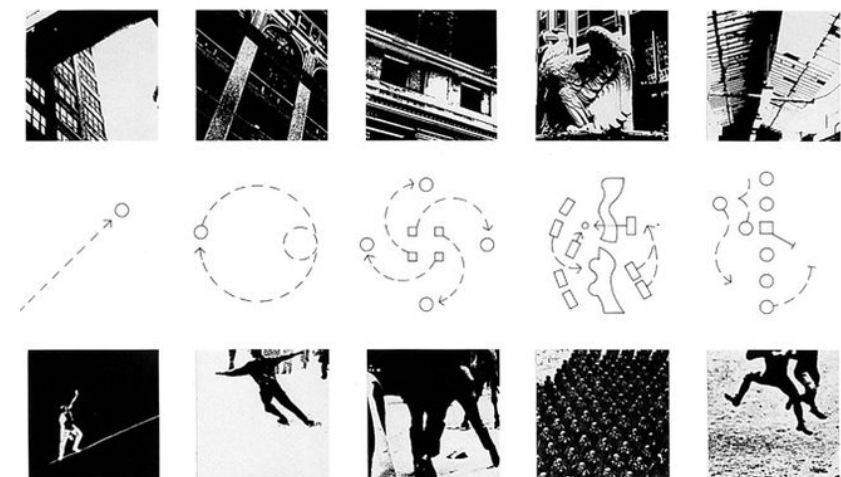and other possibile relations...

Identifying the *intersections*

Cataloguing (photographs) encounters where the lines cross.

How is it translated?

Drawing inspiration from Tschumi's *Manhattan Transcripts*, which break from conventional notions of use and function to examine unexpected juxtapositions, this study aims to analyze collected data through a combination of visual media to produce comparable outputs. By sequencing photographs, plans, and diagrams, the goal is to capture the dynamic relationships between spaces and their functions, between the architectural *stage* and the actions or *scripts* that unfold within it.

05

06

resources

Branzi, A. (2006). *Modernità debole e diffusa: il mondo del progetto all'inizio del XXI secolo*. Skira.

The book aims to analyze the changes in design brought by the 21st century as it shifts from the concentrated modernity of the 20th century to a weaker, more diffuse form. It also explores the potential for envisioning a future of non-figurative architecture, which transcends traditional building boundaries to create energy-producing, immaterial qualities that evolve over time.

Fang, H. (2016). Towards a Non-Intentional Space. In *Garden State: Cinematic space and choreographic time* (Vol. 3). Spurbuchverlag.

Harmony in combining architecture and garden, in which everything is integrated. The beauty of this integration compared to which "architecture is more superficial in its emphasis on programme".
Image of the cave and the nest. If the nest is built in response to the needs of its inhabitants, and the design of the space is determined by function, its spatial design also regulates the modes of living and use of its inhabitants, whereas the cave is not pre-designed for the sake of its inhabitants, and its spatial function must be discovered and defined by the people who inhabit it. The cave is a terrain that is rich of potential.

Fujimoto, S. (2008). *Sou Fujimoto : Primitive future*. INAX.

Weak architecture is the notion of not making an architecture from an overall order but from the relationships between each of the parts, with the result that an order can be made that incorporates uncertainty and disorder.

Lerner, J. (2014). *Urban acupuncture*. Island Press.

Continuous need to change scale to identify efficient solutions.
Targeted and rapidly implemented interventions capable of progressively extending positive land care practices and triggering broader transformation.
Space creation from spaces that previously had no value.
Look for the potential richness of the site.

Martinez Capdevila, P. (2016). Towards a weak architecture: Andrea Branzi and Gianni Vattimo. *Cuadernos de Proyectos Arquitectónicos*, 6, 147-150. http://polired.upm.es/index.php/proyectos_arquitectonicos/article/view/3238

Connection between the philosophical discourse of Gianni Vattimo and the concept of "weak thought" with Andrea Branzi architectural research.

Per, A. F., Mozas, J., & Arpa, J. (2014). *This is hybrid : an analysis of mixed-use buildings*. a+t architecture publishers.

Dives into the history of hybrid buildings, the preliminary conditions to their creation, the distinction between hybrids and condensers.

Solà-Morales, I. d., & Whiting, S. (1997). *Differences : topographies of contemporary architecture*. MIT Press.

Shift away from functional objectivity towards a more sympathetic, accessible architecture, focusing more on sensory than on economic impacts of formal manipulation.
Desire to construct an apparatus for reading architecture that is legitimate in a world that no longer produces stable, monumental works but, in its ceaseless separation

and reshuffling of images, can produce a new kind of intensity.
Weakness is the architectonic manifestation of the condition of contemporary culture.

Solà-Morales, M. d., Frampton, K., Mason, P., & Hewison, R. (2008). *A matter of things*. NAi Publishers.

The city does not consist of abstractions, but of concrete, tangible things. His projects could be regarded as an urban architecture, at the interface of architecture and urban planning.

Zeidler, E. H. (1983). *Multi-use architecture in the urban context*. K. Krämer.

Discussion on multi-use buildings as an idea rather than a narrowly designed building form. Examines what is there and see how we can achieve a better environment through the integration of the multi-use building in the urban fabric.