

## Interview

**Manuelle Gautrand (Manuelle Gautrand Architecture, Paris)**

**To adapt and shape spaces flexibly and individually is a future-oriented and economic planning. Multiuse, hybrid and transformative are the key words. How can flexible planning solutions be implemented and what effect do they have on architecture?**

Multiuse, hybrid and transformative are indeed key words for tomorrow's building. They are principles that can be applied to any type of program, are they cultural programs, residential or offices ones. They are also guidelines which I try to implement in my projects, among other principles! Flexible solutions can be implemented for instance by creating modular separations between spaces, by developing a neutral environmental, suitable for any change which may be necessary – or by including large spaces dedicated to multi-uses.



Alesia Cinema (©Luc Boegly)

As an example, for the newly inaugurated Gaumont Alesia cinema in Paris we designed large open spaces, as the large hall which runs the full depth of the building, as the majestic, triple-height atrium, and large areas of tiered seating. These areas provide to the public further spaces for sitting and chatting before going in to see a film or after the movie. They are also additional spaces for the cinema managers to organize events, meetings or unprecedented projections.

The effect on the architectural approach is to imagine the building not only from its present use, the needs addressed, but also from its future use(s), based on current social and behavioral changes. Its results in an architecture which gives more importance to exchanges, flows, an architecture much more permissive and open.



Alesia Cinema (©Manuelle Gautrand Architecture)

**What possibilities do we have already today to cope with the requirements for a flexible use of rooms? What steps have to be taken to ensure the desired flexibility? What would you expect from the industry?**

We have a lot of possibilities to cope with the requirements for a flexible use of rooms, depending on the architect's creativity and savoir-faire, as well as on the client's will. The steps I figure out are the following:

- Firstly, the client's will to include flexibility in a program.
- Secondly, the architect's ability to find out solutions and impulse such a dynamic to the building.
- Thirdly, users' will to understand and use properly the delivered flexible spaces.

Such path is followed more and more often by the industry and by users, as people, are they professional or from the public, are more and more used to multiuse philosophy, and as recent flexible buildings are more than convincing.

That was for instance the case for the Forum, located in Saint-Louis (Alsace, France). The City launched a competition to replace the old "Palais des fêtes" of the town by a cultural facility designed to host associative, sporting and cultural events ; a naturally "flexible" project!

The project was designed to fit between different built scales, programs and uses, in the smoothest possible way, by trying to minimize the breaks. It was essential for us to work on a play with progressive volumes that could interconnect with each other while displaying the two key programs: the Festival Hall and the Great Hall.



The Forum (©Guillaume Guérin)



The project is then made of several distinct volumes, linked up to one another in a way the smaller volumes are placed at the edge of the individual houses, and the more imposing ones placed at the center. At the end there are 13 volumes connected to each other gathered at the center of the site, like the pieces of one single puzzle in this work of compactness and articulation with the environment. They all fit in a unique writing because they are all covered with the same principles of forms, materials and openings.

The roof of each volume is then systematically made of two slopes, inspired by the design of the roofs you can observe in the surroundings, alternating the orientation of the folded faces sometimes North-South, sometimes South-West, in order to capture a light each time different. The expanded metal (©Métal Déployé), used as a cladding on all the facades, also contributes to this unity, and gives the project its originality. The project thus plays constantly with homogeneity that gives the building a strong and iconic design.



The Forum (©Guillaume Guerin)

**Can you give us an example in which the architecture has been designed in a way that is variable according to its use and thus creating impressive places? What do you like most about it?**

“La Gaité Lyrique” in Paris remains one of the most important projects I made designed in a way that is variable according to its use, and a mostly impressive place!

The core mission was about the re-structuring of an historic theatre of the 19th century in the heart of Paris to turn it into an interactive platform for 21st century music and arts. The main challenge was to conceive a place that could cater to all the artistic activities of today, a place open to public visits but that was also a working studio where artists could actually create, produce and present. So flexibility and transformation were inherent to this project from the very beginning, a position supported by the client City of Paris.

The design priorities were also clear: create three main production facilities, three spaces for live shows. In order to cope with all these problematics, we have created around these three anchor points a continuum of fluid and mobile ‘breathing’ spaces to serve alternately as work studios and presentation spaces: sets for the digital arts and modern music, for performers and for the public. They include media library, exhibition areas, foyers, café, rehearsal studios, etc.



"La Gaité Lyrique" (©Vincent Fillon)

Our objective was to create a 'permissive' place that includes whatever is random and unexpected, a place that defines itself without predefining everything, that enables encounters in fusion and breaks down barriers between the digital arts, the music of today and new modes of exchange between the public and artists.

To animate these fluctuations of program and accompany the many changes in spatial layout, mobile 'guide' modules, called «Eclaireuses» have been provided. Mounted on rollers, these container-size units move from place to place, creating a changing scenography. There are today 70 "Eclaireuses" in the building. Also assisting the public in its movements is a long dodecaedric furniture 'ribbon' that threads the entire layout: welcoming, accompanying, and providing rest.

The spaces created are thus impressive and immersive, with the design and flexible solutions providing a lot of possibilities. What I like the most about it is the idea of "permissive" space for the public as for the client. They can now organize events, exhibitions, shows, and develop La Gaité Lyrique uses over time: future-oriented cultural facilities!



"La Gaité Lyrique" (©Manuelle Gautrand Architecture)