

# **The Right to the Factory: Spatial Conditions and Workers' Political Agency in the 1973 Lip Factory Occupation**

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This study examines the relationship between industrial space and workers' political agency through the case of the 1973 occupation of the Lip watch factory in Besançon, France. It argues that factory architecture is not a neutral container of production but an active participant in shaping and enabling social relations. Designed for efficiency, surveillance, productivity, and managerial control, industrial space nevertheless contains possibilities for resistance and reappropriation by its main users—workers.

Focusing on the Lip factory as a historically situated case, the research investigates how its modernist spatial configuration and specific design ideology both facilitated and were transformed by worker-led self-management. During the occupation, workers did not merely halt production but reorganized it, adapting spatial elements such as access points, work zones, signage, material flows, and relations between the inside and the outside through new collective routines and spatial practices that supported autonomous decision-making and production. This shift, thus, reframes the occupation as a socio-spatial event.

The research combines historical analysis with spatial theory, drawing on Henri Lefebvre's right to the city and Martina Löw's relational understanding of space. The findings show that spatial practices—everyday routines, movements, and uses of space—played a crucial role in enabling coordination and experimentation, while also revealing the fragility of these transformations.

Building on this analysis, the thesis proposes the concept of the right to the factory as an extension of Lefebvre's right to the city. It frames industrial space as a site that can be collectively reclaimed and redefined by its primary users. The Lip case demonstrates that even highly controlled production environments can be temporarily transformed into infrastructures of collective agency, opening broader questions about the political potential of the built environment.