The goal of the intervention at Eduard-Wallnöfer-Platz (Landhausplatz) was to create a contemporary urban public space that negotiates the contradictory conditions and constraints of the existing site while establishing a stage for a new mélange of diverse urban activities. The realized project consists of a 9,000-square-metre concrete floor space.

Despite its status as the largest public square in Innsbruck’s city centre, Eduard-Wallnöfer-Platz was a neglected space, and in 1994 the ‘Neues Landhaus’, whose garage was built benixed it. The site nevertheless retains some symbolic significance associated with the square’s political and spatial appearance dominated by the facing façade of the Tyrolean provincial governmental building constructed during the National Socialist period, and by a large scale monument to the Tyrolean freedom fighters—a folkloric spectacle hard to be understood for a reader who knew nothing. Our design seeks to engage this history in such a way that it shifts the function of the square within the city so that it reformulates its emblematic and political significance. This intervention serves as a stage for a transformation which its form seeks to enable, but the potential alteration is up to the user. We tried to formulate a space that enriches the users’ ability to interpret and appropriate its elements and functions. The memorial monument is now embedded in an oblique surface that is part of the continuous fluid surface that forms the base for the memorial. This surface is simultaneously the stage for public events and everyday life, and at the same time it functions as a major transitional space for pedestrians, cyclists, and other “slow traffic”: this memorial will sensuously alter its function within the city and also in the square. Programming a public space is highly social and political—new forms enable new programs.

The «Neues Landhaus», the National Socialist governmental building (Gaushaus) for Tyrol and Vorarlberg, was stipulated that there should be a large square in front of it. According to this plan, the existing structures on the site would have been removed to accommodate an enormous panoramic view with a memorial for Tyrolean National Socialists killed in battle against the republic, before Austria was annexed into the German Third Reich in 1938. For various reasons this plan was deferred, but the «Neues Landhaus» was opened in 1939. The square was established only after the end of World War II, when France as occupying power offered to build a liberal monument that would commemorate those who were killed in action for the liberty of Austria. The square and monument were constructed between 1946 and 1948, using the labour of prisoners of war. The local population’s rejection of the monument in the first couple of years after its completion and its neglect for the last few decades can be traced back to the memorial’s stylistic resemblance to «Neues Landhaus»—to the fact that it literally is a mirror image of the National Socialist building’s entrance portal. This emblematic and, amplified by the position of a giant Tyrolean eagle on its top, is only the most visible reason for people’s misinterpretation of the monument, and the deliberate misinterpretations. The ceremony celebrating the new Austrian constitution in 1955 (which stated that the monument may never be altered) was held in and front of the fantastic «Neues Landhaus». The location of this event, and the strong atmosphere of the liberation monument is now embedded in an oblique surface that is part of the continuous fluid surface that forms the base for the memorial. This surface is simultaneously the stage for public events and everyday life, and at the same time it functions as a major transitional space for pedestrians, cyclists, and other “slow traffic”: this memorial will sensuously alter its function within the city and also in the square. Programming a public space is highly social and political—new forms enable new programs.

SS: How does the square function as a political space today? In what way does the choice of concrete as a material body facilitate this use?

HS: Concrete is concrete! Every architectural intervention is a political statement. And concrete is a material for concrete conclusions.

SS: How does the square function today? In what way does the choice of concrete as a material body facilitate this use?

HS: Concrete is a material that negotiates the contradictory conditions and constraints of the existing site while establishing a stage for a new mélange of diverse urban activities. The realized project consists of a 9,000-square-metre concrete floor space.

Despite its status as the largest public square in Innsbruck’s city centre, Eduard-Wallnöfer-Platz was a neglected space, and in 1994 the ‘Neues Landhaus’, whose garage was built benixed it. The site nevertheless retains some symbolic significance associated with the square’s political and spatial appearance dominated by the facing façade of the Tyrolean provincial governmental building constructed during the National Socialist period, and by a large scale monument to the Tyrolean freedom fighters—a folkloric spectacle hard to be understood for a reader who knew nothing. Our design seeks to engage this history in such a way that it shifts the function of the square within the city so that it reformulates its emblematic and political significance. This intervention serves as a stage for a transformation which its form seeks to enable, but the potential alteration is up to the user. We tried to formulate a space that enriches the users’ ability to interpret and appropriate its elements and functions. The memorial monument is now embedded in an oblique surface that is part of the continuous fluid surface that forms the base for the memorial. This surface is simultaneously the stage for public events and everyday life, and at the same time it functions as a major transitional space for pedestrians, cyclists, and other “slow traffic”: this memorial will sensuously alter its function within the city and also in the square. Programming a public space is highly social and political—new forms enable new programs.