When it comes to intervening on heritage buildings, the degrees of freedom are usually few because of the order and restrictions imposed by the existing structural skeleton. This building, however, shows an interesting strategy to overcome the limitations posed by the preexistent: adding a parallel structure to increase the degrees of freedom for design while allowing the architects to define a new order for the existing piece.

Keywords
Freedom
Building
Design
Heritage
Project
The Serviço Social do Comércio (sesc) is an institution that oversees 38 activity centers which bring together various fields of expertise, articulated through a variety of cultural, educational, sports, leisure, and health programs. sesc’s activities are guided by its educational ethics as well as the pursuit of broad social well-being, in which the term ‘culture’ is understood in its full spectrum. In this sense, the full accessibility to the spaces and contents offered by the institution enhances the democratization of cultural values as a form of individual autonomy and the practice of citizenship. sesc 24 de Maio opened in August 2017 and, by January 2018, had already received 1,257,455 people.

We believe that the process of transformation and development of cities such as São Paulo is made by slowly adapting to the changes in customs and way of life of the societies that build them. The new sesc 24 de Maio – which houses a complex set of recreational and service facilities – occupies the former headquarter of the Mesbla department store in downtown São Paulo, and represents an exemplary challenge of intervening in an urban heritage site. Taking such context into account, the design set both to contribute effectively to the upgrading of such remarkable area of the city, as well as to readapt the building structure to a completely new set of uses and specific programs. In order to do so, the following basic ideas were outlined:

1. To house a large open square at the building’s ground level as a central idea of public placemaking, designing it as a gallery-like free passage that is linked to the exciting surroundings of the neighborhood.

2. To transform the former underground garage into a café and a theater, in direct relation to the neighboring lively streets.

3. To create a new vertical circulation system composed of a generous sequence of ramps, outlining a clear and continuous circuit that sets an architectural promenade and playfully connects the wider urban spaces of the city to the various indoor programs of the new sesc building.

4. To structure a variety of open spaces at strategic levels that are designed as covered elevated squares, thus opening the building to its surroundings. Such spaces – as the Conviviality
Square and the Swimming Pool Garden – have no enclosures and act as hanging gardens along the open circulation network of ramps.

5. To add connections between two levels in some parts of the program, with large parquet flooring, double height ceilings, and upper and lower galleries, so as to enhance the spaces and avoid the monotony of typical overlapping floors.

6. To build a generous square on the rooftop, a solarium that includes an open swimming pool.

7. To concentrate all technical and mechanical infrastructures on an annex structure that acts as an isolated service tower. For this purpose, all infrastructures have been condensed on an extension, built on a contiguous property that had been abandoned years before.

8. To include a set of furniture pieces integral to the architectural design. This has resulted in series of colorful designs, such as chairs, tables, sofas, desks, counters and modular stackable furniture, which complete the building in a joyful and playful manner, strengthening its institutional identity.

In order to achieve these goals – which are at the core of the design's challenges and direct its spatial character – a series of decisions on building techniques and infrastructural supply were adopted, namely:

1. The selective demolition of specific parts of the structure of the original Mesbla building,
Diagrama de usos / Programmatic diagram

- Piscina / Swimming pool
- Camarines / Locker room
- Cafetería / Cafeteria
- Danza / Dancing
- Deportes / Sport
- Clínica dental / Dental Clinic
- Talleres / Studios
- Exposiciones / Exhibition
- Biblioteca / Library
- Sala de estar / Living
- Restaurante / Restaurant
- Administración / Management
- Galería / Gallery
- Teatro / Theatre

Circulación vertical principal / Principal vertical circulation
Circulación de servicio / Service circulation

Planta nivel teatro -5,00 m / Plan level -5.00 m, Theatre
E. / S. 1:500
1. Maintaining its basic structural elements and central hall, originating on the vertical void around which the new design is structured.

2. The construction of a new and autonomous structure, supported by four main columns that compose the central void, which sustain a series of large interleaved halls as well as the solarium and swimming pool crowning the building on its rooftop.

3. The conversion of the building’s former parking level into a theater by slightly lowering its level while, at the same time, carefully respecting the limits and structural foundations of its neighboring building.
4. The development of an emergency mechanical smoke exhaust system for all floors, as required by local fire regulations. Its complexity allowed a variety of spatial arrangements – such as the double-height ceilings and the completely open circulation network – that normally would not be allowed in a building with such specific uses and design constraints. ARQ
Planta nivel exhibición +24.00 m / Plan level +24.00 m, Exhibition
E. / S. 1:500
Planta nivel deportes 41.50 m / Plan level 41.50 m, Sports
E. / S. 1:500
Paulo Mendes da Rocha

Founded in 1991 by architects Fernando de Mello Franco, Marta Moreira and Milton Braga (current partners are Marta, Milton and Maria João Figueiredo), mmbb has consolidated a comprehensive professional performance, encompassing the development of public and institutional buildings, infrastructure and urbanism. Their Jardim Edite social housing complex has been awarded by the ix Ibero American Architecture and Urbanism Biennale in Rosario (2014) and the São Paulo Art Critics Association (2013), while the Watery Voids proposal won the Best Entry prize at the 3rd International Architecture Biennale of Rotterdam (2007).
Planta nivel piscina +60,00 m / Plan level +60.00 m, Swimming pool
e / s 1:500

Arquitectos / Architects: Paulo Mendes da Rocha + MMBB Arquitetos
(Fernando Mello Franco, Marta Moreira, Milton Braga)
Colaboradores / Collaborators: Adriano Bergemann, Ana Carina
Costa, Ana Carolina Mamede, Cecilia Góes, Eduardo Ferroni,
Giovanni Merelles, Gleison Pinheiro, Guilherme Pianca, Jacques
Rordorf, Lucas Vieira, Márcia Terazaki, Maria João Figueiredo,
Marina Acayaba, Marina Sabino, Martin Benavidez, Vito Macchione,
João Yamamoto, Rafael Monteiro, Rodrigo Brancher, Thiago
Rolemberg, Víctor Olivera
Ubicación / Location: 24 de Maio 109, São Paulo, Brasil
Promotor / Promoter: Danilo Santos de Miranda, Director sesc
São Paulo
Ingeniería estructural / Structural engineering: Kurkdjian e
Fruchtingarten Engenheiros Associados
Fundaciones / Building foundation: MAG Projetos
Engenheiros Associados

Ingeniería sesc / sesc Engineering staff: Eng. Amilcar João Gay Filho
Construcción / Construction: Mendes Júnior Trading e Engenharia S/A
Instalación hidráulica y eléctrica / Hydraulic and electrical engineering:
PHE Projetos Hidráulicos e Elétricos
Acondicionamiento de aire / Air conditioning: Thermoplan
Engenharia Térmica
Acústica / Acoustic: Nepomuceno Acústica e Sônica
Escenografías / Scenic projects: J.C. Serroni e Gustavo Lanfranchi
Iluminación / Lighting projects: Rosane Haron (Espaço Luz),
Altimar Cypriano
Superficie construida / Built area: 27.865 m²
Año de proyecto / Project year: 2002-2008
Año de construcción / Construction year: 2012-2017