SCIENTIFIC AND PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCE

LIFE IS SERIOUS; *ART* SERENE

ARCHITECTURAL-SCENIC RESEARCH

October 23-25, 2024, Novi Sad, Serbia

BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS / EDITORS: SLAĐANA MILIĆEVIĆ, TATJANA DADIĆ DINULOVIĆ, ANDREJ MIRČEV

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CONTENTS

15 **INTRODUCTION**
Slađana Milićević

17 **EDITORS' WORD**
Andrej Mirčev

22 **KEYNOTE LECTURE**
RETHINKING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERFORMANCE DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE: INSIGHTS FROM THE PRAGUE QUADRENNIAL
Barbora Příhodová

24 **KEYNOTE LECTURE**
I AM INSITITUION: THE CASE OF AN ARTIST IN POST-SOCIALIST, HYPER-CAPITALIST STATE (STANISLAV HABJAN)
Nataša Govedić

28 **SERIOUSNESS OF CINEMATIC SCENIC SPACE**
Tanja Lacko

38 **THE EVENT SPACE. FROM FLOOR TO CEILING. IF THERE IS ONE. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HOUSE.**
Monika Bilbija Ponjavić

48 **SUPERIMPOSING ARCHITECTURAL SPACE AND THEATRICAL ACTIVITY: FROM 'FOURTH' WALL TO 'DIALECTICAL' WALL**
Filip Jovanovski, Slobodan Velevski

60 **SCENOTECTURE: BETWEEN SCENOGRAPHY AND EXHIBITION ARCHITECTURE**
Amálie Bulandrová

70 **WHAT IS SCENE DESIGN? AND WHY IS IT NOT SCENOGRAPHY?**
Monika Bilbija Ponjavić

80 **ENVIRONMENTAL SCENOGRAPHY AND THE EVOLVING ROLE OF SPECTATORS**
Ninoslava Vićentić

90 **PALE LIGHTS OF AN INVISIBLE CITY; URBAN SPACE AS A DRAMATIS PERSONA**
Matko Botić

102 **TACTILE SCENOGRAPHIES**
Dragana Vilotić

110 **APPLICATION OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN THEATER FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES**
Anđelka Nikolić

120 **BREAKING WALLS: REINVENTING SPACES THROUGH LIGHTING DESIGN**
Flaviana Xavier Antunes Sampaio Skalska

128 **DOMESTICITY AT PLAY: A HOUSE LITERALLY MADE OUT OF PHOTOGRAPHS**
José Capela

136 **SCENOGRAPHY AND INTERMEDIALITY. A STUDY OF MACHINE BODIES AND ATMOSPHERES IN STAGING: EL VIAJE A LA LUNA O VIAJE A LA X (DE LA LUNA A LA TIERRA)**
Mahatma Ordaz Domínguez

144 **OPERA THROUGH ATMOSPHERIC NARRATIVES**
Jovana Stefanović

154 **THE LIFE AND ART OF REPETITION – "REPETITION IN MUSIC - REAL AND IMAGINARY SPACES OF STAGE DESIGN"**
Andrija Pavlović

164 **FROM STAGE TO STRUCTURE: INVESTIGATING THEATRICAL INFLUENCES ON ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN**
Darko Sekulić

174 **(UP)BUILDING OF THE NATIONAL THEATRE IN SUBOTICA**
Romana Bošković Živanović, Aleksandra Pešterac

182 **TEMPORAL UTILISATION OF ABANDONED STRUCTURES: URBAN ACTIVATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**
Bojan Stojković, Miljana Zeković

192 **THE CREATIVE POTENTIAL OF INDETERMINATE URBAN SPACE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE FLOATING PROJECT**
Radmila Đurašinović, Miljana Zeković

200 **HYBRIDIZATION OF SPATIAL NARRATIVE: WORKSHOP AS A RESEARCH METHOD FOR TRACING THE INVISIBLE**
Petar Mitrović

208 **SUPERIMPOSITION OF SPATIAL AND IDEOLOGICAL VALUES: THE DIACHRONIC METANARRATIVE OF BLOCK 13 SEGMENT IN NEW BELGRADE**
Petar Mitrović, Dragana Kocić

218 **SPATIAL AND AESTHETIC ASSESSMENT: EVALUATING NOVI SAD'S CENTRAL AREA AS A LOCATION FOR ISOMETRIC VIDEO GAME**
Marko Lazić, Ana Perišić, Janev Jelena, Igor Kekeljević

228 **THE APPLICATION OF EDUCATIONAL TECHNIQUES IN THE FIELD OF SCENE DESIGN IN CREATING COMMON SPACES**
Jelena Janev, Tatjana Babić, Ana Perišić

238 **EARTH AS AN ANDRAGOGICAL TOOL FOR CREATING SPACES AND EVENTS**
Dragana Kojičić

246 **KIBIC WALK AS A CREATIVE TOOL OF SCENE ARCHITECTURE**
Aleksandra Pešterac, Tatjana Babić

256 **DREAMSCAPES AND OTHERWORLDS: SURREALISTIC CITY STAGING**
Ivana Maraš

264 **RETHINKING THE POWER OF ART: SOCIAL RESPONSE TO THE ARCHITECTURE OF CONTROL IN THE HYPERCAPITALIST ERA**
Sonja Pejić

276 **POSTER PRESENTATIONS**
Kosta Stojanović
Bojana Sićović, Vanja Spasenović
Katarina Keti Zaharijev
Mia Knežević, Daniela Dimitrovska
Dragana Pilipović
Vladimir Savić

294 **REVIEWS**
Radivoje Dinulović
Agata Juniku

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INTRODUCTION
or what we expected...

Scientific and Professional Conference

***Life is Serious; Art Serene*:**
Architectural-Scenic Research

October 23-25, 2024

In the conclusion of the essay *Atmosphere as the Subject Matter of Architecture*[1], German philosopher Gernot Böhme[2] examined the relationship between architecture and scene design. He stated that, unlike architects, scenographers had always been aware that creating the atmosphere of a space was their goal. On the other hand, architects, viewing scenographers as their "younger brothers" or "frivolous disciples of their own art," still hesitated to engage in a more emotional relationship with space. Böhme wondered whether this fear stemmed from the thought that architecture could completely disappear in the "postmodern art of staging," and then answered: "life is serious; art serene." This fact, he argued, would forever represent a clear boundary between architecture and scenography and would not allow the merging of the two fields. "Architecture did not build for the sake of the engaged or detached spectator watching a play, but rather for people who experienced, in spaces, the seriousness of life."

Starting from this very concrete distinction that Böhme established, we sought to further examine the relationship between two closely related arts—architecture and scene design—within the framework of the conference. We asked whether the boundary between them was truly so rigid and whether it genuinely disallowed crossings. Did not the context of contemporary art precisely advocate for "mixed" marriages between architecture and scene design, as well as between different art forms? We also questioned whether contemporary architecture of spectacle had any connection to the seriousness of everyday life. Conversely, had contemporary art not been exempted from the field of responsibility by neoliberal decree? We asked whether there was a boundary between art and life, whether it should be set, and whether modern art had succeeded in its project in this regard. Where was art today in relation to life? Were such boundaries important to us at all? Were we serene or serious? As architects, scenographers, and artists, did we ask ourselves such questions?

Through the conference, we aimed to open a dialogue on all of the aforementioned questions, to deepen and expand them, while remaining aware of the professional and moral complexities involved. For this reason, the conference extended its invitation not only to architects and artists, but also to scientists, theorists, and researchers—sociologists, philosophers, anthropologists, psychologists—and anyone who wished and was able to contribute to the complex array of questions and problems that Böhme had placed before us.

Slađana Milićević

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1 Böhme, Gernot: *Atmosphere as the Subject Matter of Architecture*, in the book Ursprung, Philip: *Herzog & de Meuron: Natural History*, Canadian Centre for Architecture and Lars Müller Publishers, 2002.

2 Gernot Böhme is a German philosopher, and author of the books: *Atmospheric Architectures: The Aesthetics of Felt Space* (2017), *Critique of Aesthetic Capitalism* (2017), *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres* (2016), *Architectural Atmospheres: On the Experience and Politics of Architecture* (2014), etc.

EDITORS' WORD

In the conclusion of his book *Aesthetics of Atmospheres*, German philosopher Gernot Böhme argues that while life is serious, art is serene—a distinction he uses to differentiate architecture from stage design. This seemingly dualistic relationship is articulated through divergent spatial strategies, each embedded in contrasting social, political and aesthetic realities. However, Böhme refuses to believe that the two disciplines will completely merge: "Hasn't the architect always looked down upon the stage designer as a younger brother or even as a frivolous disciple of his own art? But why should this affinity between architecture and stage design be so threatening? Is it because architecture might melt entirely into the postmodern art of staging? That will not happen"[1]

Revolving around the distinction between the seriousness of life and the serenity of art, the international conference held within the framework of the Biennial of Scene Design 2024 in Novi Sad, articulated an interdisciplinary discursive field for interrogating the complex entanglements between architecture and stage design/scenography. The proceedings assembled in this edited volume extend the inquiry by juxtaposing theoretical propositions with practice-based investigations that critically address how spatial strategies are produced, experienced and mobilised across divergent social, political and aesthetic regimes. In this sense, the publication operates as an active epistemic site mediating between lived reality and artistic articulation. It functions not merely as a documentary, archival record of the conference, but as a critical apparatus that advances the discourse on the intersecting of architectural space-making and the multimedia practices of scenography.

Taking into account that international events such as the Venice Biennale of Architecture and the Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space consciously blur the aforementioned distinctions, the essays in this publication emphasise the urgency of critically reflecting on the role of spatial practices in the context of accelerating ecological, ideological and existential crises. The specific neoliberal condition, structured around regimes of profit extraction, surveillance, and systemic inequality, brings to the fore the deterritorialized logic of what might be described as toxic capitalism. Looking at space from "the standpoint of class struggle,"[2] David Harvey shows that the social contradictions governing our political, economic and cultural realities are not merely abstract forces but are actively inscribed, thus reflected in spatial configurations and infrastructures. If this realm of spatiality coincides with architecture's function of mirroring and organizing the seriousness of life, then art and stage design can proliferate tools and atmospheres of disobedience that challenge the abstract geographies of capitalism. However, as the following contributions suggest, the dialogue between architecture and art unfolds a liminal, third space, in which the binary is renegotiated.

Meandering between the two poles, the essays and texts collected here serve as dialectical trajectories, critically engaging and traversing the conceptual and aesthetic tension between the seriousness of life and the serenity of art. Without subsuming these tensions into a final synthesis, the assembled contributions situate practices of scenography and architecture at the dynamic, transmedial intersection of visuality and spatiality. In doing so, the publication maps a myriad of different approaches and case studies that reveal the discursive potency of rethinking the expanded field of scenography and stage design. Drawing a parallel with the thesis formulated by Birgit Wiens, who asserts that "scenographic practices have—so to speak—

1 Gernot, Böhme, *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres. Ambiances, Atmospheres and Sensory Experiences of Spaces,* Routledge, London, p. 237.

2 Harvey, David, *Spaces of Capital. Towards a Critical Geography*, p. 84.

'migrated' from the theatre into neighbouring genres and creative disciplines,"[3] the contributions can be understood as navigating this transition, thereby genuinely contributing to new research perspectives.

The essays multiply methodological frames, which results in an epistemic constellation of critical perspectives that destabilise disciplinary boundaries and open space for semantically complex readings of scenographic and architectural practices. Reacting to Böhme's distinction, the authors identify a common performative dimension of contemporary stage(d) spaces, one that extends beyond theatre, dance and opera and also emerges as a defining aspect of the eventness of architectural environments. In other words, alongside case studies focused on stage design and scenography, the volume brings together essays that analyse the interplay between performance urban space and new media. Furthermore, scenic spaces are also envisaged through the conceptual lens of dramaturgy and the specific poetics of space. In this way, the volume deepens the understanding that space re-emerges "as a dominant element of theatrical design in Western theatre,"[4] a tendency that began around the turn of the twentieth century and continues to define both scenographic and architectural practices.

An important aspect further emphasized by the publication is site-specific narration, understood as a spatial mode of storytelling that emerges from the material, social and historical layers of a given site. Against the spectacular and often commodifying logic of postmodern architecture—which frequently serves as an aesthetic legitimation of neoliberal politics—critical spatial practices accentuate ephemerality, embodiment and affectivity. This further resonates with one of the central premises of the spatial turn: there is no such thing as neutral or homogeneous space conceived as a mere container. Rather, space is understood as a relational and performative event—a perspective that positions both scenography (but also experimental architecture) as practices that actively produce, stage, negotiate and challenge spatial relations through material, sensory, temporal and social configurations.

Taking into account authors such as Chantal Mouffe, Rosalyn Deutsche, and Doreen Massey, it can be contended that spaces—and among them those produced by artists, stage designers, and architects—are not so much the result of neutral formal decisions as they are contingent and performative outcomes of social relations, power struggles and ideological conflicts. Hence, Scenography and architecture participate in the political production of space, not only by organising and choreographing bodies and perceptions, but also by articulating the aesthetic conditions under which social relations become visible and negotiable. In this sense, the publication is envisioned as an agonistic discursive space that sets in motion an epistemic friction between the seriousness of architecture and the serenity of art. Instead of reconciling these positions, it sustains their tension as a productive force, foregrounding spatial practice as a field in which aesthetic experimentation, activism and critical imagination interweave.

Andrej Mirčev

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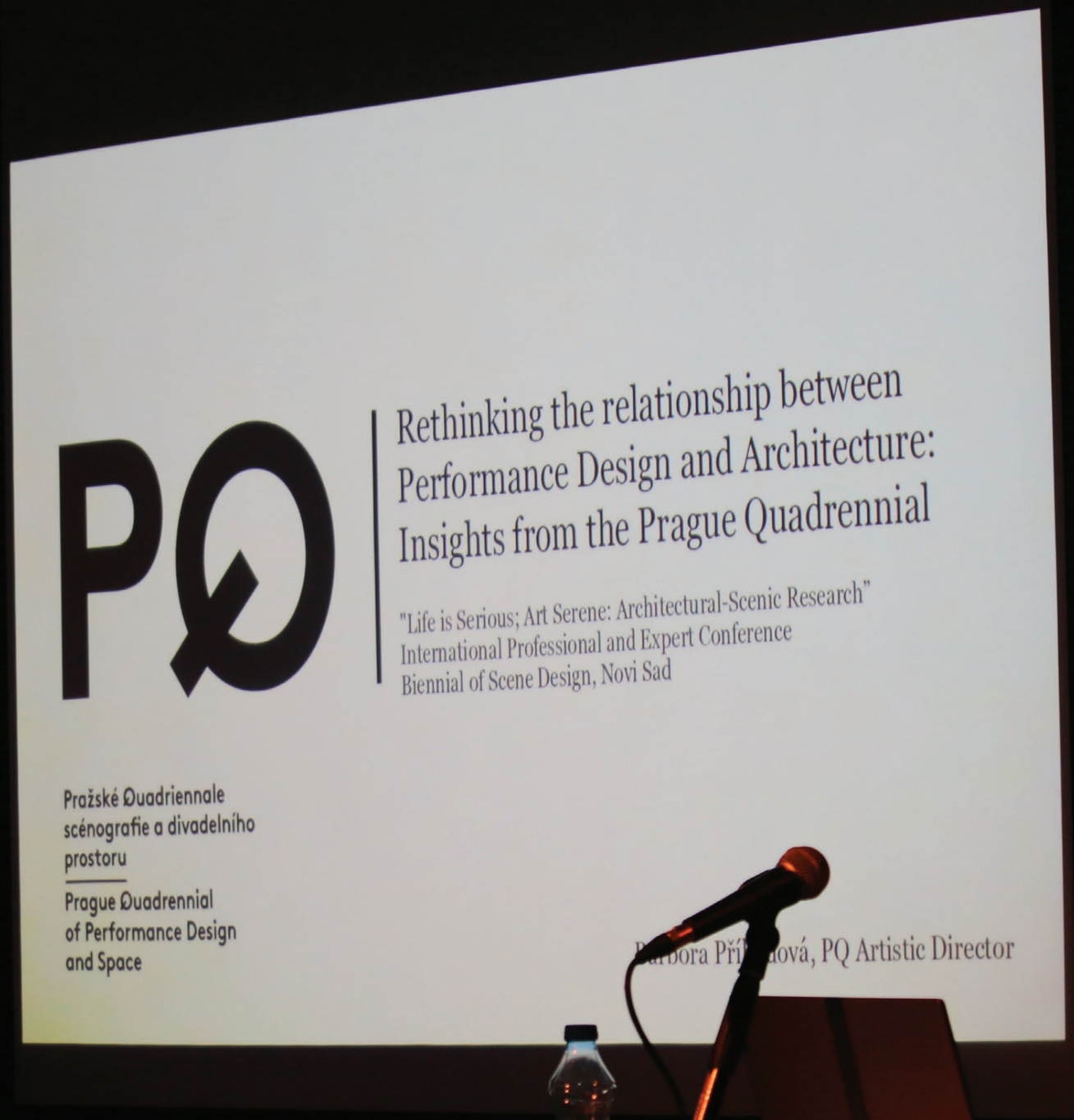
3 Wiens, Birgit, "Contemporary Scenography. Practices and aesthetics in German theatre, arts and design - an introduction", in: Birgit Wiens (ed.), *Contemporary Scenography. Practices and aesthetics in German theatre, arts and design*, p.1.

4 Aronson, Arnold, "Introduction. Scenography or design", in: Arnold Aronson (ed.) *The Routledge Companion to Scenography*, Routledge, London, 2018, p. 3.

photo: Nikoleta Radojičić



Rethinking the relationship between Performance Design and Architecture: Insights from the Prague Quadrennial

Abstract

‘Is the boundary between architecture and scene design rigid and does it truly disallow crossings?’ Taking this question as my cue while looking at selected historical examples, as well as examples presented at the recent editions of the Prague Quadrennial, I argue that the boundaries between performance design and architecture are in fact blurred, as these two areas are entangled in multiple ways. What’s more, transcending the binary ‘architecture’/’scene design’ is a necessary step towards inclusivity, as it allows us to remove certain barriers and embrace spatial forms that have the potential to go beyond the dominant, institutionally enforced norms.

KEYNOTE LECTURE

Barbora Příhodová, Ph.D., (she/her) is the Artistic Director of the Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space. She is a theater historian with a specialization in performance design/scenography. Her practice encompasses curatorial, research, and editing projects. She holds a PhD in Theatre Studies and an M.A. in English from Masaryk University, Czech Republic. Her research and curatorial projects have been recognized by the Fulbright Research Scholarship, Mellon Fellowship, and New York Public Library Research Fellowship. She was the curator of PQ Talks 2019 and 2023.

I AM INSITITUION: the case of an artist in post-socialist, hyper-capitalist state (Stanislav Habjan)

Abstract

The space of art has many disciplinary boundaries. Although we talk a lot about interdisciplinary work, artists who *really* cross borders and close the gaps remain strangers in all the official disciplinary fields. For instance, Stanislav Habjan is a poet, visual artist and designer, but in all these creative disciplines he is claimed as “too heterogenous”. The best solution is to be multiple. And to endure classification battles. I will present his work as a slow establishment of artist-as-institution and also address reasons why many theatre workers who deal with truly experimental subjects remain outside the standard institutional system (Damir Bartol Indoš, Badco., Siniša Labrović, Marina Petković etc.). Habjan is perhaps most interesting because he has his own publishing house, curatorial praxis, literary and art works, even a post office for distribution of his works. He contantly finds unconventional ways to reach his audience. And his idea of the audience is far from commercial, yet it survives. His life is obviously his art, but the trick is also in shaping it as a social institution.

Nataša Govedić, Ph.D., is a writer, poet, critic, Croatian theatre and film scholar who regularly contributes to the fields of performance studies, affective studies, adaptation studies, Shakespeare studies, feminism, feminist ethics, and communal theatre. She is employed as a full-time lecturer at the Academy for Dramatic Art (Zagreb), while she also works as editor-in-chief of the feminist academic journal TRECA, a regular theatre critic in the daily newspaper NOVI LIST, guest-lecturer at Peace Studies Zagreb and guest-lecturer at Faculty of Teacher Education, etc. So far she has published fifteen scholarly books on theater and performance (most recent are *Style for a Style: Transgressive Methodology of Adaptation*, 2021, and *Oscar Wilde Walks Out of the Prison House or Your Favorite Art is Called Criticism*, 2022). As a professional writer, she also published acclaimed novels and several books on poetry. She is also active as a theatre dramaturg and/or performer.

KEYNOTE LECTURE

photo: Zorana Rabrenović

Biography

Tanja Lacko (1966) was born in Zagreb, Croatia. She graduated in 1991 from the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Zagreb, after which she began her professional artistic career as a theater, film, and television scenographer. She is the author of more than fifty relevant artistic works, many of which have achieved significant success with both audiences and critics. She has received notable festival and national awards in her field.

In 2013, she was appointed to the artistic-teaching title of Assistant Professor of Art at the Academy of Dramatic Art (ADA), University of Zagreb, where in 2021, she was promoted to the artistic-teaching title of Associate Professor of Art. She earned her PhD in 2024 from the doctoral program in ethnology and cultural anthropology at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb, with a dissertation focused on cinematic scenic space entitled *Space of Home in Croatian War of Independence Movies*.

At the Academy of Dramatic Art, she systematically advances set design education and participates in artistic, academic, and institutional collaboration projects. Together with costume designer Irena Sušac, she co-designed and led the accreditation process for the new Master's program in Scenic Design — with modules in Scenography and Costume Design — which commenced at ADA in the academic year 2024/2025, where she teaches courses in theatre and film scenography.

She is actively involved in issues related to the improvement, preservation and recognition of the scenic design professions. Since 2022, she has been a member of the Executive Board of the Filmmakers Association of Croatia and the Festival Council of the Pula Film Festival.

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SERIOUSNESS OF CINEMATIC SCENIC SPACE

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Abstract

The paper examines the relationship and interaction between real space and the imaginary scenic space presented through the medium of feature film. Drawing on two research perspectives – cultural anthropological and filmological - the paper analyzes cinematic scenic space as any socially produced and socially constructed space (Low, 1996) into which meanings are inscribed by its planners, designers and users, as well as by all those who perceive and interpret that space. Cinematic scenic space emerges from real space and reflects it as its heterotopian and utopian image (Foucault, 2017), striving to be convincing and recognizable so that viewers can identify with the imaginary fiction world (Turković, 2012), even when it involves the reconstruction of the past or the prediction of the future. Cinematic scenic space is an affective space (Zanger, 2012) marked by a certain atmospheres, emotions, ideologies and worldviews. Gernot Böhme emphasizes the seriousness of real, lived space in relation to scenic space. The paper discusses Böhme's thesis through the lens of social memory, a field where real and scenic spaces meet, overlap, and intertwine, creating a bricolage of images and sounds, details and descriptions, practices and rituals, emotions and affects that individuals and communities store in their memory about a particular place. Using examples of specific Croatian cities as film locations, the paper explores the ways in which life is inscribed into cinema and cinematic space, but also how cinematic space is inscribed into life, constructing a hybrid place in social memory composed of different images, both real and fictional. These processes are also involved in the politics of remembering, through which societies and cultures, individuals and communities manipulate social memory, making the art of creating scenic space profoundly serious and far from serene.

Keywords: cinematic scenic space, social production and social construction of space, social memory, politics of remembering

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the relationship between real urban space and cinematic space in feature films, with a focus on three Croatian cities: Dubrovnik, Vukovar, and Karlovac. Drawing on cultural anthropology, visual studies, and film theory, it analyzes how film transforms actual, lived urban environments into *scenic spaces*[1] that serve not merely as visual backdrops, but as carriers of affective, ideological, and mnemonic significance. It examines how cinematic space can function as a heterotopia or a utopia, an emotionally charged landscape or a tool for constructing collective identity and social memory.

Through case studies of three distinctly different cities - Dubrovnik as a globally fictionalized spectacle, Vukovar as an ideologically saturated site of heroic collective memory, and Karlovac as a mimetic city marked by an unspoken, universal trauma - the paper shows how film does not simply represent real places but resemanticizes them, erasing or overwriting existing meanings in line with local and/or global ideological, political, or economic agendas.

Methodologically, the analysis is grounded in qualitative *image-reading* of selected feature films and contextualized through theoretical frameworks from the anthropology of space and place (Foucault, Low, Tuan), memory culture and the politics of remembrance (Halbwachs, Nora), and postcolonial identity studies (Bhabha, Appadurai). Special emphasis is placed on the emotionalization of space (Massumi, Ahmed) and on the processes through which viewers form affective bonds with spaces depicted in film (Gaut, Grodal, Zanger), as well as on the tensions that arise when film suppresses, transforms, or replaces local meanings.

2. THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF CINEMATIC SPACE

2.1. The Construction of Space, Place, and Memory

Space, often perceived as a physical constant or neutral backdrop, is understood in cultural anthropology as a complex social construct imbued with symbolic, ideological, and affective meanings - products of individual and collective social, political, and cultural processes (Lefebvre, 2015; Low, 1996; Navaro-Yashin, 2012). Spaces are shaped by planners, builders, users, and the discourses that interpret them, turning spatial imaginaries into tangible places. By "reading" a place, one can gain insight into the social and cultural norms, patterns, and imaginaries of a particular community, as well as into the transformations brought about by globalization, localization, migration, communication, and other dynamics.

The question of how a place is sensed - of what makes a space emotionally resonant and sensorially experienced - also invites inquiry into how constructed spaces affect the physical and emotional lives of those who use, perceive, and transform them (Feld & Basso, eds., 1996; Ahmed, 2004). Put simply "we build spaces, and spaces build us." This applies not only to physical, emotional, or identity-related aspects, but also to the realm of what we call *collective memory*. Memory is not solely an individual process but a collective one, contributing to the construction of identity within a specific locality, historical moment, and community (Nora, 1989; Halbwachs, 1992; Assmann, 2011). The creation of any place inherently involves the creation of a site of memory. Just as the destruction, disappearance, or forgetting of a place activates mechanisms of remembrance and/or deliberate forgetting (see Selberg & Škrbić Alempijević, 2013).

Approaching space as a social construct enables us to see physical locations as carriers of symbolic meaning, power, and identity. Space is always a representation, an experience, and a practice shaped by cultural frameworks, historical contexts, and collective memory. These theoretical perspectives provide a deeper understanding of how real spaces function within a broader socio-cultural imaginary, and they form the basis for analyzing how such spaces are reinterpreted in the cinematic medium.

1 *Scenic space* refers to a spatial environment composed through scenographic strategies, encompassing visual, symbolic, and atmospheric dimensions in both theatre and film. The term is used in performance and film studies to denote space as dramaturgically shaped and experientially charged. See, for example: Fischer-Lichte (2008), Di Benedetto (2013), Howard (2002), Lacko (2024).

2.2. The Construction of Cinematic Scenic Spaces and Places

Cinematic scenic space, like any other space, is not merely a visual setting for action but a constructed medium of meaning - complex in its aesthetics, affect, and ideology. It is shaped through a combination of set design, lighting and sound, framing, and editing. Rather than simply reflecting reality, cinematic space interprets, transforms, and often symbolically replaces it.

Drawing from my own experience in production design, I know that the representation of real space in film can sometimes serve as a faithful, metonymic reflection of the physical world. More often, however, it assumes a symbolic, metaphorical, or interpretive role, shaped by the conceptual, dramatic, aesthetic, and practical needs of the production. In this context, film does not merely show existing space - it reimagines it. Every cinematic representation generates a new version of existing real space, one that can affirm, reshape, or challenge the individual and/or collective narratives associated with it.

Cinematic scenic space thus emerges from the interplay between the real and the imagined, the actual location and its fictional interpretation. It can be understood through Foucault's concepts of heterotopia or utopia - a kind of "make-believe space" (Navaro-Yashin, 2012) in which recognizable geographic locations are merged with consciously constructed narratives.[2] Film does not treat space as a passive backdrop; rather, it actively reshapes it, infuses it with emotion, and frequently charges it ideologically. As such, cinematic scenic space becomes an affective field, where identities, memories, and interpretations of reality intertwine.

Film viewers easily identify with cinematic worlds because they incorporate familiar elements. These spaces appear "believable," even "objective" (Heath, 1986; Peterlić, 2018). Although cinematic spatial construction is inherently manipulative - through ellipses, camera angles, and editing cuts - audiences readily accept this illusion and identify with the fictional world (Turković, 2012; Gaut, 2010). Filmmakers draw on existing collective knowledge and memory tied to particular spatiotemporal settings. They resemanticize these spaces through the cinematic medium, reshaping their meanings, assumptions, or contested narratives (Lacko, 2024).

For example, Dubrovnik no longer functions solely as a historic city - it becomes King's Landing. War-torn Vukovar is perceived as a space of martyrdom and collective trauma, while Karlovac is rendered as a site of universal destruction, stripped of its specific local identity. The emotional connections that viewers form with such cinematic spaces are significant because visual representations evoke powerful atmospheres and affects (Bruno, 2007; Grodal, 2009). Due to film's evocative power, these portrayals become etched into viewers' mental photo albums - even when they are entirely fictional, as in science fiction or fantasy – side by side with preexisting images of real-world spaces.

In this way, cinematic scenic space acts as a *vector of memory* (Wood, 1999). It helps shape cultural practices of remembrance and the interpretation of the past, present, and even the future. Feature films thus have the capacity to generate new forms of memory or to reconstruct existing ones - a process Astrid Erll (2008) refers to as the *medial construction* of collective memory. Film is among the most powerful cultural media in this regard, as it combines narrative, emotional identification, and visual affirmation of spatial meaning.

Cinematic scenic space is therefore not a passive visual backdrop but an active participant in the construction of meaning. Through stylistic choices, editing, and dramaturgical framing, film creates *make-believe* spaces - hybrids of the real and the imagined - that convey affects, ideologies, and collective memories. Film not only shapes how we perceive space but also plays a role in its reinterpretation and the production of meaning, making it a vital tool in articulating identity and memory. This chapter thus lays the groundwork for analyzing the specific cinematic representations of cities in the following sections.

2 The term *"make-believe space"* was introduced by anthropologist Yael Navaro-Yashin (2012) in her analysis of spatial transformations in the northern, internationally unrecognized part of Cyprus.

3. CASE STUDIES: THREE CITIES AS FILM SETS

3.1. Dubrovnik: The City as Fantasy and Commodity

Dubrovnik, a Croatian city on the southern Adriatic coast, has been listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1979, recognized for its exceptional beauty and historical and cultural significance. It is one of the country's most prominent tourist destinations. However, over the past decade, Dubrovnik has also emerged as a key site of *film tourism*, particularly after serving as a major filming location for the globally popular television series *Game of Thrones* (Fig. 1.).

Fig. 1. Route Map for Dubrovnik King's Landing Walking Tour

As the stand-in for the fictional city of King's Landing, Dubrovnik has been fictionalized and transformed into a globally recognized fantasy space. Its cinematic identity becomes a heterotopia: a place that is simultaneously real and imaginary, where history, everyday life, and fiction overlap. This transformation reflects a cultural hybridization of space - one that is continuously reinterpreted through the lens of popular culture. For many television viewers, Dubrovnik is no longer perceived as a real historical city, but rather as a symbol of fictional power, intrigue, and epic conflict.

The use of real urban space in fictional narratives has a lasting impact on the perception of the city, its identity, and its collective memory. First, reality becomes filtered through fiction; viewers form emotional attachments to locations they recognize from media, often before ever experiencing them in person. Second, Dubrovnik undergoes tangible economic and cultural changes. Guided tours, themed souvenirs, festival programs, and cultural events tied to the series have become embedded in the city's contemporary daily life.[3]

At the same time, however, Dubrovnik experiences increasing commercialization and identity transformation. Its complex historical layers risk being overshadowed by the dominance of a fictional narrative. This shift reflects a broader process of cultural commodification. The city's transformation into a product of the cultural and entertainment industry aligns with Hobsbawm and Ranger's concept of the "invention of tradition" (1983), where history is reconstructed to meet the demands of contemporary consumers and global audiences. As a result, the city's identity becomes partially delocalized, increasingly shaped by market logic rather than by the memory and needs of the local community (cf. Beeton, 2005).

Interestingly, this contemporary fictionalization stands in stark contrast to Dubrovnik's very real and painful recent past. During the Croatian War of Independence, the city was a site of destruction and trauma. Footage of the shelling of its historic center in 1991 circulated widely, helping international audiences grasp the severity of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia.[4] At that time, images of Dubrovnik functioned as an audiovisual cry for help, an urgent appeal underscoring cultural and historical endangerment.

Today, those same spaces that once represented vulnerability and trauma are repurposed as sets for fictional battles. This shift raises important questions about how the film medium participates in the ongoing transformation of spatial meaning - across time, and in response to political, economic, and cultural change.

3.2. Vukovar: The City as a Site of Conflicting Memory Politics

Vukovar symbolizes one of the deepest collective traumas in recent Croatian history. This Baroque town on the banks of the Danube River once functioned as a river port and a cultural and economic center of Eastern Slavonia. During the Croatian War of Independence, it played a decisive role in Croatia's defense. The city endured a brutal three-month siege, resulting in its near-total destruction (Fig. 2). Footage of civilians leaving the city became a globally recognized image of wartime suffering. November 18, the date of Vukovar's fall, in Croatia is commemorated as the Memorial Day for the Victims of the War of Independence and the Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Vukovar and Škabrnja.[5]

In Croatian cinema, films such as *Remember Vukovar* (Zapamtite Vukovar, 2008, dir. Fadil Hadžić) and *The Sixth Bus* (Šesti autobus, 2022, dir. Eduard Galić) depict wartime Vukovar as an almost sacred space - a site of martyrdom, sacrifice, and heroism. Both films were partially shot on actual locations in Vukovar and partially built on other locations. In these films, Vukovar functions not only as a backdrop but as an authentic, almost archival record of pain - a bearer of memory. As Aleida Assmann (2011) emphasizes, cultural memory constructs "sacred spaces" of the past, which acquire the status of indestructible symbols of shared (Croatian) identity. In Croatian daily discourse, Vukovar is referred to as the "Hero City."

In Serbia, whose forces besieged and took Vukovar, a film about the tragedy was also produced. In *Vukovar Poste Restante* (Vukovar, jedna priča, 1994, dir. Boro Drašković), Vukovar is portrayed as a place where love is impossible due to war. However, the film simultaneously tends toward relativization by equating the aggressor and the victim and blurring responsibility for destruction. The fact that this film was shot in the actually destroyed city shortly after its fall, during Serbian occupation, further intensifies its symbolic charge. It highlights cinema's potential as a propaganda tool and what Annette Kuhn (2002) calls "disputed memories" that compete for hegemony.

3 In 2016, UNESCO issued a warning about the negative consequences of mass tourism in Dubrovnik. In an official report on the state of conservation of the Old City of Dubrovnik, UNESCO expressed concern about the excessive number of tourists, particularly those arriving by cruise ships, which posed a threat to the site's Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). The report warned that, without appropriate management measures, Dubrovnik could be added to the List of World Heritage in Danger.
Retrieved from: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248073, 2.5.2025.

4 The War of Independence (1991–1995) was a defensive conflict fought to secure the independence and territorial integrity of the Croatian state. It was waged against the aggression of the combined forces of Serbia and Montenegro, supported by the human and military resources of the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA). This war marked the final phase of the disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). The conflict ended with Croatia's victory and the establishment of its territorial integrity.

5 After months of siege and shelling, Vukovar was captured on November 18, 1991, by the forces of the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) and Serbian paramilitary units. During the siege and following the city's fall, more than 3,000 soldiers and civilians lost their lives, including 86 children. Additionally, over 300 residents of Vukovar remain missing to this day.

Fig. 2. War-torn Croatian town Vukovar (1991)

Film depictions of Vukovar - whether Croatian or Serbian - are never neutral. They are ideologically constructed spaces where battles for truth, identity, and politically driven interpretations of the past unfold. In this sense, the city becomes both a “site of memory” (Nora, 1989) and a site of narrative conflict. Every frame showing Vukovar acts as a political gesture - a retroactive and reactive inscription of meaning, emotion, and identity into space.

Thus, film does not merely represent the real city of Vukovar; it resemanticizes it. Vukovar is not just a geographic location but also a symbol, trauma, political metaphor, and myth. In cinematic depictions, it emerges as a space where reality overlaps with ideology, the past with present politics, and the local with universal issues of war, responsibility, and memory. This example illustrates how film, as a medium, enables the rewriting of narratives that determine the ideological, political, historical, and cultural meanings of a real place.

3.3. Karlovac: The City as a Universal Landscape of Trauma

Unlike Dubrovnik and Vukovar, Karlovac rarely “plays itself” in the cinematic imagination, despite suffering significant damage during the Croatian War of Independence (Fig. 3). In film production, Karlovac has gained a reputation as a practical war location due to its proximity to Zagreb, good transport connections, and stable infrastructure. As such, it functions as a flexible scenographic stage that, with minimal intervention, can represent almost any war-affected place in the world.[6]

6 Karlovac is a city located in central Croatia, approximately 60 kilometers from the capital, Zagreb. It serves as an important road and railway hub, situated on the main route to Adriatic Coast. Due to its strategic geographical position, the former Yugoslav People’s Army (JNA) maintained around twenty military facilities with stationed troops in Karlovac and its surrounding area. This made the city a key focal point during the Croatian War of Independence, marked by frequent military clashes and shelling. The city and its surroundings were ultimately liberated on August 7, 1995.

Fig. 3. War-torn Croatian town Karlovac (photo Davor Višnjić/PIXSELL)

This mimetic role is well illustrated in the British-American film *The Fever* (2004, dir. Carlo Gabriel Nero), where Karlovac “plays” an unnamed city in the so-called “Third World.” The film explores the responsibility of the global “First World” for the suffering experienced by people in war-torn countries. Although Karlovac is physically present in the film, it remains “invisible” as its actual war scars and local history are erased, replaced by abstract, universal symbols of violence and poverty. This raises important ethical questions about representation: can, and should, a space marked by concrete trauma serve merely as a decorative backdrop for someone else’s story?

A similar approach can be seen in the Croatian film *Witnesses* (*Svjedoci*, 2003, dir. Vinko Brešan), adapted from Jurica Pavičić’s novel *Ovce od gipsa*. While the novel is explicitly set in Split and deeply shaped by its cultural, social, and Mediterranean context, the film relocates the story to an unnamed continental city - shot in Karlovac - for production reasons. This spatial transposition is not simply a technical or logistical choice; it carries strong symbolic weight. Through this process, the specificities of Split’s wartime trauma and local cultural identity are erased, and the narrative becomes a generic story about violence. Karlovac thus functions as a medium of universalization, where a concrete location is replaced by the spatial idea of “any” Croatian wartime city.

In this way, the film medium indirectly participates in the delocalization of memory, transforming individual and localized suffering into an abstract, nearly neutral form. This manipulation of space can be interpreted through theoretical concepts such as topophilia (Tuan, 1974) and heterotopia (Foucault, 2017). Instead of fostering emotional attachment to a specific, recognizable place, cinematic Karlovac becomes a space of “somewhere” — simultaneously real and unreal — a symbolic landscape that absorbs and reflects the histories and traumas of others. By transposing the local (Split) into the universal (an anonymous city), the film *Witnesses* creates a new memory framework, making the memorial space fluid and open to reinterpretation.

In this sense, *Witnesses* participates in a broader discourse on the politics of memory, which shapes what societies remember and how (cf. Assmann, 2011; Nora, 1989). Although the film uses the real space of Karlovac, it does not engage with its specific history. Instead, it produces a fictionalized trauma landscape that lacks local articulation. This approach creates emotional distance while achieving symbolic universality,

allowing for wider reception and interpretation - but at the cost of losing the concrete, voiced identity of the city itself.

4. CONCLUSION

The analysis of film representations of Dubrovnik, Vukovar, and Karlovac demonstrates that feature films possess the power to shape not only the perception of space but also the collective emotional geography of a nation. Cinematic scenic space is far from a neutral backdrop; it is an active field of meaning where memory, ideology, affect, and identity intersect. Through diverse representational strategies - ranging from spectacularization and commercialization (Dubrovnik), to the sacralization of traumatic sites (Vukovar), and the delocalization and universalization of trauma (Karlovac) - film influences how communities remember, forget, and negotiate their past and present.

The films analyzed in this study do more than depict spatial configurations; they actively participate in the production of meanings that can have lasting consequences for local communities. Through mechanisms of emotionalization and narrative selection, certain cities become powerful symbols - of fiction, heroism, or trauma - while others remain silent spaces characterized by mimicry and omission. These processes open critical space for reflection on how places are remembered and who holds the authority to tell their stories.

In an era when cities are increasingly mobilized by cultural industries and global visual economies, it is essential to question how these processes impact local identities and collective memories. Film can serve both as a tool of remembrance and as an instrument of forgetting - a medium that can illuminate local history, yet just as easily overwrite it in favor of globally recognizable narratives. For this reason, analyses like the present one is vital not only for understanding the language of film but also for fostering ethical reflection on the representation of space and communities within the contemporary visual media landscape.

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LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Route map for Dubrovnik King's Landing Walking Tour. Source: Game of Thrones Tours. Retrieved from https://gameofthronestours.com/kings-landing-walking-tour-dubrovnik/, accessed May 1, 2025.
Figure 2. War-torn town of Vukovar during the Croatian War of Independence (1991). Source: Vukovar Tourist Board. Retrieved from https://turizamvukovar.hr/en/vukovar/crtice-iz-povijesti-vukovara/, accessed May 1, 2025.
Figure 3. War damage in Karlovac. Photo by Davor Višnjić/PIXSELL. Source: *Večernji list*. Retrieved from https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/ratna-steta-hrvatska-srbija-unisteni-stanovi-kuce-poginuli-1225275, accessed May 1, 2025.

Biography

dr Monika Bilbija Ponjavić (1982), architect, scene designer, visual artist. Monika finished studies in architecture, theatre, audio-visual arts and performance (scene) design at the universities of Banja Luka, Amsterdam, Belgrade and Novi Sad, with projects dealing with the transformation of space and design through stage means.
Over the course of the last fifteen years, she exhibited her work at Prague Quadrennial, Biennale of Scene Design, Museum of Applied Arts in Belgrade, Alternativa Gdansk, KC Belgrade, KS Svilara, Sarajevo Winter, Balkan Architecture Biennial, WSD Cardiff...in around 15 collective exhibitions.

During this time, she had three solo exhibitions, “Body Never Lies” (2010), “Who Would God in Bosnia Be?” (2021), “Blackest Wave” (2024) and one permanent exhibition, she co-created with Nemanja Milenković, “Spirit of the Place: First Hundred Years of the District” (2023).

She is the author of the book about film curation titled “From the Black Box to the Black Box of the White Cube”, published by the Museum of Contemporary Art RS (2015). She is the co-author, editor or a consultant on five cultural development strategies.

She was the art director for two ECoC projects: Banja Luka 2024 and Budva-Boka 2028, leading them into the finals. She is the member of OISTAT Serbia. And the holder of the Erasmus Mundus full scholarship.

She is the art director of Kaleidoscope of Culture, a large-scale showcase of artistic production within the following fields: applied arts, literature, architecture, performing and visual arts.

Monika holds a doctoral degree in the field of scene design and is currently a second-year doctoral student in architecture. She lives and works in Banja Luka and Novi Sad.

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THE EVENT SPACE. FROM FLOOR TO CEILING. IF THERE IS ONE. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HOUSE.

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Abstract

The paper borrows its title from Bachelard’s “The Poetics of Space.” More precisely, from its first chapter “The house. From cellar to garret. The significance of the hut.”, in which he voices his opinion that the house is our first universe and that it shapes all our subsequent knowledge of other spaces, whilst asserting that memory is located in space rather than time.

Following Bachelard’s logic in discussing the house, this paper will examine the event space, more particularly the exhibition (and performance) space, as the equally important universe of an artist (creator), elaborating on how space and architecture design, or for that matter the lack of it, influence our overall process (of creating) and perception of the work (created).

In doing so, the starting position of this paper will be drawing the parallels between the artists’ primary universe – *the house of the artist* and the secondary universe – *the house of his/hers art*. The house of which we speak is “the topography of our intimate being”, rooted in our memory, the space in our heads.

The principal case studies will be three very different and distinct works of scene design, in both the outcome and the process of their creation. The works in question – “Body Never Lies”, “Who Would God in Bosnia Be” and “Spirit of the Place: First Century of the District” – were all built around the same idea of what scene design is, using the same three elements that, according to this author, are the key determinants of scene design: space, body, text.

Keywords: space, house, event-space, dramaturgy, memory, architecture

1. THERE IS NO EVENT WITHOUT SPACE

How does space shape creation? And how does the act of creating, in turn, transform space? These questions lie at the center, the heart of this paper, which takes inspiration from Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1994) – particularly his meditation on the house as the primal site of imagination, memory and intimacy. For Bachelard, the house is our "first universe," a space that does not simply shelter us, but structures our very perception of the world. Memory, in his view, is not chronological but spatial: it is housed.

This notion resonates deeply with artistic practice, especially with the practice of architecture and scene design – where space is not only the setting for action but a condition of the work itself. In the fields of scene design and performance, space is never neutral. It is always charged: with memory, with meaning, with power. It is both material and imaginary. As Bernard Tschumi has argued, among others, *there is no space without event*. This paper proposes the reverse as well: there is no event without space.

The aim of this paper is therefore, to trace a path between two spatial realms that shape artistic creation. The first is the very intimate, internalized space of the artist – the studio, the mind, the remembered house. This is the site of origin: private, intuitive, often invisible. The second is the event space: the site where the work is made manifest, where it becomes visible and experiential for others, and where it enters a dialogue with architecture, audience and context. These are the artist's two houses.

By drawing on Bachelard's phenomenology of space and intersecting it with theories of scene design, architecture, spatial production and performance, this paper develops a conceptual framework for understanding how space functions in the creative process - not as background, but as collaborator, co-author, and constraint.
To ground these ideas, the paper examines three works of scene design built on architecture of the space they took place in and using the logic of architectural design as one of methodologies:

- Body Never Lies – a spatial meditation on embodiment;
- Who Would God in Bosnia Be – a politically charged installation-performance on identity and the sense of belonging rooted in space;
- Spirit of the Place: First Century of the District – a site-specific work engaged with memory, ruin and cultural identity of industrial heritage.

Each of these works is analyzed as a case of spatial thinking – emerging from the private house of the artist and extending into the public house of performance. Through them, the paper explores how space is imagined, inhabited, and transformed across different scales, sites, and modes of creation.

This is not merely a study of scene design/architecture technique. Rather, it is an attempt to articulate a poetics of spatial creation – where memory becomes form, and form becomes event.

2. BACHELARD'S HOUSE AS TOPOGRAPHY OF INTIMACY

In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard proposes that the house is not merely a shelter, but the primal site of human experience – a container for dreams, memories, and imagination. He calls the house "the topography of our intimate being," (1994, pp. xxxvi) and suggests that before we know the world as a chronological series of events, we first know it spatially (Bachelard, 1994). Memory, in Bachelard's poetics, is inscribed not in time but in space: in the attic's silence, in the warmth of the kitchen, in the shadows of the cellar (Bachelard, 1994, pp. 8-12).

The house, in this sense, is our first universe. It is where our phenomenological understanding of the world is formed. Through its rooms, corners, thresholds and stairs, we learn what it means to inhabit space – to dwell. This dwelling is not neutral or abstract. It is textured by experience, emotional resonance and psychological depth. The spaces we occupy as children become archetypes; we carry their echoes into our adult creative lives, consciously or not (Bachelard, 1994, pp. 5-6).

This spatial understanding of memory, rooted in intimacy, becomes particularly significant for artists, especially whose medium is space itself – architects, scene designers, scenographers, installation artists. If the house is the site of origin, then artistic spatial practice becomes an act of extension: the externalization of internal topographies. The scene becomes a projection of remembered or imagined spaces, filtered through the aesthetic logic of performance (Bachelard, 1994, p. 13).

Bachelard invites us to treat the house not as object but as experience. For us, scene designers and architects, this aligns with the idea that space is not a backdrop but a co-performer. The house becomes a poetic model through which we can explore the architecture of performance itself.

3. SPACE AS CONSTRUCT, STAGE AND PERFORMER

Space is not a void, nor merely the measurable distance between objects – it is a layered, complex and dynamic condition. In architectural theory, it has long been defined in both geometric and experiential terms. Christian Norberg-Schulz (1979) distinguishes between space as a measurable dimension (geometry) and space as a perceptual field rooted in place, history, and memory. Drawing from Heidegger, he argues that space derives its meaning from *place* – from boundaries that give form and presence.

In performance theory, Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008) sees geometric space – the architectural container – different from performative space**,** which emerges during the event. Performative space is fluid, relational, and shaped by actors, audiences, bodies, light, sound and movement.

Tatjana Dadić Dinulović (2017) develops four interrelated types: physical space – the tangible, geometric setting, space of play – the imaginative, abstract space of the work, performance space – the translation of the idea into the physical act and liminal space – a transitional zone between reality and fiction.

Gaston Bachelard (1994) contributes the deeply intimate concept of imagined space**,** such as the "house" as a psychic structure – part memory, part dreamscape.

McKinney and Butterworth (2009) add a scenographic lens, distinguishing between theatrical space, architectural space and gestural space, which arises from the interaction of performer, movement, and space. Theatrical space is a hybrid of the physical and performative space. Architectural space is intended (built) or found (site-specific). But gestural space, well, gestural space is a bit more complex. It is a space where the geometry, its spatial dimension, and the bodies of the performers or objects come together. It is the space that is created in the mix of the body presence, the position of the body and its movement. In the gestural space, space (designed for the performance (scenography or scene design) or architectural space) and the performers, so to speak, "meet". Patrice Pavis defines that as "the space projected and marked by the actors, induced by their physicality, an evolving space that can be expanded and reduced" (McKinney, Butterworth, pp. 152).

Speaking of gestural space, McKinney and Butterworth introduce the term proxemic relations between actors, which they consider important for understanding and defining gestural space. It is all about space, that is, the distance that is built between individual bodies in the theatre, primarily the actors. So, we are talking about the spatial relations between the bodies of the actors and the bodies of the actors and the space during their interaction. Scenography, as McKinney and Butterworth see it, shapes proxemic relationships on stage.[1]

In the context of scene design, both in theatre or outside of it, in the exhibition or site-specific environment, performative space of Ficher-Lichte, performance space of Dadić-Dinulović and gestural space of Mckinney and Butterworth are so close together that one can hardly separate them. They are also the key, given that this space implies the spatial dimension of space that is taken into account in the mutual relationship between (contemporary) scenography and/or architecture and performers, which constitute a work of scene design.

1 Manipulation of gestural space is one of the basic methods in Robert Wilson's theatrical work and refers to the way in which his actors will present themselves, as well as their character. In rehearsals for King Lear, Wilson used the way the performers entered and moved around the stage to explore and further define their characters. He presented movement in the form of lines of different characters - "a straight arrow for Gonerilla, a zigzag line for Regan, and a graceful curve for Cordelia" (Holmberg 148). The way actors move around the stage, their sense of movement, weight, balance, rhythm, pace, is what Pavis calls a kinaesthetic experience. That "experience" is made up of all these elements and it is not only manifested in the relationship between the actors, positioning them on the stage, but it is also unconsciously transferred to the audience, which uses these patterns of behaviour in its understanding of the characters and their development paths.

Therefore, in the context of this paper, we divide space to:

- Physical, geometric space (as precondition for the event), which can be built, natural or site-specific – the space
- Space of imagination (as precondition of the movement) – the event
- Gestural/Performative/Performance space – the movement

Together, they form *event-space*, a theatrical space of sorts (different from theatre architecture and building), archetypal space of performance/scene design, even when it is performed in the space that is not theatre (building).

Following these thoughts, but also the social theory and the theory of architecture, primarily Foucault (Michel Foucault), Ponty (Maurice Marleau-Ponty), Vitruvius (Vitruvius) and Norberg-Shulz (Christian Norberg-Shulz), we arrive at two key ways in which space affects the body and vice versa. On the one hand, we can say that the space shapes the way the actors and bodies physically inhabit the space and the way they manage that space. In that instance, actors, performers and bodies become an integral part of the space. In the second, they create that space with the way they use the space, with their gesture, movement and physical activities. Therefore, by their very existence, they are already part of the space. Therefore, in the first, the body does not organize the space around itself, it inserts itself into it, while in the latter, everything is subordinated to the body, which positions the space and the world around it. Choosing between these two approaches is a matter of personal choice.

4. THE EVENT-SPACE

At its core, scene design is relational. As Joslin McKinney and Philip Butterworth articulate in *The Cambridge Introduction to Scenography*, it is "the manipulation of space in time" and "the negotiation of meaning through spatial composition" (McKinney & Butterworth, 2009, pp. 3-9). It involves more than building a set - it activates space as a dramaturgical tool. It transforms architecture into event.

The concept of *event-space* builds upon this logic. Bernard Tschumi (1996), in his *Architecture and Disjunction* suggests that space only comes alive through use, movement and experience. Event-space, then, is not fixed – it is dynamic, temporal and embodied. It is formed in the interaction between architecture and action, structure and performance.

Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1991) further enriches this understanding. He distinguishes between conceived space (planned, designed), perceived space (lived, practical), and lived space (imagined, symbolic). Scene design operates across all three: it must respond to physical conditions, aesthetic vision and symbolic meaning. The scene designer navigates between these layers to create spaces that are not only functional but affective.

Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008), in *The Transformative Power of Performance*, describes how space in performance is co-created by performer and spectator, and how the material environment becomes charged with presence. Scene design, in this view and in comparison to classical scenography, is less about representation and more about enactment.

Marvin Carlson (1989) in *Places of Performance* similarly emphasizes that performance spaces – be they theatres, streets, galleries, or ruins – carry histories and ideologies. No space is neutral. To design for performance is to engage with these layers, to "write" with them, and sometimes against them.

In this paper, I adopt the term *event-space* to describe not only the physical site of performance or exhibition, but the full spatial condition in which an artistic work is conceived, constructed, and encountered. It includes materiality, scale, acoustics, architecture, orientation, and finally temporality. Scene design, then, becomes the practice of shaping this condition.

By linking Bachelard's intimate, memory-laden house with the public, performative event space, this framework establishes the central tension of the paper: the journey between inner and outer space, between dwelling and display, between the house of the self and the house of the work.

5. THE PRIMARY HOUSE: THE INTIMATE UNIVERSE OF THE SELF

In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard (1994) proposes that the house is more than a shelter – it is *the topography of our intimate being*. The spaces we inhabit in our earliest memories become imprinted on our consciousness, they shape how we experience and conceptualize all other spaces. For the artist, this notion resonates profoundly: the house becomes not just a physical dwelling, but a mental architecture, a site of imagination, solitude, repetition and creation.

The "primary house" of the artist is this internalized space. It may manifest physically as the studio, the rehearsal room, or a corner of domestic quiet – but more significantly, it is a psychic space: the remembered attic, the warm kitchen, the confined hallway, the imagined refuge. It is where creative seeds are planted, often unconsciously. The internal house is where form begins before material appears. It is shaped by memory, by habits of working, by gestures repeated in solitude, by the silence before the word (Bachelard, 1994, pp. 11-14).

For architects, scenographers, performance designers, this house is not neutral. It holds within it sedimented layers of past performances, unfinished projects, misremembered lighting states, textures of walls we've never seen but know intimately. It is where the design begins not with a sketch, but with a spatial sensation – a volume remembered or a light imagined. The cellar of this house holds our darkness and doubt; the garret, our lofty ambitions (Bachelard, 1994, pp. 18-20). To work from this primary house is to work from a deeply subjective and rooted position. It is where intuition dwells. Yet, it is not insular: rather, it is where the world is first mirrored and reconfigured (Bachelard, 1994, pp. 16-17).

6. THE SECONDARY HOUSE: THE SPACE OF THE ENCOUNTER

If the primary house is the site of origin, the secondary house is the site of encounter. It is the space into which the artist projects their internal landscape, and where the work becomes public, performative and relational. For the scene designer or architect, this space is often literal: a stage, a black box, a white cube, an open square, an abandoned factory. But like the primary house, the secondary house is not merely functional – it is performative, poetic and political.

This house is constructed or chosen, found or designed. Sometimes, it precedes the work and demands to be inhabited with care; other times, it is built around the work, responding to its needs. In some projects, the space resists occupation – its architecture becomes an obstacle. In others, it becomes a collaborator (McKinney & Butterworth, 2009, pp. 4-7; Tschumi, 1996, pp. 141-143). The boundaries of this house are fluid, shifting with audience arrangement, bodily presence and scenographic intervention (McKinney & Butterworth, 2009, pp. 26-28).

The secondary house can act as a container, echo chamber, or antagonist. It hosts the body of the performer and the gaze of the spectator. It is where time compresses, where meaning is enacted. Crucially, it redefines the work: what was an idea in the quiet of the primary house becomes an event here, subject to friction, failure, resonance.

In exhibition spaces, too, the secondary house asserts its influence. White walls and neutral lighting are not blank – they are aesthetic ideologies. An installation situated in a repurposed warehouse or public square speaks differently than one in a museum. The artist that works with space, be it a scene designer or an architect, or a scenographer, must reckon with this: space is never passive (McKinney & Butterworth, 2009, pp. 23-30; Tschumi, 1996, p. 141).

What binds these two houses is not their similarity, but their continuity. The work travels from one to the other, transformed by the journey. The spatial memory of the primary house echoes in the material choices, the textures, the pacing of light in the secondary. The two are in dialogue – like rooms in the same imaginary dwelling (Bachelard, 1994, pp. 72-73; McKinney & Butterworth, 2009, p. 21).

7. SPACE, EVENT, MOVEMENT

While working on the theoretical frame of the exhibitions, that are used as case studies for this paper, or anything I do really, Tschumi's ideas, as well as Bachelard's, became pivotal, because the space, or better yet, the architecture, the house, including the event and movement, became both the starting and the ending point of the work. The space is the main character. In every single instance.

Performance as research (PaR) project *Body Never Lies* is a project of exploration of space with the body (of an architect). The space was, for most part, architectural space and the body took upon itself the role of a human Modulor.

Spirit of the Place: First Century of District (further in the text: *Spirit of the Place*) is a permanent exhibition about an abandoned wire factory that was turned into a creative centre for culture and arts during Novi Sad 2022 – European Capital of Culture project.

Who Would God in Bosnia Be? is a performative exhibition and a personal exploration into the question of identity – individual (Being Bosnian and Herzegovian, being Serb, being woman etc.) and collective (Bosnia and Herzegovina) – and what constitutes it through the means of space.

Like in Tschumi's Transcripts, these projects aimed to offer "a different reading of architecture in which space, movement and events are independent, yet stand in a new relation to one another, so that the conventional components of architecture are broken down and rebuilt along different axes" (Tschumi, 1995), which is essentially the exact way I see, feel and understand architecture and what it is, or what it is supposed to be.

7.1. Space, event, movement in Body Never Lies

Physical, geometric space in the PaR project *Body Never Lies* is the site-specific outdoor space, in both built and natural found environment. While doing the project, prerequisite was that the space is built or found, natural or site-specific.

The set of movements was designed and it consisted of basic human behaviour: to sit, to stand, to lay down, to stand still or to move, to walk or dance as you would do in any other (architectural) space. Therefore, the space of imagination, the event, the text, set of acts, or, to use the language of architecture – the programme of the space design – was predetermined and exact.

The body, the human *modulor*, was to inhabit the space, not as an actor, but as an object, as a piece of scenery. Or furniture. Its main task was to measure the space and transform it by the mere existence in it.

The outcome of this "experiment" was the creation of gestural space. The gestural space was the work. Its creation, the performance.

7.2. Space, event, movement in Who Would God in Bosnia Be?

From the get-go the exhibition *Who Would God in Bosnia Be?* Was always about the primary and the secondary house. Both indoor and outdoor. The dwelling and the landscape. The house and the memory. And it all started with the image of the box, placed in the vast Bosnian landscape, with a performance body in it, the body of actress Miljka Brđanin, representing and reenacting the body of Monika Ponjavić.

The box, which travelled across the country, ended up in the gallery space as a spot from which the audience is to observe the video of the box travelling, while listening to the sound of how it feels being "trapped" in that box, in that particular body, and in that particular landscape. So, the physical, geometric space, in this instance, is site-specific space (the first phase of the work) and the in-situ space of the gallery (the final phase of the work).

The box itself, although smaller in scale, is also a geometric space, imagined as a stage for the performance (and a scenographic object). Therefore, in the context of this work, open spaces of Bosnia (and Herzegovina), its landscape, are equally important as the built, architectural space, space for dwelling, where the exhibition about that space was held.

This was the first scene. *The box*.

On the opposite side of it stood the monumental video installation "I/Bosnia" consisting of three video projections (head of actress Miljka Brđanin) on three retaining walls. The position of the video projections – *the memory* – created an enclosed space and at the very centre of it another installation was placed – a pile of rocks of enormous volume, weighing around one ton. The Bosnian landscape was, so to speak, in the midst of Bosnian identity. Enclosed by it.

The third scene – *the earth* – was on the ground floor of the gallery consisting of seven boxes, lit from above with dimmed light. On top of each box a handful of earth was placed, from and for each location the body (body of actress Miljka Brđanin) and its identity came from.

The task of this work was to create a mental map of author's identity in relation to the space that forged that identity. The body was the bearer of identity. But the space in which it was placed was as well. And like in the PaR project *Body Never Lies,* the body was tasked with the series of acts, the obstructions. First and foremost, the movements were stripped to a minimum, to a position of standing (mostly still) in a confined solid glass box (90x90x240), which was the built geometric space placed first in the landscape and later on in a gallery. The action of the body followed a methodology of three sets of performances: live performance, displaced or absent performance and non-performance.

The end result was the exhibition of identity and of space that shaped it. Literally.

In the context of gestural space within these three scenes, we first must determine the type of performance that took place in each of them.

The first, *the earth*, it was clearly a non-performance. The second, *the box*, consisted of all three spanning across time and space. The third, *the rocks*, was the absent performance, coupled with the non-performance. Having that in mind, gestural space of *the earth* scene was created in the relationship between the object and the event. The same can be said for *the rocks* scene. Design of the space, the placement of the elements that constitute the scene is what created a stage for the performance (of the audience that finishes the work by simply moving and interacting with space). The predetermined positions have conditioned the movement and therefore the space itself. And the outcome. The similar happened in *the box* scene but unlike in the previous ones there was no landscape here but there was the body of a performer. And this made all the difference because this body interacted not only with the space that was given but with the other bodies (of the audience) as well. And once the performance was finished, a shift was made, a castling, between the audience and the performer, changing the dynamics of a scene and likely the outcome but preserving the gestural place intact. The audience filled the spot of the absent performer.

7.3. Space, event, movement in Spirit of the Place: First Century of District

The third case study, permanent exhibition *Spirit of the Place*, took the different approach albeit using the same methodology, which resulted in a fact that the physical, geometric space of the work is twofold. In one instance, we have a space of the site, the place, its *genius loci*, which informed the exhibition. The focus was on the architecture of a former factory, renewed and revitalised factory, turned into a space for arts and culture. This was what the story, the event, the programme, was about. In the second, we have the space of the exhibition. Therefore, the space here – District – is the main protagonist.

While creating the programme of the exhibition, the starting point was the theoretical work of Norberg-Shultz, most specifically his seminal work "Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture". Hence the title of the exhibition. In this book, Norberg-Shultz talks about genius loci, or spirit of the place, which is a Roman concept.

According to ancient Roman belief every "independent" being has its *genius*, its guardian spirit. This spirit gives life to people and places, accompanies them from birth to death, and determines their character or essence. (...) The *genius* thus denotes what a thing *is* or what it "wants to be", to use a word of Louis Kahn (Norberg -Shultz, 1979, pp. 18).

This concept, which Norberg-Shultz successfully applied to architecture and his theory about it, refers to a space of distinct atmosphere, whose character is temporal, where life occurs and out of which human identity springs.

In it we have two determinants that are crucial for the concept of the exhibition: atmosphere and character.

Over the course of its existence this factory was the factory that gave the kickstart to the development of the city, it was the factory of death and destruction, factory of hope, factory of despair, factory of arts and culture that, within the century of its existence, was part of nine different countries without moving places. The life and the identity that sprung out of this place was integrated into the data on display, as an information (about the people that lived and died here), and it was deliberately designed as an echo, a fragment of story, a voice, a glance, an echo.

Gestural space exists only as or within the scope of a "non-event". In other words, the work has no stage as it was designed as a non-performance, meant to be "finished" by the audience that interacts with the exhibition by simply moving through the place and experiencing it first-hand, thus assuming the role of new residents of the factory, of District, and becoming the part of the story themselves. Willingly.

8. THE ARTIST'S HOUSE REIMAGINED AS EVENT-SPACE

All architecture is geometric space. It has width, depth, height – this is a given. But geometry alone does not define architecture, because architecture is never just pure space. It is always "contaminated by event, action and so on..." (Tschumi, 1995, pp. 122–124). Architecture is always already performative space. It is always gestural space. In its very essence, architecture is a stage – an environment where proxemic relationships are orchestrated and where life is enacted.

This is architecture in an expanded sense – beyond the limiting notion of a neutral "container" (Tschumi, 1996, pp. 141–147). Architecture is not, and cannot be, merely a vessel. It is activated through the presence and movement of bodies. First, we define a space. Then, we animate it. This activation is the architectural event. As Tschumi proposed in the 1970s with his groundbreaking theory of event-space, architecture and performance are not separate but interwoven: there is no space without event and no architecture without program (Tschumi, 1995, pp. 16–21).

Derrida later echoed this notion in his concept of *spacing* – architecture as the "event of spacing," a temporal and experiential unfolding (Derrida, 1997, pp. 63–65). The performative becomes spatial; space becomes performative. Drawing on Austin's (1962) theory of performative speech, architectural action is not just representational – it does something. The act of inhabiting is not passive; it is a mode of making space. We do things through architecture.

Likewise, Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical environments, Schechner's (1985) "twice-behaved behavior" as well as de Certeau's (1984) "space as practiced place" all point to this same performative nature of spatial experience – what Hannah and Khan (2008, p. 4), who drew these parallels, describe as the convergence of architecture and performance. Within this frame, architecture, like language, is not inert. It moves, shifts, speaks, gestures.

Tschumi's *space* and Norberg-Schulz's *place* are on the same spectrum without negating one another, and they come beautifully together in this performative field – both shaped and given meaning by human action. Gestural space mediates between them – it is both the choreography of movement and the embodiment of place (Norberg-Schulz, 1980, pp. 18–19, 27; Tschumi, 1995).

This is where we return to the idea of the artist's house. And to Bachelard.

For Bachelard, the house is the cradle of memory – a poetic construct that gives form to our inner life. The house, even more than the landscape, is a 'topography of our intimate being' (Bachelard, 1994, p. xxxvi). The artist's house – real or imagined – is the first space of creative intimacy. But it is never static. It is a dynamic stage for becoming.

When we follow the artist into the studio, into the site-specific or in-situ intervention, into the world of architecture, performance or installation, we see how this house expands into a broader field: a field of spatial enactment. The artist's house is thus reimagined as an event-space – a site of memory, movement and transformation. It is at once all: intimate and collective, private and public, anchored and ephemeral. It is a place where gesture becomes form, and where architecture becomes active, performative, alive.

The house, then, is not only where the artist dwells – it is where they act. And through that action, it is where they make space mean something.

In this light, the poetic and spatial structure of memory is not confined to the past. It is enacted in the now—on the stage of architecture, in the choreography of everyday life, and in the imagined houses we carry with us. It is here that performance and architecture converge—and here that we find the possibility of space becoming place, structure becoming story, and the house becoming the world.

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Life is Serious;
ART SERENE

Biography

Filip Jovanovski (b.1979), is a professional associate at the Faculty of Architecture UKIM - Skopje and teaches Scenography as an expert from practice at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts - "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" in Skopje. Jovanovski graduated from Faculty of Architecture, University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" in Skopje, and obtained his Master's degree from the Faculty of Fine Arts at "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" in Skopje in 2019 with the project "If Buildings Could talk".

With his pronounced interdisciplinary approach, Jovanovski explores different media and their interdisciplinary connection - architecture, visual art, theater, video, film and spatial installations. The most common means of artistic expression are spatial - performative interventions in public space. He explores artistic expression and potential in the field of scenography, thus far creating about 30 scenographies for theater projects. Jovanovski has had over 15 solo exhibitions and presentations in the country and abroad, and participated in over 40 group exhibitions.

He creates long-term socially engaged art projects, which are based on research and often in collaboration with different communities. In his projects, he tries to expose the hidden mechanisms of dominant positions of power, which lead to the destruction of public space and the public in general, while deconstructing and encouraging different alternatives to capitalist living. His works are transformations of political and social categories into spatial images. He often uses public space for his works or creates it, in addition to unconventional and alternative exhibition spaces.

His project "This building talks (truly)" curated by Ivana Vaseva, which represented the Republic of North Macedonia at the Prague Quadrennial for Performance, Design and Space in 2019, was awarded the main prize "Golden Triga."

Slobodan Velevski (b.1976) is a tenure professor at the Faculty of Architecture, University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" in Skopje, where he lectures on urban design and co-leads master design studio in architectural-urbanism entitled Growth 2.0. In 2007 he completed his master studies at Dessau Institute of Architecture in Germany and in 2013 he finished his PhD in Skopje which aims to decode the utopian narrative of contemporary cities.

His experience in practice (2005-2007) ranges from engagement at architectural offices such as Shigery Ban Arhitects Paris, David Chipperfield Architects Berlin, and research institute Space Syntax Lab in London. In 2018 he co-curated *Freenigspace*, an exhibition representing the Republic of Macedonia at the 16th International Architecture Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia entitled Freespace.

He is also a co-author of several publications including *Conversations*, a book that embodies series of interviews with eminent architects and educators. He regularly participates in conferences and various scientific research networks and programs.

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SUPERIMPOSING ARCHITECTURAL SPACE AND THEATRICAL ACTIVITY: FROM 'FOURTH' WALL TO 'DIALECTICAL' WALL

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Abstract

With its power to delineate and encapsulate space, the wall signifies one of the anchoring elements in architectural discourse. As such, the wall is an interface between various spatial conditions and processes that define cultural production in any societal context: from basic definition of community and the meaning of primary shelter, to complex relationships within the network of various socio-economic constraints that bring forth the rhizomatic nature of contemporary urban conditions.

According to Gottfried Semper, the most valuable aspect of the wall, as an enclosing element, is not its tectonic and constructive power to sustain the structural totality of space, but its value as a liminal entity that operates between various conditions on its both sides simultaneously. Namely, this condition of embracing parallel programmatic protocols reflects the plethora and the multitude of relations that correspond with the dynamic human nature which constantly produces different social encounters.

This paper aims to focus on the impetus that the liminal condition of the wall has in the process of instigating narratives within the physical context. It follows a research project conducted in Zentrum für Kunst und Urbanistik (ZK/U) in Berlin, where the generic space of a newly constructed rooftop becomes a specific place of activity (a 10 seconds theatre). The research departs from changing the basic notion of the 'fourth' wall as a dividing element between the 'world of imagination' (the stage) and the 'real world' (the audience), and introducing a 'performative' wall which becomes a dialectical element every time when the position of the

stage and the audience is subverted. Namely, the work showcases how the scenic and narrative content of everyday life always emerge as a form of theatrical activity when the architecture of the rooftop and the city shift their position around the dynamic nature of the dialectical wall and communicate with its content, performance, materiality, and appearance.

Would the dialectical wall be the ideal symbolical and political space for action, transforming a city into a stage? How thick is that wall? The dialectical wall in our research is a machine that generates actions by establishing a dynamic relationship of generic (abstract) versus active (place) space in the city, posing the question of the relation between the audience and the performers. The wall is a stage itself, a space that dialectically involves the audience in the action, reactivates the city in the creation of the actions (events) and thus, transform it into a performative city/scene?

Keywords: 'fourth' wall, architecture, theatre, performance

1. INTRODUCTION

The research presented in this paper started as a wider collaborative project initiated by the Prague Quadrennial for Performance Design and Space and its partners.

The overall collaboration was entitled "Active City(zens)". Three partners working with challenging urban localities in Prague, Berlin, and as well as a fourth partner located in Ukraine, developed innovative urban stage performances geared towards new audience development.

The title of the project tried to put in active relation the term city and its performers (citizens) - participants in creating their urban surrounding and transforming it into performative space.

Architecture and drama students, experts, citizens, artists, and researchers, developed prototypes for performances in public space that transform the city into a stage using an interdisciplinary research approach. These prototypes represent tools, instructions and recommendations on how rare experiences of a city can create the possibility of a new, extraordinary, radical reality as a process in building a better future.

The project intended to develop innovative audience - building approaches that support community engagement, while preserving local cultural values and developing methods of cross-cultural programming. The wide range of interventions into public spaces include areas with limited cultural reach, such as train and bus stops, marketplaces, abandoned heritage sites and more.

The general idea aims to develop prototypes for interventions that will exhaust the full potential of the city as an invisible resource. By creating new prototypes of culture programming, performative activities and interventions will redirect some of the attention the public is currently giving to advertising and commerce, to rediscover unique public spaces and create new forms of vibrant short performance bites.

There were several key points guiding the project:

- Activating people and places for new forms and prototypes of cultural production and engaging community through artistic production
- Creating innovative urban stage performances. Spinning on processes that instigate new audience development
- Providing spatial and programmatic infrastructure for establishing artistic creation (theatre) in existing (complex) urban settings

The project also relies on contemporary artistic performative and urban research practices close to the field of scene design, extending the field of scenography and its wider role in the society. One of the major challenges was how to use performative (scene) tools to transform non-places within the urban context in order to create performative (active) and engaged space (place) ready to grasp and embrace any action.

As dramaturg and artistic director of the Prague Quadrennial (PQ) 2015, Sodja Lotker, would note in her curatorial text for the PQ2015 edition:

PQ2015 explores scenography as a strong and sometimes invisible force of performance; a power that influences us just like music, weather and politics influence us. Theatre is a place where people gather and

where important socio-political relations are created. The Shared Space title points to scenography´s social function, providing a space for sharing, relating, and also for being in conflict – a place of connection and of difference.

The difficulty of orienting one's self in the fast changing world makes scenography's social function very important: here politicians use imagination and fiction while paradoxically artists are often obsessed with the authentic.

So, what is to be done? (Lotker, 2015)

2. THEORETICAL DISCOURSES AND REFERENCES: THE CONCEPTOF THE WALL IN ARCHITECTURE AND THEATRE

2.1 On some meanings of the wall in architecture

Architecture is a projective discipline usually seen as synonymous with progress because the (projective) outcomes it creates are perceived as strongly related with establishing new development strategies. This condition is especially present from the XIX century onwards and reflects the demands related to our ever-growing urbanization in which cities simultaneously became places of prosperity and challenges where many socio-political contradictions and complexities emerged. On the other hand, it could be argued that although the nature of architecture initiates change and not an entirely predictable new reality, the spatial tools that serve architecture in the process of building our cities and societies are actually mechanisms restricting possibilities. When the built (architecture) supplements the unbuilt, and therefore the unrestricted, it actually reduces liberty because it imposes decision-making, organizational structure, and order which by default is restrictive to freedom of choice. On ideological level, such condition marks each of the architectural elements as resources of subjugation. This paper argues that although architecture and its techniques based on specific relationship established by spatial elements (walls, columns, platforms, stairs, corridors, etc.) are based on creating a condition of control in which functions are determined with the purpose to construct order, they are also tools disrupting that very same order because they could instigate differences. On conceptual level, each of the architectural elements could serve as entities of a final state of certain structure of order, but the same ones could compositionally defer and create an 'open-end' structure in which the practice of order is re-codified as a practice of unlimited choices that produce freedom. Moreover, such condition further develops by introducing programmatic diversity that goes beyond functional correlation between form and content, and produces a condition of architecture as social condenser.

The work presented in this paper aims to reveal the double nature of architectural elements by focusing on the meaning of the wall as one of the most prolific architectural entities. With its power to delineate and encapsulate space, the wall signifies one of the anchoring elements in architectural discourse. As such, the wall is an interface between various spatial conditions and processes that define cultural production in any societal context: from basic definition of community and the meaning of primary shelter, to complex relationships within the network of various socio-economic constraints that bring afore the rhizomatic nature of contemporary urban conditions. The paper questions the power of the wall to simultaneously establish order, but also to create multiple and diverse non-hierarchical situations. One of the most striking examples of the former is the case of the Berlin Wall built during the Cold War era, which resembles the concept of intended order, restraint, division and exclusion, while the latter could be exemplified by the Kowloon Walled City in Hong Kong, as a place that has continually grown and perpetually changed for more than four decades until the mid-1990s when it was demolished. (Bock, 2015 pp. 33-84) Although both examples are an outcome of strongly politicized contexts, they could be seen as case studies that resemble three major aspects of the wall that were used as a conceptual strategy in the design work conducted for the rooftop of the ZK/U cultural center in Berlin, and were part of the collaboration within the "Active City(zens)" project. Namely, as will be discussed in more detail later, the project presented in this paper argues that the delineating aspect of the wall establishes the possibilities for dichotomy between various parties and their dynamics that are being delineated. Second, the wall is a generic element the size of which allows it to be programmatically populated almost on the level of total self-organization (Kowloon in Hong Kong).And last, the aspect of temporality that provokes a condition of accidental and involuntary behaviour, a state of perpetual performance that creates

multiple situations.

The first one could be traced back to the XIX century through a theory in the book *The Four Elements of Architecture* (Semper, 1851), in which the author, the German architect Gottfried Semper, argues the origin of architecture and the meaning of its elements. According to him, the most valuable aspect of the wall is its enclosing capacity. That means that Semper does not apply the tectonic and constructive power to sustain the structural totality of space as the major strength of the wall, but its value as a liminal entity that operates between various conditions on its both sides simultaneously. Thus, by delineating the space inside and outside the wall, he is introducing the idea of dichotomy. Namely, this condition allows embracing parallel programmatic protocols (from both sides) and creates a plethora which reflects the multitude of relations that correspond with the dynamic human nature which constantly produces different social encounters in the process.

In 1972, inspired by his thesis research on the Berlin Wall and for the purposes of a competition entitled "The City as a Meaningful Environment" organized by the Italian architecture magazine Casabella, Rem Koolhaas and his partners in the early days of the OMA collective proposed a dystopian reality for the city of London as a critique on the ongoing planning of the cities. The project "Exodus, or the Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture" is a polemical response to the multifaceted challenges of contemporary cities (Schaik & Macel, 2005, pp.236-276). Although its complex nature could be discussed through various social, spatial, as well as political constraints, the project is mainly based on proliferation of different programmatic entities limited within the thickness of the walled structure that operates as autonomous stripe which is sunken within the existing city. The decision to place the new city within the confines of the existing one, something that was avoided by many other architectural collectives in the 1960sand 1970s, shows that although the OMA proposal radically delineates its city from the existing one, it still needs it in order to establish dichotomy on the level of socio-spatial (urban) continuity. Thus, the programmes involved in the 'new' city should simultaneously present the critique of the contemporary society and its passive response to the ever-growing needs of its citizens, but also to position the non-spatial seeding of maximizing programmatic diversity of the urban territory (an approach that was years later developed by OMA as a concept of 'programmatic lava') as a way to sustain and to further develop the disciplinary frame of urban planning. The intention of this new paradigm is to go beyond the planning based on typological forms with predetermined functions and substitute them by embracing the city as an operational field of overlapping activities that correspond with the fluidity of global reality.

The third aspect that was researched for the purposes of the ZK/U rooftop intervention refers on flexibility of space. In that regard, flexibility of walls should be seen as part of the active spatial condition in which the dichotomy of the liminal and the programmatically less-determined conditions juxtapose and create an environment of performance. Perhaps one of the most profound examples of such juxtaposition is the Fun Palace, a 1964 project developed by architect Cedric Price in collaboration with avant-garde theatre director and producer Joan Littlewood. This project represents an evolving and adaptive open-end structure in which everyday life is understood as a cultural production that embraces emancipation, education, and leisure for people. The walls (and floors and all other architectural elements) are movable panels that are part of the scaffolding structure in which the movement, and the actions taken, are merged in multiple programmatic activities that imply performing situations. In such spatial disposition (scaffolding), and an actual condition of perpetual change (movement), the wall becomes an element of indeterminacy in which the practice of personal and collective freedom is instigated. The idea of the project is not to become a building, not more than the OMA project for London was intended to become an actual city, but rather those concepts aim to transform the top-down techniques of architecture in which order is imposed, in socio-spatial interactive machines that are capable to reinvent the dynamics of everyday life and grasp the novelty that comes with the growing societal complexities derived from accumulation of new knowledge. Moreover, the Fun Palace project derives from the strength of theatre performance. In terms of ideology, this project sees contemporary life as layers of various narratives that create numerous situations, and thus architecture should be capable to constantly re-adapt itself in order to sustain 'a theatrical stage' that provides an interactive backdrop to the varying needs and desires of the individual within the collective (Mathews, 2005, p. 73).

2.2 The wall as an element in theatre performance

Architecture is a space of reconciliation, scenography is a space of conflict. (Hocevar, 2003)

If we have to explain the definition of traditional theatre, regarding its already précised protocols of theatre produced in an institution (building, black box), with all elements that help producing an illusion of a play, we can simplify it and say that the key elements defining this illusion are: dark (light), theatre curtain (an imaginary 'fourth' wall in front of the proscenium) and (the shape of) the auditorium. Having these elements provides the starting position for creating a theatre theatre illusion as part of a theatre event within a building. Following these expected conventions, we can conclude that everything (performers / scenography / objects) positioned in the dark and not under the spotlight is not part of the performance, or at least it is not in the focus of the drama space in which the narrative takes the play.

In the traditional theatre, the positions of light and dark, actors and audience are very precisely defined. Actor and viewer are not allowed to mix their spaces (Sekner. R, 1992, pp 17). The space of the audience and the space of the actor are separated by the (imaginary) 'fourth' wall embodied in the form of a (red) theatre curtain.

There were several important historical efforts in the 20th century aimed to improve and redefine the relation between the architectural space (the building) and the performance (the theatrical space). One of the most important examples is the Total Theatre project by architect Walter Gropius and theatre director Erwin Piscator. Gropius builds a conception of an object in which *designed technical equipment enables the director to use perspective stage, proscenium and round arena, i.e. all of them simultaneously, inside of one play*, which actually establishes a new type of a stage - auditorium into one space of a *theatre-machine*. (Dinulovic, 2009)

On the other hand, Meta Hocevar claims that the paradox of the relationship between the spatial elements of the theatre (stage and audience) is that theatre architecture begins to live when the light goes off, when it finds itself in darkness. It lives in its absence, in the absence of form, when form fades away. (Hocevar, 2003)

The dynamics of the space, in the concept of Total Theatre**,** somehow redefined the traditional position of theatre protocols, so the theatre curtain (in front of the proscenium), the position of the auditorium (in relation with the viewer/audience) and the opportunities of using light/dark (through projections) on the stage, were radically redefined. This modernistic concept of redefining the positions of the viewer/audience and performers/actors were later established as one of the main aesthetic approaches of Bertolt Brecht's dialectical theatre practice. Brecht broke the (imaginary) 'fourth' wall in his theatrical methodology putting the light on the audience, so they had an opportunity to see each other (Sekner. R. 1992, pp18). but also see the architecture of the building, as a role in his plays. So, does this mean that the theatre (as building) became a kind of site-specific place to perform a play? The 'fourth' wall is no longer only a wall, the light is no longer focused on the actors, the audience is no longer in the dark listening to the play of the actors. All these elements are in an active relation creating one continuing performing space (architecture), where illusion is broken and exchanged. In his approach, the audience is in an active position of taking critical a decision towards the main narrative of the drama. Following this Brechtian tradition where theatre architecture can be seen as a role in a play, our project for the ZK/U rooftop transgress the traditional theatre protocol and its elements ('fourth' wall – curtain, relation of the audience and the performers in the space), aiming to create one total performative experience.

The scenographic approach is focused on deconstruction of the 'fourth' wall by intervention with scenography elements that are later transformed into different stage settings for performance and occupy the architecture of the theatre building.

3. RESEARCH OUTCOMES: NARRATING THE PERFORMATIVE WALL OF ZK/U BERLIN

This paper stems from a project that was conducted within the premises of the Centre for Art and Urbanistics (ZK/U) in Berlin, a cultural centre that operates as an independent creative hub. Its main objective is to host numerous artistic residences aimed at exchanging knowledge between international parties and the local community. One of its most distinctive qualities is the use of culture as an instigator of community development, an aspect that juxtaposes social, spatial (urban) and creative experiences. Thus, the understanding of complex socio-political and other contemporary urban dynamics is embedded within the very essence of this organization and represents its core value.

The research project presented in this paper is part of this cultural exchange format, where six researchers

with a timeframe of one month conducted their residency and worked on a particular theme. The participants were using spatial elements and the disciplinary discourse of architecture to develop a structural prototype that will invigorate new forms of cultural production. The task was very site-specific, focusing on a newly constructed rooftop of 600sqm that covers the new semi-detached building of the ZK/U.

The research originates from the idea of transforming the generic space of the rooftop into a specific place of activity. In order to enrich the notion of the rooftop as an active place, the team decided to use theatrical elements of stage, as a podium, a place that attracts the performance focus, and audience as a place from which we observe the scenic activity. Moreover, the research conducted onsite provided a new possibility in which, following the idea of 'total theatre' and the breaking of the fourth wall, the rooftop will be a place of shifting dynamics. This means that its role would not be perceived as a stage or as an audience, but both, depending on the activity that takes place on the rooftop or in its nearby surroundings. Namely, the hypothesis implies that the newly emerged activities on the rooftop are only a part of the narrative content of the everyday life that takes its place around the building. For instance, the rooftop is a stage when certain performance like a party, a concert, a theatrical play or cinema is taking place on the top of the building positioning the nearby streets, balconies, courtyard park or trains passing by as places for audience. On the other hand, the rooftop could become a place from which the 'theatre of everyday life' is being observed, a platform from where the city skyline is experienced, but also a place from which various spontaneous, yet scenic (daily) activities are being watched. In order for this interchange to occur and the shift of the rooftop as a stage or as an audience to take place, the notion of the theatrical 'forth' wall as a performative item was introduced. By changing the basic notion of the 'fourth' wall as a dividing element between the 'world of imagination' (the stage) and the 'real world' (the audience), new possibilities occur. Namely, the dialectical relationship of the rooftop and its surroundings in which the spatial experience of stage as a place of activity and the audience as a space for observation will be perpetually subverted and amalgamated, is achieved by a new element (the wall) that has performative capacities. At the same time, this means that the wall becomes a dialectical entity that is responsive to various activities and serves as an interface creating contextually specific narratives. Namely, the work showcases how the scenic and narrative content of everyday life always emerges as a form of theatrical activity when the architecture of the rooftop and the city shift their position around the dynamic nature of the dialectical wall and communicate with its content, performance, materiality and appearance.

To achieve such 'performance' and to negotiate the nature of the rooftop (as a stage or as a place for the audience), the wall must retain its spatial autonomy as a distinctive object. The research for the ZK/U project identifies the wall as a flexible element that could change its position on the rooftop, as well as its length, height and thickness, in order to be ablee to operate as an instigator for various 'performances', on a conceptual level. Therefore, the project uses the prefabricated elements of industrial scaffolding to became the basic 'wall infrastructure'. Hence, the rooftop is perceived as a perpetual 'construction site' and reinvigorates the idea of an 'open-end' structure in which the plane, the plateau of the rooftop, and the verticality of the wall create conditions ready to embrace various spatial and programmatic conditions.

The scaffolding works as an interface, an element that changes its spatiality and its form according to the performative requirements denoting its presence in multiple ways: as a 'colonnade wall' with predominantly vertical elements (becoming a barcode representing a series of messages, texts or images, continuous row of flags insisting on the multicultural nature of the cultural centre, embracing a row of trees within its depth, presenting the rooftop as an elevated garden/forest). It could also become a 'surface wall', appearing through various kinds of its 'façade', now becoming a theatrical curtain that opens and encloses the space between the rooftop and its surroundings, thus curating the ongoing performances, a billboard that communicate messages from/to the citizens, or a 'silver screen' for various projections. This treatment of the wall intensely extends the programmatic possibilities of the rooftop and the whole dynamics of the cultural centre, creating activities that span from stage setting infrastructure, artistic encounters (open gallery, dance and theatre performances), social events, like presenting the crafts of the local artisans, or various citizen workshops, up to entertainment that involves pop up bars and canteens, music festivals, or even provisional accommodation facilities within the demanding reality of Berlin when the wall setting on the rooftop provides a small scale short-stay camp site.

It is important to mention that the concept of the 'performative wall' could be sustained only through ongoing

curatorial practice that will continuously develop this spatial infrastructure as a prototype for new performing activities. Only by doing so, the artistic activities will activate a relationship between the audience and (artistic) performance, and will bring (artistic) practice as part of production of the city as social space. Thus, the wall will provide a setting which promotes a 'learning situations environment' that looks on existing problems such as creating social cohesion and current ecological issues (climate, waste disposal, urban green, etc.). Only by addressing this challenges that activate people and places, and connect artistic production that engages community, the process of social emancipation will continue.

Fig. 1. The 'fourth' wall prototype; Visualisation by Tamara Djerkov for the conference Life is Serious; Art Serene: architectural scenic research, Novi Sad, October 2024.

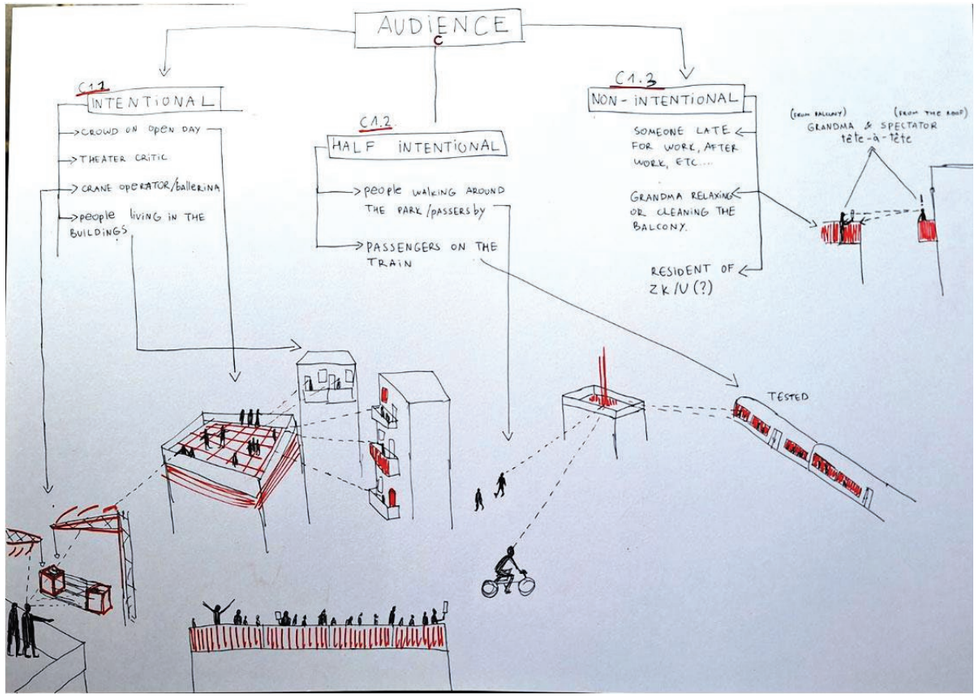

Fig. 2. Working diagrams for the ZK/U rooftop case study by Miodrag Kuč, Dimitar Milev, Ivana Samandova; produced during the residency at ZK/U,Berlin, July 2024.

Fig. 3. Lost Modernistic Utopias, performative intervention in public space. Collaborative project by Filip Jovanovski and Miodrag Kuč, 16 Th AKTO Festival for Contemporary Arts, Skopje, December 2021. Photo credit: KOKOS production.

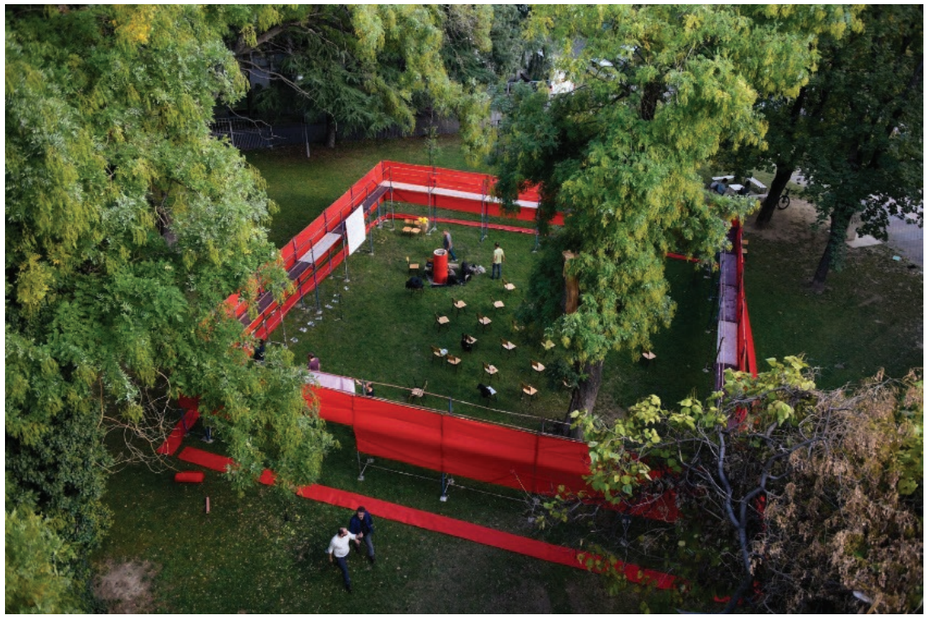

Fig. 4. Writing Urban Places,New Narratives of the European City, Skopje Brutalism Trail, COST Action 18126 at the Faculty of Architecture, University Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Skopje. September 2021. Photo credit: Mila Gavrilovska

Fig. 5. This building talks truly, Pavilion of the Republic of North Macedonia at the Prague Quadrennial for Performance Design and Space, author: Filip Jovanovski, curator: Ivana Vaseva, Performer: Kristina Lelovac Rehearsals at the Universall Hall, Skopje, May 2019. Photo credit: Dragica Nikolovska.

Fig. 6. They Shoot Horses, Don’t They?, Production National Theatre Bitola, directed by: Martin Kocovski, Scenography: Filip Jovanovski, March 2020. Photo credit: Aleksandar Bunevski.

Active City (zens) project: Superimposing architectural space and theatrical activity: from ‘fourth’ wall to ‘dialectical’ wall. authors: Filip Jovanovski, Slobodan Velevski, collaborators: Miodrag Kuč, Dimitar Milev, Ivana Samandova, Tamara Djerkov, Martina Peneva.

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Biography

Mgr. at Mgr. Bc. Amálie Bulandrová is a theatre scholar, art historian, and theorist. She holds a Master's degree in Theatre Studies and a Bachelor's degree in Art History from the Faculty of Arts at Masaryk University in Brno. She later completed a Master's programme in Theory and History of Art at the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague, where she currently teaches in the Studio of Fine Arts I. Since 2022, she has also been actively involved in the organisation of Kafkárna / Centre for Arts and Ecology UMPRUM, based in the former sculpture studio of Bohumil Kafka in Prague. Her doctoral research centres on scenography, with a particular emphasis on the intersections of theatre, installation art, and visual dramaturgy.

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SCENOTECTURE: BETWEEN SCENOGRAPHY AND EXHIBITION ARCHITECTURE

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Abstract

This paper investigates scenographic strategies and spatial approaches employed in contemporary art exhibitions in the Czech Republic, with a particular focus on those conceived by visual artists. After a brief historical overview of the tradition of *exhibition scenography*—institutionalised during the 1960s and 1970s through the national enterprise "Výstavnictví" in the former Czechoslovak Socialist Republic—the discussion turns to the subsequent decline of this field and the post-1989 emergence of what is now commonly referred to as *exhibition architecture*. Through an analysis of selected exhibitions by Czech artist Dominik Lang, the paper examines spatial strategies that function as interpretive, authorial layers positioned between artistic intention and functional display. It is argued that these practices resonate more closely with scenographic principles than with architectural ones—despite the term *exhibition scenography* having largely disappeared from contemporary Czech exhibition discourse. Nonetheless, the selected case studies reveal that scenographic thinking continues to inform curatorial methodologies within current exhibition-making practices.

Keywords: exhibition scenography, artist-as-curator, theatricality in installation, exhibition as a medium

1. EXHIBITION SCENOGRAPHY OR EXHIBITION ARCHITECTURE?

This paper examines the phenomenon of exhibition scenography—an artistic discipline with a strong tradition in the Czechoslovak context, particularly in relation to the iconic designs of numerous international, often competitive, exhibitions from the second half of the 20th century.[1] From the late 1950s onwards, following international successes in this field, the practice of *exhibition-making* gradually became established as a specialised artistic discipline, institutionalised through newly founded state-run enterprises "Výstavnictví" and "Brněnské veletrhy". (Binarová, 2017)

Through these institutions, the sub-components of exhibition design were systematically developed, both practically and theoretically. This process gave rise to new professional roles such as exhibition screenwriting, scenography, and dramaturgy. Within the framework of the national enterprise "Výstavnictví", the appropriate form and function of the exhibition *scenario* was considered to be essential to the production of a compelling result—that is, a distinctive exhibition. This approach also required a unified dramaturgical and scenographic direction to ensure coherence and impact.[2]

Although the exhibition medium within this institutional framework primarily served as a tool of communication—functioning as an instrument of state propaganda and as an authorised mode of representing official art and culture—it remains relevant to current discourse. I argue that the systematic attention paid to functional spatial-artistic approaches to constructing and narrating the layers of an exhibition resonates with certain tendencies observed in contemporary exhibition practices and their associated "scenotecture".

After 1989, with the restructuring of the Czech state, many institutions—including "Výstavnictví" and "Brněnské veletrhy"— were dissolved. In the wake of this institutional vacuum, a new approach began to emerge, characterised by the figure of the *artist-as-curator* and a renewed interest in the exhibition as a creative medium. Around the year 2000, the local art scene witnessed a growing trend towards self-organisation, whereby contemporary visual artists increasingly took on the roles of exhibition organisers and producers. (Nekvindová, 2020)

Although the term *exhibition architecture* had not yet been clearly articulated during this period, several key figures of this movement later came to be recognised as prominent *exhibition architects*. Among them are, for instance, the sculptor Dominik Lang and the new media artists Zbyněk Baladrán and Tomáš Svoboda, all of whom became actively engaged in the field of exhibition architecture. They continue to operate within this dual role, maintaining a distinction between their own artistic practices and their work on exhibition projects.

While the term *exhibition scenography* has largely disappeared from use in the Czech context—where it tends to be associated with historical, technical, or scientific museum displays or with immersive, spectacular formats—it continues to attract considerable attention internationally. For instance, in her 2014 research, Margaret Choi Kwan Lam demonstrates that contemporary international discourse on exhibition-making increasingly recognises scenography not only as a dominant spatial strategy but also as a curatorial methodology.

"Scenography has now radically evolved into a new transdisciplinary staging practice that characterized by its self-sufficiency, autonomy, open-structured methodologies, and probability-seeking strategies. By seeing museums and exhibition spaces as metaphorical stages, the exhibition culture will borrow the ideological methodologies, strategies and staging skills from theatres, and translate them in the use of curating." (Choi Kwan Lam, 2013, pp. 91)

Margaret Choi Kwan Lam further argues that this shift emerged in response to the growing imperative to "stage experiences" and, consequently, to enhance the affective relationship between exhibited works, objects, and their viewers. She observes that during the period of her research, between 2010 and 2014, exhibition scenography had already undergone a kind of trial phase, in which it was primarily associated with the production of spectacular commercial events.[3] (Choi Kwan Lam, 2013) It was only once this initial tendency began to wane that exhibition scenography started to merge more seamlessly with curatorial practice, she explains.

Building upon this briefly outlined research, my focus shifts to various approaches, strategies, and general staging practices drawn from the field of theatre, which have significantly influenced the curatorial concepts of contemporary exhibition-making. Notably, such practices tend to appear in exhibitions whose *architecture*, *scenography*, or *scenotecture* has been conceptualised, designed, and executed by contemporary visual artists themselves. Whether applied in the context of permanent collections or in their own authorial presentations, these final spatial structures consistently demonstrate a capacity to interpret space and construct narrative via physical situations. In other words, these artists bring a distinctly scenographic sensibility to the practice of exhibition-making.

Although scenographic qualities can be observed across a wide range of contemporary art exhibitions, the spatial layer is, at least in the Czech context, almost invariably referred to as *architecture*. This may stem from the fact that the term *exhibition scenography* is still largely associated with large-scale, immersive shows and thus remains burdened by suspicions of certain inauthenticity. Another possible explanation lies in historical precedent—specifically, the legacy of the Czechoslovak exhibition tradition, particularly its scenographic achievements in the second half of the twentieth century, which were often closely tied to the political rhetoric of the time and to the capacity of exhibitions to materialise ideological frameworks. However, scenography has long since evolved beyond its traditional theatrical context. In its expanded field, it is now understood as a discipline or practice that employs visual and spatial organisational strategies to communicate meaning—effectively, as a method of composing and shaping any performative environment. (McKinney & Palmer, 2017)

Fully aware of both the historical legacy of *exhibition scenography* and the more recent discourse surrounding *exhibition architecture*, I have deliberately introduced a synthetic (newly coined) formulation in the title of this paper. By combining the two terms, my intention is to underscore the continuity between the contemporary exhibition-architectural turn and the scenographic tradition of Czechoslovak exhibition-making. Above all, I seek to emphasise the notion that the exhibition medium constitutes a performative scene in its own right.

2. CURATING THROUGH SCENOGRAPHY

The notion of exhibitions as performative units—or even as a particular form of theatre—is a recurring theme in curatorial studies.[4] This perspective is grounded in the observation that when an artwork imaginatively *enters* an exhibition, it begins to function performatively: "[...] having agency but also in another sense as becoming exhibition, entering into another kind of ontological situation." (Rebentisch, 2019, pp. 60) The presence of theatricality—understood as a specific mode of representation—thus emerges in the aesthetic presentation of the artwork. This may occur through the dramaturgical reading of space, its scenographic articulation, the choreographic management of visitors, or the orchestration of sensory experiences: the rhythm of viewing, the synchronisation of various media, and so forth. In such contexts, scenography operates as an active web of relations, a field of connotations embedded within a visual-spatial construct that allows for multiple interpretive perspectives and levels of engagement with the exhibition as a whole.

A compelling example of this approach can be found in the work of Czech artist Dominik Lang. Whether

1 This paper is based on the thesis entitled "Scenotecture - Between Exhibition Scenography and Architecture" and defended by the author at the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague in 2023 (thesis supervisor: Jan Wollner). Partially similar version of this paper had been prepared in the Czech language for the anthology of the VIII Congress Czech Association of Art Historians held in Brno (12. –14. 9. 2024).

2 Josef Svoboda, a prominent Czech scenographer and author of many successful scenography solutions for international exhibition, also emphasises the concept of exhibition dramaturgy in his conference paper from 1975. According to Svoboda, exhibition dramaturgy represents the basis of an approach of staging material culture as well as ideas. As such, even theatrical technologies applied to exhibitions can then serve this purpose, proposes Svoboda, and in some cases, exhibitions themselves might become a space for experimentation with new audio-visual technologies (in such a way that they have had a retroactive effect on theatrical and artistic production of the exhibition). (Svoboda, 1975, pp. 30)

3 *"While a more fundamental transformation in the exhibitionary ideology is on call, a prominent artistic phenomenon is emerging on the other side of the world which has started influencing the exhibition scene, causing a paradigm shift in contemporary curating. It is the notion of the expanding field of scenography."* (Choi Kwan Lam, 2013, pp. 2-3)

4 *"When an artwork enters an exhibition, it begins to function performatively, [...] having agency but also in another sense as becoming exhibition, entering into another kind of ontological situation."* (Thrue Djurslev, 2022, pp. 21)

designing exhibitions to which he was invited purely in the role of architect, or developing his own original projects, Lang consistently introduces a deliberate, interpretive layer of spatial design. One such project is *Haus der Wohnirrtümer (House of Housing Mistakes)*, presented at Gallery TZB in the Czech Centre Berlin.[5] Here, Lang engaged scenographic principles to respond to the very building in which the exhibition took place, making it central to the installation's conceptual and material structure.

The building in question—the Czech Embassy in Berlin—was designed in 1972 by the renowned architectural duo Věra and Vladimír Machonin. Lang's exhibition responded not only to the building's architectural legacy, but critically and more pointedly to its current state of deterioration and misuse. These conditions were symbolised in part by valuable works of art originally created for the embassy's interior in the 1970s, which had since been neglected and relegated to obscure or inappropriate locations within the building due to a lack of awareness or care by local staff.

Lang's scenographic strategy addressed these realities through the principle of *absence*, evoking a sense of emptiness or incompleteness upon initial encounter. Only as visitors progressed through the exhibition space did it become apparent that period artefacts were concealed behind nondescript shelves and false columns—elements constructed by the artist to replicate the embassy's original architectural features with precise fidelity. In this way, reliefs, sculptures, tapestries, and other works gradually revealed themselves through movement, discovery, and spatial immersion of the audience. (Fig. 1, Fig. 2)

Fig. 1-2. Dominik Lang: Haus der Wohnirrtümer (Dům bytových omylů), © Galerie Českého centra v Berlíně, foto: Šárka Lenertová

The most dominant element of the exhibition—one that also had to be *discovered* by the audience—was a bedroom constructed by the artist as an exact replica of the embassy's original facilities. This room was bounded on one side by a large glass gallery window overlooking a busy street, and on the other by an artificially constructed chipboard wall with a small opening. Visitors could access the bedroom from within the exhibition space and were invited to spend time there: to lie on the bed, sit in the armchair, and inhabit the room temporarily.

As a result, during gallery opening hours, it was possible for passers-by on the street to glimpse not only a static 1970s-style bedroom display through the gallery window, but also an unfolding live scene featuring an unknowing performer—a gallery visitor interacting with the space. (Fig. 3, Fig. 4)

This scenographic intervention created a paradoxical form of intimacy. On the one hand, it evoked the illusion of a private bedroom, secluded from the rest of the exhibition by a solid wall. On the other hand, it simultaneously constructed a *meta-scene*: an exposed, almost voyeuristic environment filled with objects and artefacts from the embassy, made visible to onlookers outside. The installation thus blurred the boundaries between private and public, performance and observation, fiction and reality.

5 Dominik Lang: *Haus der Wohnirrtümer* (*House of Housing Mistakes / Dům bytových omylů*), TZB Galerie Tschechisches Zentrum Berlin, 11. 2. - 9. 4. 2016.

The scenographic approach adopted in the exhibition described above enabled the artist to construct layered narratives, rather than a linear mode of presentation. It allowed for the integration of the exhibition's processual qualities, as well as the potential interactions between people and objects within the space. As a result, this approach rendered the exhibition inherently self-reflexive, prompting visitors to adopt a specific position—or even to engage as co-authors—in relation to the building itself: the architecture that the exhibition was critically reflecting upon.

In this way, the exhibition space functioned as a performative structure, one that shifted over time and through space in response to the movement of the human body. This embodied engagement was not incidental, but rather intrinsically tied to the curatorial intention of the project. The performativity of the exhibition—its capacity to generate meaning through spatial experience—was thus inseparable from the conceptual and material framework of the artwork as a whole.

Fig. 3-4. Dominik Lang: Haus der Wohnirrtümer (Dům bytových omylů), © Galerie Českého centra v Berlíně, foto: Šárka Lenertová

3. SCENE WITHIN A SCENE WITHIN A SCENE...

Dominik Lang frequently works with *meta-scenes* and, more broadly, with various scenographic constructs that allow for a multi-layered reading of the exhibition as a whole. He often places both human actors and non-human objects—i.e. the exhibited artefacts—onto diverse kinds of *stages*, allowing them to narrate an imaginary story embedded within the specific context of each display. A notable example is the exhibition *Ivan Meštrović (1883–1962): Sculptor and Citizen of the World*[6], for which Lang was originally invited solely in the capacity of exhibition architect. Ultimately, however, the spatial design he created came to serve as the dominant curatorial and dramaturgical framework of the entire project.

Here too, the spatial conception may be described as scenographic: it functioned as a stage for the construction of multiple discourses and interpretive narratives through which the oeuvre of the exhibited artist, Ivan Meštrović, was mediated.

The first part of the exhibition was situated in a long connecting corridor of the gallery, functioning both as a cartographic presentation of Meštrović's sculptural works and as a historical-social contextualisation of his life and practice. The curatorial narrative began with a section devoted to the 1960s—the decade of Meštrović's death—from which visitors could proceed *backwards* in time toward the artist's birth. This reverse chronology was articulated not only through the selection of documents, catalogues, letters, and artefacts, but also via the transformation of the furnishings—pieces of furniture that operated as active scenographic props, themselves metaphorically *ageing* over time.

6 Sandra Baborovská, Barbara Vujanović (curators). *Ivan Meštrović (1883–1962): Sculptor and Citizen of the World / Sochař a světoobčan*, Prague City Gallery, 24. 11. 2022 – 26. 2. 2023.

In this way, the spatial layout was tightly interwoven with the dramaturgy of the exhibition, engaging directly with questions of *what* the exhibition reveals and *how* this revelation unfolds through time.

In other words, by the time visitors reached the beginning of Ivan Meštrović's life story—his birth—they had already been introduced to his major exhibitions, key biographical milestones, stylistic classifications, and critical reflections on his sculptural practice. This layering was a crucial aspect of the overall curatorial concept, as the corridor functioned not only as a spatial connector between the two sections of the exhibition, but also as a spatial-temporal *node*. Upon passing through this transitional space, visitors entered the rear section of the gallery, where several additional exhibition rooms were located. To access the remainder of the exhibition on the opposite side, they were required to retrace their steps and pass through the connecting corridor once more. This return journey offered the possibility of recognising new connections within the presented materials—connections that may not have been legible upon first encounter, but became clearer only after engaging with the installations in the rear gallery spaces.

A particularly striking example of this principle was the treatment of the political dimensions of Meštrović's work. These were represented not only through historical documents, but also by a sculptural installation composed of two portrait busts of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, the first President of Czechoslovakia. Both busts, dating from the 1920s, were placed on classical plinths positioned directly opposite one another, creating the impression of an imaginary dialogue between the two likenesses. The installation also included a historic chair, placed atop a wooden table, into which one of the plinths had been partially inserted. Since this plinth supported one of the busts, it meant that the portrait of the president was, quite literally, *embedded* within the chair.

This composition simultaneously conveyed a sense of statesmanlike authority—by elevating and enshrining the figure of Masaryk—while also evoking connotations of entrapment or constraint, as if the political figure were confined within the institutional structures he once helped to shape. (see Fig. 5)

Fig. 5 Sandra Baborovská, Barbara Vujanović: Ivan Meštrović (1883–1962): Sculptor and Citizen of the World / Sochař a světoobčan, ©Prague City Gallery.

Given the *chronotopic* arrangement of the exhibition, visitors may not have immediately made the suggested associations upon their first encounter with the Masaryk installation. Rather, the interpretive potential of these juxtapositions emerged retrospectively—upon re-entering the corridor after having explored the adjoining gallery rooms. These other sections included, among other features, audio recordings of professionally interpreted archival materials, such as personal letters and excerpts from Meštrović's memoirs. One particularly significant text was a 1923 memoir entitled *On a Visit to Masaryk*, in which the artist reflected on his personal relationship with the president.

Such materials offered a rich interpretive framework for re-engaging not only with the dialogical installation of the Masaryk busts but also with other scenographic compositions throughout the exhibition. In this way, the exhibition *Ivan Meštrović (1883–1962): Sculptor and Citizen of the World* emphasised a processual, fluid unfolding of interpretive layers. Meaning was not fixed or linear, but rather constructed gradually through spatial movement, repetition, and return.

During his lifetime, Meštrović's work achieved international acclaim, thanks to a wide array of exhibitions both within Czechoslovakia and abroad. This continuous *movement*—not only of the artist himself but of his sculptures across numerous international venues—informed Dominik Lang's overall spatial and architectural conception of the exhibition. This idea was also materially represented, that is by the use of metal shelving units, which structured the placement of the sculptures within the space. These racks resembled contemporary storage or transport systems more than traditional museum displays, thereby underscoring their function as framing devices and highlighting the exhibition space itself as a *non-neutral zone*—a scenographic setting in its own right. (see Fig. 6)

Fig. 6 Sandra Baborovská, Barbara Vujanović: Ivan Meštrović (1883–1962): Sculptor and Citizen of the World / Sochař a světoobčan, ©Prague City Gallery, foto: Tomáš Souček

4. SCENOTECTURE: STAGING CURATORIAL STRATEGIES

The aforementioned examples serve to illustrate how a scenographic approach to exhibition-making actively constructs the chosen narrative form. This mode of working draws upon a range of elements—such as the conceptual use of spatial segments as transitional *scenes*—to further articulate and intensify the exhibition's overall structure. At the same time, these projects demonstrate that by foregrounding the very presence of the stage or *scene*, it becomes possible to articulate a form of meta-commentary on the exhibition as a whole.

This perspective is echoed by philosopher and art theorist Juliane Rebentisch, who addresses the theatricality

inherent in the medium of installation. According to her, when the exhibition medium is approached as a stage-like, performative environment, a dominant hierarchical relationship is often presumed—one in which individual artworks are viewed as subordinate to the overarching exhibition scenography or its sub-scenes. However, as Rebentisch argues, this is not the only possible configuration:

“[The] frame, the border of a work of art is nothing static, [...], the context sensibility of contemporary art points to the open structure of artistic experience. [...] Instead of it locking and defining the work of art the highlighting of the stage lets us become aware of our conditions for experiencing art. The stage presence lets the exhibition structure come to the fore and be reflected upon.” (Rebentisch, 2019, p. 60)

The principle articulated by Rebentisch resonates with the previously discussed projects, in which the exhibition functions as a fluid and inherently ambiguous situation—one in which the boundaries and frames of the artwork are continually renegotiated with each visitor’s engagement. The act of foregrounding the scenes, and of identifying their various forms, does not serve to enclose or delimit the artwork; rather, as the examples have demonstrated, it brings into focus the conditions under which the artwork is experienced. These are among the defining characteristics of scenography as a discipline—qualities that are manifest in spatial-artistic solutions even when exhibitions are not conceived as spectacular or immersive shows.

I have chosen to focus on the projects of Dominik Lang as a way of illustrating the potential of the scenographic approach within exhibition-making, and to show how the navigation of the exhibition space can itself become a subject—a medium—that constitutes an integral component of the curatorial concept. In such cases, spatial arrangement does not serve as a neutral framework for the autonomous display of artworks in the service of so-called “objective” presentation. On the contrary, it functions as an interpretive force in its own right, actively shaping the meaning, experience, and narrative of the exhibition as a whole.

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Biography

dr Monika Bilbija Ponjavić (1982), architect, scene designer, visual artist. Monika finished studies in architecture, theatre, audio-visual arts and performance (scene) design at the universities of Banja Luka, Amsterdam, Belgrade and Novi Sad, with projects dealing with the transformation of space and design through stage means.
Over the course of the last fifteen years, she exhibited her work at Prague Quadrennial, Biennale of Scene Design, Museum of Applied Arts in Belgrade, Alternativa Gdansk, KC Belgrade, KS Svilara, Sarajevo Winter, Balkan Architecture Biennial, WSD Cardiff...in around 15 collective exhibitions.

During this time, she had three solo exhibitions, “Body Never Lies” (2010), “Who Would God in Bosnia Be?” (2021), “Blackest Wave” (2024) and one permanent exhibition, she co-created with Nemanja Milenković, “Spirit of the Place: First Hundred Years of the District” (2023).

She is the author of the book about film curation titled “From the Black Box to the Black Box of the White Cube”, published by the Museum of Contemporary Art RS (2015). She is the co-author, editor or a consultant on five cultural development strategies.

She was the art director for two ECoC projects: Banja Luka 2024 and Budva-Boka 2028, leading them into the finals. She is the member of OISTAT Serbia. And the holder of the Erasmus Mundus full scholarship.

She is the art director of Kaleidoscope of Culture, a large-scale showcase of artistic production within the following fields: applied arts, literature, architecture, performing and visual arts.

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WHAT IS SCENE DESIGN? AND WHY IS IT NOT SCENOGRAPHY?

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Abstract

Ever since Adolphe Appia (architect) and Edward Gordon Craig (theatre director and actor) proposed that design practices within performance are considered an equal partner within the construction and reception of meaning or since Pamela Howard rethought scenography in her seminal work “What is scenography?”, giving us a new, holistic approach to the *traditional* idea of what scenography is the room for debate cantered around design for performance has been wide open.

This paper will continue with the debate given that the main point of reference or, better yet, its focus will be drawing the parallels between scenography and scene design and finding the line of separation between these two disciplines, which, according to this author are not and cannot be synonyms, especially in the context of the 21st century art and technology. In doing so, it will discuss other terminology (set design, stage design, production design etc.), theoretical frame and spatial setting i.e. space in which scenography and scene design can and do happen.

The artworks – “Body Never Lies”, “Who Would God in Bosnia Be?” and “Tišma” – were all built around the same idea of what scene design is, using the method of *repetition and the difference* that comes out of it and same three elements that, according to this author, are the key determinants of scene design: space, body, text.

Keywords: scene design, scenography, architecture, stage, scene, space, body, text

1. FROM SCENOGRAPHY TO SCENE DESIGN

Word scenography, formerly known as set design, stage design or theatre design, comes from the Greek word *skenographia*, which, in literal translation, within the context of ancient Greece, means *painting of space*. This role of scenography – as decorative painting – remained in the theatre until the appearance of one architect (Adolphe Appia) and one actor/director (Edward Gordon Craig) whose theoretical and practical work in this field will forever change the world of scenography and the way we think, create and experience performance space.

However, despite this shift, the term(s) in English language stayed, until one scenographer and theatre director changed them: from set design, stage design, theatre design to scenography. Her name is Pamela Howard.

Thanks to her, and her persistent struggle for new understanding of scenography – *writing the stage space, not paining it* – and making a clear departure from previously used and known terms, *scenography*, her new phrase has now become a universal term that is used today in professional practice in many countries where this was not the case before. However, in our region, and our language, that term (scenography/scenografija) was already widely in use, before her time, but not in the same meaning Pamela Howard intends and advocates.

1.1. Scenography is Scene design

„What is scenography?", a book by Pamela Howard, published in 2002. is a result of her need to clarify this (new) term and explain what she means when she says *scenography* instead of *stage design*, *set design* and *theatre design*.

The Serbian translation of the book – Šta je scenografija? – however, is a puzzling one. At first glance, the title is misleading, because, due to different meanings in different languages, it implies and suggests, that scenography *is* set design, stage design and theatre design, when it is clearly not. It is the opposite, which the book is trying to convey. On further inspection, and given the fact that Serbian language already had a substitute for set design, stage design and theatre design, that span out of the same need Howard had, the title seems incorrect. This new word was coined by Radivoje Dinulović (architect and scenographer), Irena Šentevska (architect) and Milosav Marinović (dramaturg) in 1996. with the idea of creating a clear distinction between the past and the present of theatre design.

However, their phrase – scene design (Serbian: scenski dizajn) – although some might read as a synonym, is not to be confused with Howard's phrase because it bears a different meaning: to design everything that can be seen (or heard) on display. Be it a theatre play or an artwork or an exhibition. In other words, we are talking about designing the whole of performance, the sum of it, not just its parts. This meaning is slightly different from what Howard is saying. In a sense that it is surpassing it, making scenography a subset of scene design. One of its elements.

1.2. Scenography is not Scene design

The surpassing bit, the subset bit, is best understood in the light of Prague Quadrennial and the name change of this crucial event, which occurred in 2011. The shift from *Prague Quadrennial International Exhibition of Scenography and Theatre Architecture* to *Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space*, which has seen the evident change from the word *scenography* to the word *performance design*, is crucial, because it marks the moment, which made the grand entrance of the latter into the artworld, enabling the shift once again, anew. From set design to scenography to performance design.

New name, a legacy of Arnold Aronson, PQ 2007 Commissioner, has brought forth a new identity, and thus a new concept, expanding the field of activity that aims to place emphasis primarily on performance or scene design and its role in performing, as well as all other arts. Sođa Lotker, the artistic director of the Prague Quadrennial at the time, talks about the changes in the context of performance design, i.e. scene design, in the preface to the book "Scene design as art" by Tatjana Dadić Dinulović, where she highlights the theatre as the place where these changes were most significant and as a place crucial in our understanding of performance design:

The post-dramatic theatre, that theatre in which no dramatic work was written, enabled scenography to not only be a tool in the service of the play, but to become an equal dramatic element in the creation of the play.

The visual theatre of Robert Wilson, the musical theatre of Heiner Goebbels or the interdisciplinary work of the Need-company group are, of course, unequivocal examples. The recent wave of theatre works based on authentic elements such as documentary theatre, found place theatre, site-specific, community theatre, performances in public urban space, are projects in which the space/scenography is often the starting point: it is the subject, the main character (Dadić Dinulović, 2017, p. 7).

Recognizing that scenography in such works is often found instead of built, Lotker talks about new scenographic strategies which, due to such conditions, now relate to the recognition, marking and reading of the space which, in this new relationship, is inevitably inhabited by the spectators who, together with the performers, share a common environment. In this way, as Lotker says, new, changed practices brought changes to scenography as a profession, which was significantly transformed, and the role of the designer itself became more complex and multifaceted (Dadić Dinulović, 2017, p. 7). These changes have led to the world in which scene designers became a fairly common phenomenon outside the theatre as their primary space, including in different genres and disciplines, from fashion shows and exhibition settings, through vj-ing and photography, to art installations, of which they are principle, sole authors. However, the most important trend is reflected in the fact that scene designers, have become artists who lead their projects, initiate and implement them, independently, instead of depending on others, instead of being team members led by the director, which is what the scenographer, in the sense in which it is still understood by Pamela Howard, is.

2. WHAT IS SCENOGRAPHY?

2.1. Definition of scenography

In Oxford English Dictionary scenography is defined as follows: *1) The representation of a building or other object in perspective; a perspective elevation and 2) Scene-painting (in ancient Greece).* A similar definition is found in Oxford Dictionary of English: *1) the design and painting of theatrical scenery and 2) (in painting and drawing) the representation of objects in perspective.*
The similar understanding of scenography is found in Serbian language.

These definitions are usually relating to the décor, be it a painting, objects on stage, and often to the act of organising them. That said, most writings on scenography have defined it as a *material art* (instead of spatial), consisting of concrete elements such as props, costumes and pieces of scenery. And most of the time scenography is or equals material design of the scenographer - drawings coming to life and materialising in space and real time, meaning that scenography is an act of representation. All of the definitions, including the advanced definition of Pamela Howard, see scenographer as *a collaborator* within the bigger team, bound to the director and his vision, part of a whole. Handful of them speak of scenography as *transformative art*.

2.2. Contemporary definition of scenography (by pioneers of the field)

For Howard "scenography is the seamless synthesis of space, text, research, art, actors, director and spectators" (Howard, 2002, p. 152). The term "synthesis" was earlier used by scenographer and architect, Jozef Svoboda in 1947. to argue that no single art – painting, sculpture, architecture – should dominate theatre. Instead, choice of the scenographer is synthesis, i.e. "we choose an artistic principle that corresponds to our theatre concept... the priority on the stage therefore belongs first to the theatrician, and only then to a designer or director" (Burian, 1971, p. 16).

Svoboda did not coin the term scenography, but he did define it as the three-dimensional materialisation of a play (McKinney, Butterworth, 2009, p. 65). He rejected the idea of scenography as decoration, insisting it includes the entire theatre experience - actors, sets, space, audience, the architecture. For him, scenography is "what happens once the curtain opens" (Burian, 1971, p. 15).

Robert Wilson's theatre similarly prioritises visual and spatial elements. Light is central to his work—he calls it "a magic wand" (Holmberg, 1997, p. 121) that shapes and transforms space.

In German, as in English, unlike the other languages, there was no adequate term for this new art that emerged from the decorative stage painting. There was only *Bühnenbildner,* which, like in the case of stage design, means the stage painter. In order to adequately describe what they are doing, Bertolt Brecht and Caspar

Neher coined a term *Bühnenbildner*. In English, the translation of the word is "scene designer" (McKinney, Butterworth, 2009, p. 45). Their scene design developed during rehearsals and functioned as part of the performance (McKinney, Butterworth, 2009, p. 45).

For Brecht and Neher, it was about distinguishing the way they worked from the way in which designers were generally expected (or expected of themselves) to work. And it is only in their understanding, as well as in Svoboda's, that we can tell apart contemporary scenography from scene design. This distinction – between decorative design and scenography as integral to performance – is key. For Appia, Craig, Howard, Svoboda, Neher, and Wilson, scenography is spatial, three-dimensional, and part of the dramatic structure. It creates space, draws from the stage, not just the text, and permeates performance.

In the 20th century, scenography moved beyond décor. As directors and designers began working more closely, design gained influence over dramaturgy. Technological developments further expanded scenography's tools and scope. The emergence of the term "scenographer" marked this shift (Holdar, 2005, p. 117).

But with the shift the question emerged – what separates scenography from this new art called scene design? Because, by the time terminology caught up the term (scenography) was already outdated and, in other languages, was being replaced by performance (scene) design.[1]

Despite this, despite the fact that the terminology change lost its impact, the pioneering work Svoboda, Brecht and Neher were doing remains crucial – they treated design as an expressive, affective element of performance, engaging audiences on all sensory levels. And that, to me, is the first step, which enabled the creation and contemporary understanding of scene design.

3. WHAT IS PERFORMANCE (SCENE) DESIGN?

The confusion brought forth by two languages – German and English – gave birth to a century old discussion that is occurring among the leading voices of this field across space and time.

3.1. Scene design...in the theatre

When Brecht and Neher coined the term *Bühnenbildner*, they were already pointing toward what we now call *scene design*. If we go back to this moment, it becomes easy to understand that the answer was already there.

The key difference from scenography lies in *intent*. Scene design begins with a clear artistic intention and operates without hierarchy – light, costume, set, and sound all serve a unified visual dramaturgy. McKinney and Butterworth call this "visual dramaturgy", where scenography is only one component. In Brecht and Neher's view, scene design is a *superset* – parallel to direction, encompassing all visual elements, and constructed collaboratively by the director and designer.

The scene designer is, therefore, like a director of photography in film: the director's visual partner, responsible for shaping the entire aesthetic identity of a performance. From concept to audience engagement, their task is to conduct the visual story. They don't just design sets – they co-create the world of the play.

That said, the role of scene designer in theatre is to be director's director of visual dramaturgy, a conductor of everything visually happening on stage, including scenography and not just. He is the individual responsible for the overall aesthetic of the story.

This elevates scene design to a distinct, higher position within theatre-making. But again, it hinges on *intent*. Scene design must be conceived as such from the beginning. This is the central question the Prague Quadrennial has explored for decades: how can theatrical work be exhibited independently, outside its original context? The answer lies in *transformability* – the ability of scene design to become autonomous

1 See Holdar: 177 Bablet 1975: 291, Svoboda 1993: 14 and 54, and Howard 2002: 123-129, who provides a contemporary reflection on the matter. Terminology in this section of theatre business has never been coherent (see Öjmyr 2002: 24-27) but varied greatly from periods, languages, and practitioners. Although scenography has been standard concept in France, Central Europe, Balkans and Scandinavia for the past fifty years, the term has escaped a similar impact in German and English-speaking countries. In Italian, scenografia was already the established concept, explaining why the ideas behind an updated terminology lost impact.

art. This distinction separates scenography from scene design. Latvian artist Vladislav Nastavshev's "Miss Julia" and the resulting artwork *The Submission* (PQ 2015) exemplify this shift—from theatre to gallery, from performance to object.

That is why Howard's book was aptly translated as *scenografija* in Serbian, not *scenski dizajn*. Because scene design simply involves more: intent, collaboration, authorship and the power to transform.

3.2. Scene design...outside of the theatre

Now that we have established what is scene design in the theatre and what is scenography, we should emphasize that there are other forms of stage design. One relating to architecture, which we will save for a different paper, and another relating to visual art, which is about an independent artistic work of scene design, that is, scene design as art. Tatjana Dadić Dinulović defined it as: "...a new, independent, contextual work of art, dominantly based on the use of scenic means of expression, which establishes an active relationship with the space and the audience" (Dadić Dinulović, 2017, p. 286). This is the work that did not come directly from the theatre, in the sense of representation, recreation, reinterpretation of the theatre play. And is neither an installation nor a sculpture.

This means that scene design is a comprehensive, multi-media, multi-layered work of art, for it connects different phenomena (space, light, sound, objects, movement...), but also different arts (sculpture, film, installation, scenography, painting, performance, costume, theatre...).

In Šuvaković's definition, the one we will rely on and expand on, scene design is a set of "various techniques of articulation (of architectural design and physical realization) of the performing arts space" (Šuvaković, 2005, p. 553). And since the performance is the central axis of the scene design (in the theatre, the scene design is usually in the service of the performance, while outside of it, the performance becomes a building tool for an independent work), the performance, which can be a directed or undirected event, the absence or presence of the performer is not decisive for its embodiment. That said, during the course of my investigation of what scene design is and what is it not, I formulated three types of performance: live performance, displaced or absent performance and non-performance.

A live performance, as in any conventional theatre (because that's what makes it a theatre), regardless of what kind of theatre it is, goes without saying. It implies. And when we say implies, we are talking about the existence of a living person, actor or performer on stage. A man, an actor or a performer, can be physically present at a given moment in time, with his body, movement, voice or only with the latter, but he must be physically present in the sense that his performance is happening now and here, in front of the audience.

Displaced performance or, as Šuvaković calls it, "absent event" (Šuvaković, 2005, p. 553), is a type of performance that dramatizes another space in relation to the space in which the final product is performed or exhibited and that dramatizes a specific action or event. Displaced performance can thus be any (live) performance that takes place somewhere and then, in the form of artistic documentation, video or audio recording, or in some other way and with other techniques, is presented to the audience somewhere else, as, for example, in "The Defence of Socrates" by Tomi Janežič, where the pre-recorded voice of the actor is present, but not his body on stage, or as in the case of the artwork "Displacement" by Dorian Kolundžija.

Non-performance is a performance that does not imply the presence of the performer (living body) on the stage. Instead, what "enlivens" the space are passers-by or observers of the work who perform an undirected performance by simply moving through the space. It is a perceptual performance, in which case the work is finished (influenced, changed...) by the observer who passes through the space and experiences it, as, for example, in "Stifter's Things" (Stifter's Dinge) or in "The Legacy, pieces without people" (Nachlass, pièces sans personnes) by Stefan Kaegi, director, and Dominic Huber, scenographer, which was performed at the 52nd BITEF.

3.3. Definition of performance (scene) design

Performance (scene) design is a multilayered phenomenon that has three outcomes, in theatre, outside of theatre and in architecture.

In theatre, scene design encompasses various areas of audio-visual and spatial creation—the articulation

of physical space, and the design of décor, costumes, sound, and lighting—united in the organic process of creating a performance. In this context, scene design is almost synonymous with contemporary, expanded scenography as discussed by Howard, Appia, or Craig. The second outcome includes all of the above but also considers the nature of the work—whether it stands independently, comments on the performance, and creates its own meaning. If so, it is a work of scene design. It's about approach and intention.

From a professional standpoint, the scene designer in theatre assumes the role of audio-visual director—overseeing all that is seen and heard on stage, within the realm of design and technology. As such, the scene designer represents the artistic direction of the technical aspects of the work and works in direct, equal partnership with the director.

Outside of the theatre scene design is a new, independent, contextual work of art, based on the use of scenic means of expression, which establishes an active relationship with the space and the audience. In the instance of art creation, the designer is not part of the wider team, although he may be, nor is he related to the director, as he is the de facto director of the given work. In the instance of architecture scene designer is the one who designs the work (space for performance or exhibition) and the one who leads the team.

Thus, scene design is audio-visual-spatial art – designing for performance through storytelling via scenic (and technological) means. Its result is an independent contextual work of articulation and theatricalization of space and dramatization of events, which takes place somewhere, in time, whose starting point, or the outcome, is the text, a work of art that consists of different objects arranged in a mutual relationship, where the object includes the bodies of performers and/or audiences in the acts of live performance, displaced performance and non-performance.

Scene design is, therefore, an umbrella field – encompassing scenography, architecture, technology, costume, etc. – that sits at the intersection of architecture, design and visual/applied arts. Art and science of designing for the performance. A visual-spatial storytelling.

4. WORKS OF SCENE DESIGN

4.1. Who Would God in Bosnia Be?

"Who Would God in Bosnia Be?" is a three-piece exhibition consisting of five artworks exiting between video art, light and sound design, installation, performance, architecture, storytelling, costume and scenography. The exhibition is autobiographical excavation of author's identity – individual and collective – that span out of extensive research on Bosnia (country + landscape) and "being Bosnian", which lasted for over three years.

Fig. 1. Third piece - "Who Would God in Bosnia be?" / Life on the edge of the two worlds, Monika Bilbija Ponjavić

Illustration above shows one scene (*Life on the edge of the two worlds*), and three artworks: site-specific performance (*Performing Life I*), sound design piece (*Vilajet*) and in-situ performance (*Performing Life III*). The artworks, done by the same author, are separate entities because they were created in different times, places and spaces. *Performing Life I* was created over period of three years, from 2018. until 2021. on different locations (Manjača, Kozara, Leotar...) that were crucial in forming the author's identity. They were performed on site, in real time, by actress Miljka Brđanin, and were documented with the intention of being exhibited later on, as part of the whole piece. *Performing Life II* and *III* were created on spot during the exhibition. First one was the reenactment of *Performing Life I*, done by the same actress, Miljka Brđanin, in front of the screen showing the video work of Miljka's original performance. The second one was the unintentional reenactment done by the audience, who followed Miljka's lead and entered "the box" after her in situ performance (in the exhibition space) was over (as seen in the photo illustration). *Vilajet* is the sound design piece created in 2021. as the illustration of Bosnia, or, what Bosnia is and what it means to be Bosnian. *Vilajet* could be heard only from within "the box". Together, all of these parts, created one whole, which can be described as the work of performance (scene) design.

The box and the screen are scenography. The body inside the box is the body of an actress. The dress the actress is wearing is costume. The images on screen are video work (and part of the light design). The author's identity is the text the work is based on. All of it together is the artwork – *Life on the edge of the two worlds* – and the artwork is the work of performance (scene) design.

4.2. Body Never Lies

Fig. 2. Body Never Lies - Obstruction / Lying down, Monika Bilbija Ponjavić and Marina Radulj

"Body Never Lies" is a performance piece, documented in a series of photographs and videos. To describe it as performance as research (PaR) project would be the most accurate. It was created during 2009. and was, in a series of actions, performed on site(s), for over three years, until 2012. The project was conceived by dr Marina Radulj and dr Monika Bilbija Ponjavić at the Faculty of Architecture (AGGF), University of Banja Luka, as part of the subject *Theatre (scene) architecture – Spaces for Culture* within the *Architectural design department*. During Prague Quadrennial in 2011. *Body Never Lies* was exhibited in St. Anna's Church, as part of the Architecture Section /Performance Design Spaces, curated by Dorita Hannah, as the only project from Bosnia and Herzegovina ever being exhibited at this event to date.

The key idea of *Body Never Lies* was to explore the relationship between the performing body (of an architect) and the performance space (architecture) in a series of carefully designed actions that consisted of three movements, natural to the human body: standing, sitting, lying.

Looking at the photo illustration of the work it is obvious that there is no scenography in it, unless we, like Svoboda, count in the existing (built) architecture as found scenography or the bodies of the performers. Beyond that, there is not much else. Except the costume, a self-explanatory sign that is the red sweatshirt they are all wearing. And that is it. Yet the placement of the bodies, the story behind it, the collaboration part, as well as the intention, textuality and the transformability of the artwork is what makes it the work of performance (space) design. By simple act of placing the body within the built architectural landscape the meaning is created. The action (standing, sitting, lying...) programmed into that body further deepens the meaning.

This act not only changed the built environment, the space in which the body was "performing" its identity and memories, it made the new reading of the space possible, one that commented on the action instead of complementing it, showing us the true power of the body-space dynamic.

4.3. Tišma

"Tišma" is a series of seven outdoor/indoor performative installations based on the literary opus of famous Serbian writer Aleksandar Tišma. The installations were conceived as part of the Week of Literature during the 7th Kaleidoscope of Culture in Novi Sad, within the Tišma Pavillion, which celebrated centenary of Tišma's birth.

Fig. 3. Tišma – a series of performative installations / Štrand, Monika Bilbija Ponjavić and Sonja Leštar

With previous knowledge (experiential, as well as theoretical) regarding scene design, the design of *Tišma* installations was, from start to finish, a very controlled and straightforward venture.

The starting point was Tišma's writing. This was the text. The dramaturgy of the performance. The next thing was the concept, which was envisioned as a series of tableaux, movably still. It was supposed to be a scene as if it was ripped straight out of a theatre play, with all its characteristics. Multiplied by seven. Each talking about a choice, "to kill or let them be killed" (a father's choice), "to swim in Danube during The Raid or not", "to be someone you are not" (a citizen's choice) or "to sell your body or die" (a woman's choice) etc. Each consisting of traditional theatre elements. Sound. Light. Costume. Scenography...But it was not to be a theatre play. It was supposed to be a self-contained contextual piece of art, a work of articulation and theatricalization of space, that takes place in space and time, and can function as the same piece of artwork regardless of the space it is in, be it a theatre stage, site-specific or an exhibition space or a public outdoors. Each piece was using the same method of repetition (and difference) that was used in *Body Never Lies* with performance bodies that are either standing, sitting or lying down. The repetition of the same (action) within the different (space), as was done in both *Body* and *God*, created vastly different meanings, through vastly different imagery, completely in line with the texts it was dramatizing.

Spanning from *live performance*, across *non-performance* to *displaced performance*, Tišma is a true work of performance (space) design that can equally function in the context of the exhibition space as well as a theatre play, on stage, rooted in Tišma's text.

5. CONCLUSION

By stepping out of the theatre – in the form of extended scenography, performance design, or scene design – and using the logic of theatre and scenography from which it originated, scene design became a new hybrid art form, positioned between the performing (scenic, dramatic), audio/visual/applied arts and architecture.

Scene design is a performing art insofar as it is a text-based art that uses the body in its final form. It is an audio-visual art because it uses sound and image to tell its story. It is architecture because it designs and creates space for performance (not the stage, but space itself). It is applied art, but only within the theatre. This is the specificity of scene design: in theatre, it can retain its applied nature – but it doesn't have to. Furthermore, if any key element is removed, the work of scene design becomes something else – installation, performance, even sculpture.

Behaving as an ambient work of art, because it treats the space as its fundamental part, scene design begins its life as an installation until the moment when that installation, provided that the text is its starting point (or the outcome), becomes the "stage on which the performance takes place". This marks the difference between scene design and installation.

Scene design can take place in galleries or museums, with or without a performer, since the observer must move across or through it to perceive it – thus compensating for the absence of a performer's body. It can also happen in the theatre, again with or without a performer. As in exhibition contexts, scene design in theatre may start as sound, costume, scenography, or even a beam of light – but how it ends that life is what matters.

A theatre play can be considered a work of scene design under certain conditions – intention, profession, or the transformability of the work. In the other words, if the design is removed from the theatre context and placed in an exhibition, does it still function as a standalone piece? Does its applied nature hinder or enhance that shift? Does it hold meaning beyond the theatre play for which it was conceived?

These questions reveal the key distinction between scene design and scenography (or costume, sound, or light design). The latter is collaborative, applied art; the former doesn't have to be - and most often it is not. Thus, scenography is a narrower field of activity (*Bühnenbildner*), retaining its utilitarian, applied nature. Scene design is a broader field (*Bühnenbildner*) – not just part of a work of art, but *de facto* an independent contextual artwork in its own right, regardless of the setting.

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Biography

Doctor of Arts Ninoslava Vićentić is an associate professor at the Department of Scenography, Faculty of Applied Arts, University of Arts in Belgrade. She graduated from the Faculty of Applied Arts in Belgrade, Department of Scenography. At Saint Martins College of Art and Design in London, she obtained the title of Master of Arts in the field of Scenography. The title of Doctor of Arts she obtained at the Faculty of Applied Arts. She engages in artistic and scientific work and develops the field of Serbian scenography history. Author, curator and designer of many exhibitions, projects and educational programs.

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ENVIRONMENTAL SCENOGRAPHY AND THE EVOLVING ROLE OF SPECTATORS

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Abstract

The paper explores the influence of scenographic principles on the selection and transformation of urban spaces into scenic images, and on the transformation of spectators into performers. Through an analysis of site-specific settings for two classic plays and one poem, this study examines the interplay between spatial configurations, the textual material intended for these spaces, and their integration. Scenography is emphasized as an independent entity in its engagement with authentic space, underscoring its visible logic and invisible dramaturgy. It actively models the space, the narrative, and the events intended for presentation in a triadic manner.

This approach produces an evolving event that alters the role of spectators, facilitating their direct involvement in the scenery. Contrary to being a static, isolated entity, the stage is depicted as dynamic and present within each image. Environmental scenography offers a technical support and methodology for the realization of the text, proposes interpretative frameworks, governs movement within the scene, and contributes to the construction and delineation of (constructed) reality. By dissolving the boundaries between the performance and observation spaces, the illusionistic barriers are also removed. Spectators, by engaging with the metaphor, are afforded the opportunity to shape it, experience it as their own reality, and physically identify with the scene presented. Their role evolves from passive viewing to active participation, wherein they become co-creators of the performance experience.

Keywords: environmental scenography, urban spaces, site-specific narrative, active spactators

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the boundaries between performance, spectators and the space that unites them have been radically reimagined. No longer confined to the traditional stage, scenography has emerged as a transformative force that shapes not only the visual and spatial language of performance but also the roles of those who observe it. This paper investigates how environmental scenography—when integrated with authentic urban or architectural spaces—redefines the spectator's function from passive observer to active participant. By examining site-specific installations inspired by classical texts and poetry, this study reveals how space itself becomes a dramaturgical agent, co-creating narrative meaning and inviting the spectators to engage with the performance on a psychological, emotional, kinesthetic and imaginative level. It helps position the spectator at the center of the event, frees or directs movements, encouraging them to experience the stage space as the performers does. Through this lens, scenography is not merely a support for storytelling but a central authorial voice, articulating new relationships between space, text, and spectatorship.

The interdisciplinary installations analyzed in this paper aim to highlight the potential of environmental scenography and reconsider the role it can play, expressing itself independently outside the conventional theatrical context. Through scenographic interventions, authentic spaces become both the inspiration and collaborators in the development and shaping of the narrative intended for them. Found urban spaces were not physically altered; instead, they served as the setting for writing and staging a play, emphasizing their role as active participants in the creation of the narrative. These installations provide practical evidence of how environmental scenography emancipates itself through the selection, adaptation, and staging of a particular text. "The fullness of space, the infinite ways in which space can be altered, articulated, and set in motion—these form the foundation of environmental scenography. If the audience is one medium in which the performance unfolds, then the existing space is the other." (Schechner, 1992, pp.6)

This paper explores the evolving role of spectators in environmental scenography, examining how the works presented challenge traditional boundaries between audience and performance. They aim to support and enhance the autonomy of spectators, ensuring that no performer acts as an intermediary. Spectators are transformed into performers, incorporated into the scene with a new, more responsible, and active role. In this process, the authentic environment plays a significant role—it enables, directs, and shapes their actions. Their movements develop the performance area, actively participating in the transposition of the presented images into scenes. Environmental scenography is not an isolated, framed reality, nor is it an untouchable one; it is offered and displayed live, with the focus shifting from the aesthetic to the phenomenological, physical, and emotional experiences. It is projected onto, rather than being the site of projection, and assumes the definition and organization of the image. Spectators are no longer positioned in front; instead, they are incorporated within the scene, taking on a more responsible and active role.

The works will be analyzed through the theoretical lens established by Professor Arnold Aronson in *History and Theory of Environmental Scenography*, a foundational text for understanding contemporary performance and visual art practices. Practically, they are based on and developed from the theory of Professor Pamela Howard, as expressed in her book *What is Scenography*.

2. JIGSAW BASED ON SOPHOCLES' OEDIPUS REX

This was a master's degree project in scenography, realized at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design in London under the mentorship of Pamela Howard. The project assessment required the realization of the entire production, from the independent choice of text to the selection of the performance style and the space in which it would take place, offering complete freedom of expression and means of selection.

Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* was chosen not only for its timelessly inspiring images, metaphors, and its eternally relevant themes of ancient drama, but also because of the familiarity of the story to the audience. To fully engage with the performance and decode the images, the audience had to be familiar with the text. The Cochrane Theatre, a classical black box, was used as the initial space, but only to guide the audience through to the workshop space located directly behind the stage. In this way, the "workshop of imagination" was

revealed for many for the first time, opening doors to a space previously unknown to the wider public, which was being used as an exhibition space.

2.1 *In Front of the Imperial Palace*

The audience gathered in the theatre foyer. When the Leader appeared among them, dressed in a long red leather coat with a torch in his hand, it symbolically marked the beginning of their journey. This served as a sign for the spectators to follow him, taking on the role of the ancient chorus and beginning to interpret the images presented to them.

2.2. *City - Contagion, State of Emergency*

The audience passed through a darkened auditorium, moving cautiously through the darkness with only red position lights illuminating the space. They climbed onto the empty stage, where a starcloth was set in the background. After a moment, alarm sirens blared, and a fire curtain descended, separating them from the auditorium. They remained on the darkened stage for a while, heightening the tension. As the sirens faded, side doors near the stage opened, and the audience was allowed to enter the theatre workshop. The Leader was gone.

2.3. *Workshop – Oedipus Palace*

Upon entering, the audience received a paper with the names of images, numbered for them to connect. The basic working light was used, dimming at certain points to create atmosphere. The environment—both the workshop and the palace—appeared deserted, with machines left unfinished and work abandoned. Sawdust covered the floor, dirty walls bore the remnants of previous work, and the smell of machine oil lingered in the air. The distant sound of cicadas added to the eerie atmosphere of a once-lived-in space now forgotten.

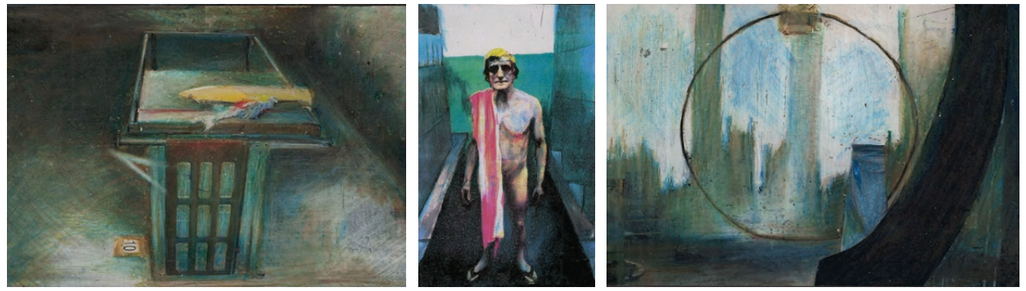

Fig. 1. *JIGSAW,* based on Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex,* interdisciplinary art project, *Cochrane Theatre, London, 1996.*

Once within the space, spectators were free to move anywhere, allowing them to define the performing area for themselves. They found themselves at the center of the event, perceiving the environment as an integral part of the total space. Spectators were encouraged to physically experience the environment, much like the performers. These characteristics align with the principles of environmental scenography, as defined by Aronson in his work. (Aronson, 2018)

3. CHEKHOV-MOTIFS

The Chekhov-Motifs environmental scenography project invited spectators to physically engage with a settings inspired by motifs from Chekhov's plays. Designed as a series of interconnected images, the installation drew on well-known motifs from Chekhov's plays, which served as the narrative backbone, linking the dramatic and scenographic spaces. In this work, language is not conveyed through dialogue but through the titles of the displayed images, each derived from Chekhov's iconic dramas. Even in the absence of spoken words, a shared script emerges, communicated visually through familiar motifs. The environment created was both temporally and spatially distinct, yet seamlessly united by the chosen motifs.

The museum itself takes on the role of the distant family estates that serve as the settings in Chekhov's plays. The historic Military Academy building, which houses the museum, was constructed in 1899—during the period when Chekhov was writing his plays. With its strict neoclassical design and imposing scale, the building

offers a spatial-temporal parallel to the distant estates of Chekhov's works. These estates, once described as "oases of life in the endless emptiness and desolation" (Hristić, 1994, pp. 141), have long been lost to history but are momentarily revealed to the present-day audience. The museum, with its physical traces and patina of past times, evokes the impression of a decaying, neglected space from which its former inhabitants long ago retreated. Nature has begun to quietly reclaim the building, symbolizing the slow, peaceful process of decay.

It is left to the public to discover this dormant place, to wipe away the dust with their passage and attention, and to awaken the images so they can tell their story of the former inhabitants who once called this space home. In its new, unexpected, and familiar role, the museum becomes both imaginary and final. It takes on a concrete form while simultaneously evoking memories of the past. This exemplifies one of the tasks of scenography: to create a space that fits the event. In this environmental setup, scenography goes even further, actively shaping the event, the narrative, and the space intended for it.

The exhibition was open during the dusk of a long summer day, marking the transition between day and night, and between natural and artificial light, lasting only a few days in the summer. This created a unique, ephemeral moment for the event—one that mirrored the essence of theatrical performance and set it apart from everyday life. Special emphasis was placed on the fleeting, the unrepeatable, and the celebratory—elements central to both theatrical art and Chekhov's plays, which unfold in a distinct time and place. These plays, rich with moments of celebration, offer rare opportunities and festive experiences that distinguish them from the routines of everyday life.

3.1. *The Hall - Can't do without theatre (A.P.Chekhov, The Seagull: Prologue)*

Visitors gather in the central hall, ascending to the first floor via a staircase with two orientations, passing the porter's room. All of these spaces—the hall, the staircase, and the porter's room—remain untouched, preserving their authenticity. In this way, the audience is introduced to a theatrical situation: a long-abandoned family residence, a house imbued with the memories of a former life. The porter (Firs, the old servant in The Cherry Orchard) carries a flashlight and discreetly directs the audience, guiding and dispersing them as needed. Without speaking, he uses just the light, embodying a character from a different world and time—one whose language no longer belongs to the present.

At this point, visitors ascend the stairs and pass through an open architectural portal, which resembles a theatrical entrance—a "temporal membrane" separating the present from the past. They enter an emotional and intellectual atmosphere of their own making. As they continue through the hall and the staged setting, they are free to explore further, independently choosing their direction. From this moment on, they become part of the scene itself, immersed in the unfolding images.

3.2 *New Forms Are Needed* (The Seagull, Act 1)

The staged setting takes place in a section of the park surrounding the family estate. A wide avenue stretches into the distance, leading toward a lake, but the view is obstructed by a hastily assembled stage for an amateur family performance, as depicted in the drama.The audience enters a hall with two long hallways leading to the left and right wings of the building. The stage, positioned centrally, serves as the focal point. The left hallway doors remain closed, and the audience is guided by both the stage and lighting toward the right-hand hallway—a wide avenue.

Visitors climb onto the stage and descend from it, moving through rostra set across two levels. Two rusty iron sheets, peeling and layered with paint, hang from an iron pipe construction, symbolizing a torn curtain. This imagery serves as a metaphor for the small family stage, worn down by time and neglect. In the background, a swing is placed—an echo from the childhood of Treplev and Nina. Two old iron lanterns, borrowed by Treplev from a nearby railway station, hang on the stage to light the family's premiere of his play.

On either side of the stage, wooden benches and small stools are provided for the audience, along with a sound mixing console that controls the lighting and projections. The audience is free to sit on the stage itself or around it, integrating themselves into the scene.

In this space, all the elements of a traditional theatre scene are referenced with minimal intervention: the portal, stage, curtain, spotlights, audience seating, and the substructure of the scenery. Through the stage,

the audience is invited to step into the narrative itself, becoming part of the unfolding story.

Sound & Light, Projection: Human chatter and voices, in Russian (with text that remains incomprehensible to the audience), gradually transition to the sound of wind and distant thunder, signaling an approaching storm. Two red lights flicker on, symbolizing decadence and signaling alarm. This marks the disruption of the performance, as the audience is guided to the next space, signaling the need to leave.

3.3 *Corridor 1: The Alley in the Park in Front of the House*

This image functions as an intermezzo, utilizing an authentic interior without modification. It offers a long-distance view that stretches toward an infinite depth, blurring planes and softening the focus. From the corridor, the viewer moves through a series of scenes where the distance gradually shortens, and the space "zooms in," becoming more intimate and enclosed. The journey begins with the estate, the park, the alley, the porch, the dining room, the children's room, the wardrobe, the orchard, and an alley with cut trees—ultimately leading to the intimate disappearance of the space itself. As the space shrinks, large furniture and props give way to smaller objects, which gradually vanish completely, disintegrating into dust. The space (and the time it once contained) fades away.

Along one wall, windows frame the scene through which pigeons fly in, while petrified tree roots push against and break through the façade. The walls, though solid, are decayed and crumbling, giving the entire setting a porous, fragile feel. Once a lavish alley, it is now a neglected wasteland. Thorny bushes and dry, leafless branches press into the building's façade like visible veins and arteries, serving as a posthumous monument to a time that no longer exists.

This is a hidden place, difficult to locate, camouflaged by nature, which relentlessly destroys the last remnants of life, soon to completely overtake it.

3.4. *The Porch of* (The Seagull, Act 2; Ivanov, Act 1; Three Sisters, Act 4...)

A long, shallow room with parquet floors and white walls, along which runs a wall representing the porch of the house. The house's façade, with its shallow porch, is depicted almost as a two-dimensional collage, with arabesque lines and surfaces, suggesting a short distance. The porch functions as a proscenium in a theater, still a boundary space between the interior and exterior, realized through elements of the décor that also serve this boundary function—windows, doors, and railings. This is where much of Chekhov's drama unfolds. The walls, doors, and windows materialize boundaries between the open and the closed, the free and the isolated, between dream and reality. "Windows are very important in Chekhov's works. The thoughts and desires of his characters fly out through windows, while life and reality enter through them in the opposite direction. Windows guide us through Chekhov's atmosphere; they do not limit the interior, but open it" (Svoboda, in Aronson, 2005, pp. 124).

The scene simultaneously represents both a salon and a courtyard, achieved through the symbiosis of the exterior and interior, signaled by a few pieces of furniture and fragments of the comfortable life of rural aristocracy— a rocking chair, a carpet, a chandelier, a coat rack, deteriorating iron railings, and a peeling wooden fence. With minimal furniture, this two-dimensional, almost abstract display moves away from a naturalistic impression and reveals the magical allure of a classic theatrical environment. It does not offer an illusion of reality but rather an allusion to a specific reality.

Sound & Light: The sound reflects the ambivalence of the space, blending music from inside the house with the quiet of a summer night: the hooting of owls, the chirping of crickets, and the distant sound of a passing train. As the sun sets, long shadows stretch across the décor, and the lights inside the house flicker on—a large chandelier with only two working bulbs.

3.5. *Dining Room* – Left and Right Doors, a Table in the Center furniture and properties of the family estate (The Seagull, Act 3; Cherry Orchard, Acts 3 and 4...)

The second room in the sequence, located along the corridor, offers a central setup that allows visitors to move around it in a circular fashion. At the center, a gathering of furniture—suitcases, carts, and fragments of the dining room—evokes the sense of things hastily packed. The furniture appears to be loaded onto large cargo carts, as if ready to be taken away as excess baggage, bound for a nearby train station or shipping

port. Many unnecessary little items, which their owners carry as mementos rather than as essential luggage, resist being packed and fall out of the carts onto which they were hastily loaded. From real furniture to the memory of it (such as the outline of a piano, sketched quickly into the display), the installation plays with small, playful props from Chekhov's dramas—playing cards, chess pieces, crystal glasses, a siphon bottle, a guitar, an umbrella, a walking stick, a wall clock, an upside-down picture of the Eiffel Tower (symbolizing Treplev's relationship with Maupassant's text), a half-cylinder, boxes, suitcases, chairs, an armchair...

On the wall of the second part of the room, divided by a partition, a projection shows images from a family album—yet another intermezzo, a brief pause, a comma in the installation's narrative, offering a different form of expression (photographs, sound). Paradoxically, a room with two lounge chairs and an old projector showing slides feels fuller and warmer than the dining room, where belongings are hastily gathered, ready to be cleared out.

The stretch film, symbolizing the packing of suitcases and baggage, subtly links these two related spaces. It discreetly limits the display, which seems to resist being confined and packed into the designated space, as though parts of the luggage awkwardly spill out—like an overstuffed, hastily selected item..

Sound & Light: The sound of movement—the creaking of the parquet floor, dragging and pushing furniture, human voices, greetings, chatter, and the sound of the projector and its projections—fill the space.

3.6. *The Room Still Called the Children's Room* (The Cherry Orchard, Act 1)

This magical and dreamlike image seeks to evoke distant childhood as a universal motif. A closed and secure space is filled with the music of old carousels, music boxes, and wind-up toys. Thin, translucent curtains gently caress, rustle, and blur the view, subtly guiding the eye in a circular motion, suggesting rather than commanding attention. This is the epicenter of the (family) home, the cradle, a shelter that encapsulates the mysteries of happiness (Bachelard, 2006, pp. 70)—a large cradle that protects both the dream and the dreamer, as well as the viewer's encounter with memories. "Life begins well; it begins closed, protected, completely immersed, in the embrace of the house" (Bachelard, 1969, pp. 34).

The space is viewed and interpreted both from the perspective of the newborn and from those who were once newborns and, after many years, revisit the room of their childhood—places where daydreams were lived, now return in a new daydream. This image translates the dramatic space into one that can resonate with the audience through its immediate, visceral accuracy—the symbolism of the children's room, the ceremonial salon, the piled-up furniture, and the packed suitcases on an empty stage (Strechler, 1979, pp. 26).

Sound & Light – Children's chatter, music, strobe lights, light effects...

3.7. *A 100-Year-Old Wardrobe* (The Cherry Orchard, Act 1)

A small, dark room that visitors enter and move through as though inside a wardrobe. The space is filled with old clothing (witnesses to times past), shoes, and boxes on the floor, some containing Christmas ornaments, sleds, and other forgotten items. A deep, ancient wardrobe holds the unique scent of dried fruit and mothballs. From outside, the sounds of a family celebration filter in — the clinking of cutlery and the sound of a piano.

The audience, still immersed in childhood from the previous scene, is transported into a moment of hidden playfulness. This image evokes the sense of children hiding inside the wardrobe during a family celebration, playing quietly while the adults carry on outside.

The wardrobe is a monument, full of evidence of multiple lives. The room itself becomes a kind of graveyard of time. It is a metaphor for intimacy, secret treasures, and hidden conflicts, all stacked or accumulated deep within. Like drawers, trunks, and wardrobes, it is both object and subject, carrying an abundance of memories, intimacy, and deep inner spaces. The wardrobe is the keeper of family secrets, much like the cherry orchard is the guardian of family history and legacy. Both metaphors offer a glimpse into the unknown, into what is hidden from view —a dignified object, closed off from strangers, yet offering refuge to the family and their intimacies and secrets.

Sound & Light – Sounds of a family celebration: cutlery, glasses, voices, piano, billiard balls...

3.8. *How Beautiful the Trees Are (The Cherry Orchard, Act 4)*

This image symbolically represents the passage of time, which, in collaboration with nature, will gradually overtake the space. The nature surrounding the house, indifferent to the lives of its inhabitants, relentlessly infiltrates and fills the interior. It is implied that soon, nothing will remain of the house — a structure that has long since lost its purpose. This metaphorical image highlights the temporal limitations of spaces that have already been overtaken by time.

The pouring sand symbolizes the irreversible flow of time, steadily encompassing, completing, severing, and transporting the story to another world. Through time, space itself becomes an active dramatic force, influencing the events unfolding within it. The continuous sound of a chainsaw serves as the backdrop, signaling that trees are being felled to clear space for land development and new construction.

Sound & Light – The sound of the chainsaw, with a beam of light focused solely on the pouring sand.

3.9. *The Alley, Corridor 2 – The End*

The old inhabitants have left the property, the new ones have not yet arrived, and preparations are underway for new construction. The trees have been felled, the former orchard is gone, and fallen branches now block any further movement through the space. Visitors can view the second hallway, but progress forward is no longer possible. At the far end of the hallway, a projection of closing credits appears on the wall, listing the names of the authors and participants.

This final image underscores one of the initial concepts of the project: "there is no dead space, nor an end to space" (Schechner, 1992, pp. 6). The space, now closed off, is accessible only to the eye — to our experience, memory, and imagination.

Fig. 2. *Chekhof – motifs,* interdisciplinary art project, Belgrade City Museum, 2020.

4. APPARITIONS - THE POETICS OF ITAKA BY MILOŠ CRNJANSKI

The old, abandoned platform at Belgrade's Danube Station endures as a romantic, fragile, and porous relic of a bygone era that has left its indelible marks. The rich patina, the exceptionally harmonious relationships between graceful and sturdy elements, and the discreet colonnade of columns are some of the platform's most striking features. The space offers an uninterrupted, focused view stretching along both sides of the platform — a feature that amplifies its inherent beauty. This platform requires minimal artistic intervention to shine with renewed brilliance and to be reactivated for public use. It was this unique space that sparked and directly influenced the project *Apparitions*, which draws inspiration from the poetry of Miloš Crnjanski.

Apparitions is a visual interpretation of Crnjanski's poem of the same name, which is part of his collection *Poetics of Itaka*. The decision to pair this text with the space of the old platform was driven by the recurring theme of travel in Crnjanski's work, as well as the historical role of the station itself. For over 70 years, it has connected Banat and Vojvodina with Belgrade and the rest of the country. Crnjanski, born in Banat, frequently returned there until his mother's death. His life was defined by travel, and he often found himself in spaces much like the platform at the Danube station.

Beneath the roof and around the columns, a network of stretch foil is woven, subtly guiding and influencing the movement of the audience. Lighting interventions draw the viewer's gaze, highlighting and enhancing

the “long-distance” perspective that stretches on one side toward Belgrade, and on the other toward Banat. Through the design of light and sound, the installation evokes a sense of speed, transience, and an invitation to movement, change, and the passage between spaces. The transparent stretch foil directs both movement and vision, ensuring the isolation of the moment and the singular experience of being on the platform and passing through the installation.

In this way, the platform becomes *Itaka*—an isolated island of memory and imagination, symbolizing the themes of travel, longing, and reflection. The audience is invited to experience the installation as a passage through a dream, with photographs serving as proof that they physically inhabited the dream.

Fig. 3. *Appariti*t*ions – The Poetics of Itaka,* interdisciplinary art project, Platform, Danube Train Station, 2023.

5. CONCLUSION

All three projects share a common thread: the use of environmental scenography to create spaces that engage the audience not just as passive observers but as active participants in the unfolding narrative. Each project merges space, memory, and time to evoke profound emotional responses, creating immersive experiences that allow participants to physically experience the themes of the artwork.

The *Jigsaw* project based on *Oedipus Rex* engaging the audience in ways that go beyond traditional performance. The audience is not merely observing the play but actively involved in its unfolding, and participating in the emotional journey of the characters.

Chekhov's-Motifs highlights the decay and loss of time, encouraging an interaction with spaces that feel both historical and eternal, drawing a powerful parallel between the past and the present.

Apparitions – The Poetics of Itaka focuses on transition and journey, allowing the platform to become a symbolic passage between worlds, reflecting both the physical journey and the inner journey of longing and reflection.

Together, these projects demonstrate the potential for environmental scenography to shape and deepen the audience's engagement with both the text and the physical space, offering a fresh perspective on a timeless story.

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Biography

Matko Botić, Ph.D., was born in Rijeka in 1980. He is employed as an Assistant Professor at the Theatre Arts Department at the Arts Academy in Split. He graduated in Croatian Language and Literature from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Rijeka and defended his doctoral dissertation, Croatian Prose in Recent Croatian Theatre: Theoretical and Dramaturgical Aspects, at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb in 2012. This dissertation was published in 2013 under the title Playing Prose, Writing Theatre. He has published over two hundred theater reviews and essays on theater studies in Croatia and abroad. He is a collaborator with the Croatian ITI Center, where he edited several theatrological publications within the Mansioni Library, and various professional journals in Croatian, English, and Spanish.

He has presented academic papers at most Croatian theater study conferences. As a selector, jury member, panel moderator, or guest critic, he has collaborated with numerous theater festivals in the region.

As a dramaturge he has worked with most Croatian theater companies and directors such as Olja Lozica, Tamara Kučinović, Vinko Brešan, Saša Anočić, Jagoš Marković, László Keszég, János Szikora, Nemanja Ranković, Aida Bukvić, and others. He has also participated in radio and television projects for Croatian Radiotelevision. Occasionally, he serves as an editor and host of theater-related programs on Croatian Radio and the third television program of HRT. He was the artistic director of the PlayDrama Theater from 2018 to 2024.

He is the author of stage music for theater productions by Olja Lozica, Tamara Kučinović, Petra Kovačić Botić, and Hrvoje Korbar, as well as for documentaries by Miroslav Sikavica. He is a guitarist and mandolinist with the Rijeka-based band My Buddy Moose and a guitarist in the international project The Strange.

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PALE LIGHTS OF AN INVISIBLE CITY; URBAN SPACE AS A DRAMATIS PERSONA

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Abstract

This scientific paper deals with the processes of *reading the city* within the dramaturgical preparation of the play *The Invisible City*, directed by Olja Lozica, which premiered at the 61st edition of the Split Summer Festival in July 2015. It was a performance that primarily engages with its own stage spaces; the play, through three separate stories played in three different locations, addresses the social and architectural heritage of the city in which it is performed. Loosely connected theatrical omnibus, temporally ranging from the bombing of Split in World War II through the socialist post-war enthusiasm to the contemporary tourism dystopia, does not construct a story around a character, group of characters, or community in the narrow sense; the central protagonist in this play is the actual urban space in which the action takes place. In this process, the dramaturgy of the play largely depends on the dramaturgy of space, which significantly influences the final structure of the performance. The creative team chose the locations where the play is performed not because of their representativeness and metaphorical elevation in relation to reality, but quite the opposite – because of their immersion in the real space of some current or former lives. This approach resulted in an ambient performance that, although packed with actors, musicians and extras, accepts the urban space as the central protagonist. Just like the old Yugoslavian film by Hajrudin Krvavac ends with the proclamation of space as the protagonist (*Sehen Sie diese Stadt? Das ist Walter!*), *The Invisible City* attempted to transform its own actual and fictitious space into a dramatic character. The author of the paper was a dramaturge on that project, so this analysis is simultaneously a well-informed perspective from within and an external review of a unique theatrical process.

Keywords: city as a stage, dramaturgy of space, political theatre, sociology of theatre

1. IN SEARCH OF A PROTAGONIST

Do not light the lamp! Do not awaken the walls!
The colors have long faded on the canvases,
the frames have rotted.
Those you seek have left.
There is no one here, except for the worm-eaten mulberry
and the wind beneath the window.[1]

Director Olja Lozica began negotiating a potential collaboration for the Split Summer Festival in 2015, although she was initially unsure of the specific focus or literary foundation for the project. The then management mentioned a rarely performed play, a choral recitation of *Sun City* by Radovan Ivšić, which had been rehearsed at the Split theater that spring. However, the director backed out at the last minute, having only a few days to stage a different play. Thus, *Sun City* remained an unfulfilled repertoire wish of the Croatian National Theater in Split. In discussions about the future production, other iconic literary cities were also mentioned—those *invisible* ones from the Italian novelist Italo Calvino—leading to the emergence of thoughts during the project preparation and conversations between Olja Lozica and her creative team about a performance that could unite all these fictional cities into a cohesive whole. The old Latin saying *Nomen est omen* seemed to hold true, as the cities mentioned in the title directed the search for the central character of this post-dramatic composition. What would happen if we anchored Ivšić's playful utopia and Calvino's unruly semiotic combinatorics in the real space of the actual city where the performance is created? Can this fiction serve as the basis for a story about a social and cultural space? Most importantly, can the city, rather than being treated as a mere backdrop, a set, or a social and geographical frame, be elevated to the status of a central character in the performance?

In the search for answers to this questions, it quickly became evident that if we accept the city as the central hero, the crucial decision is about the location where the performance will take place. This is a central production of an important national summer festival, with the city in the leading role; any scenographic marking of the space in a theater building would appear as a cheap trick. On the other hand, statically positioning the performance in one of the usual, celebrated venues of the Split Summer Festival, such as Peristil, Carrara's field, or Meštrović's Kaštilac, would necessarily simplify the semantic potential of the interplay between the theatrical space and the dramatic action. Thus, the dramaturgical preparation of the project was executed in motion, with the creative team wandering through the streets of Split for days, searching for a space to house the content. The Split working-class neighborhood of Lučac ultimately revealed itself as the ideal setting for the story of the city as a whole; although it lacks the sentimental charm of Veli Varoš or the residential grandeur of the old town core, it is an area that, with its rich history and social potential, deserves to be a space-protagonist. Lučac is close enough to the city center and just far enough away; its narrow stone streets and hidden courtyards are an unmistakable link to Ivšić's time, and the not entirely peaceful cohabitation of superficial tourist attractions and the daily lives of its residents provides a compelling image of contemporary Split, caught between tradition and quick profit.

This *walking dramaturgy* within the stroll through the Lučac neighborhood significantly influenced the structure of the performance, which could not be satisfied with a single setting and the usual relationship between the audience and the theater stage. The city, by definition, is multifaceted and layered, and cannot be convincingly encompassed in a theatrical piece with an unchanging, static vision. Very early in the process of shaping the performance, it became clear that it was a dynamic structure, containing several distinct performance spaces as well as pathways between those spaces; in an attempt to highlight the pulse of the city, the construction of theatrical signs must not wane even during the pauses, in which the audience must physically traverse the distance to the next stage.

The performance that began to take shape quickly acquired its hybrid name, which hints at both Ivšić and Calvino: *Invisible City*, but also its own theme, attempting to outline and reconstruct the spirit of the Split

1 Cettineo, 1978, p.129

working-class neighborhood of Lučac through three separate temporal segments and three distinct stylistic formations. The mutually different components are primarily connected through real spaces-protagonists in which the performance takes place; all three performance spaces are city streets, squares, and courtyards, chosen not for their representativeness and metaphorical elevation in relation to reality, but precisely because of their immersion in the real spaces of some present or past lives.

Fig. 1. (The Invisible City, first part, photo by Matko Biljak)

A kind of motto for the entire dramaturgical preparation of the project is the key phrase from the poem *Past* by the Split poet Ante Cettineo, which enters into a conflicted relationship with the social heritage of the space it seeks to address. *Do not light the lamp! Do not awaken the walls!* (Cettineo, 1978, p.129), warns the poet, creating a harsh atmosphere that could be characterized as Dalmatian Gothic, directing the theatrical investigation towards a layered relationship with the near and distant past of the city where the performance is created.

2. CITY THAT SINGS

The structure of the performance is conceived in a linear flow of time—the first part travels farthest into the past, into the first half of the twentieth century, in the story of an unreliable narrator about the mythical Lučac, a suburb of a large city filled with laborers with their own customs, rituals, and habits. The second part is based on Ivšić's *Sun City*, which poetically outlines the post-war enthusiasm for building a new world in a utopian key. The final, third part shifts the action to the present day, and Calvino's *Invisible Cities* in this segment of the performance serve more as a source of inspiration than a firm dramatic foundation. In this way, the story is rounded off, which, structurally speaking, has two central protagonists. One is the character of an unnamed woman, interpreted by actress Dara Vukić, who appears in the first part as a young girl, in the central part as a young woman, and in the final segment as an old woman at the end of her life. The second protagonist

is the city, or the social and urban heritage within which the events of the play unfold. The character of the mentioned woman merely frames the entirety with very brief appearances on the margins; the second main character occupies a central place in the structure of the play already in the first act, called *The City of the Dead Laborers*.

Fig. 2. (The Invisible City, first part, photo by Matko Biljak)

Deliver me, Lord, from eternal death, on that terrible day: when heaven and earth begin to move.[2]
The staging of the performance with the urban space as the central hero brought to the forefront the question of the location where the action begins. In the search for a space that is both *scenic* and *dramatic* (Pavis, 2004, p.76), from the very beginning, a small irregularly shaped square emerged, essentially an undeveloped area at the intersection of two roads in the center of Lučac, right next to the main street Radunica, which is called Duplančića dvori. This is a gathering space, with a few benches, an elevated concrete slab that serves as an improvised stage for public festivities (widely known *Days of Radunica*), an old family house on the northern side of the square, and several murals dedicated to the local football club. The set designer of the performance, Igor Vasiljev, recognizes the social potential of this intersection of paths and places the improvised audience seating on the mentioned concrete slab, thus creating a vibrant scenic space even before the theater builds upon the social everyday life. The audience's perspectives follow the pedestrian traffic on Radunica Street to the left, the elevated area of the improvised park in the middle, and the strict front facade of the family house to the right. The production of theatrical symbols begins even before rehearsals, with remarks from passersby in Radunica, locals interested in the arrival of theater workers in their neighborhood; the street will not be completely closed even during the performance, so this interaction seamlessly blends with the fictional narrative later on in the finished play. The scenographic intervention in the space is subtle and precise; the only architectural novelty is a fragile silhouette of a small house, indicated by basic elements in the middle—a sort of dreamy vision of the birthplace of the main character. Everything else in the wide perspective is the architecture of the old Split neighborhood, only subtly touched by scenographic details.
The dramaturgical logic necessarily follows that of the scenic design; in the desire to outline the contours of a city that no longer exists, the staged events do not group around the usual dramatic composition, dialogue,

2 Folk hymn *Oslobodi mene, Gospodine (Deliver Me, O Lord),* traditionally sung at funerals in Split and the surrounding area.

and a classical dramatic conflict. Instead of a dialogical drama, we witness loosely connected scenic images that symbolize reflections of life in an urban environment. The rhythm of the performance at the very beginning mimics everyday life; children in the street play old-fashioned games, throw improvised pyrotechnic devices, and recite nursery rhymes, a young man and woman shyly flirt from window to window, and the protagonist, as an old woman, observes herself in the past, as a girl in a house in the center of the scene.

Fig. 3. (The Invisible City, first part, photo by Matko Biljak)

The main expressive medium is not the spoken word, which hardly appears at all in the entire first part of the performance, but music - folk melodies in the powerful rendition of the members of the Brodosplit choir, conducted by maestro Vlado Sunko. The choir members are not static singers, but suggestive performers, as they are constantly in motion—at one moment as ceremonial attendants of social rituals, and in another as a playful group helping the young man win the girl's heart. The polyphonic singing, strong vocal music, in synergy with the authentic space and striking costumes designed by Ana Marin, creates the atmosphere of the performance; the acting contributions in the first part are reduced to brief, mostly non-verbal snippets from everyday life, which alternate in an almost ceremonial way. The lack of classical dramatic action and the development of relationships among characters brings the urban landscape to the forefront; before the audience's eyes is primarily a scenic space filled with a cappella music. The symbiosis of space and music thus presents itself as the central expressive element of the performance, far more important than the classical understanding of dramatic tension.

At the very end of the first part, a loud female scream from one of the actresses is heard from the old house on the right side of the performance space. Following this, six people emerge from the house carrying a coffin, while the choir unites their voices in the poignant church hymn *Oslobodi mene, Gospodine (Deliver Me, O Lord)*. During one rehearsal, an older woman who had lent her house for the festival found herself by the window at the moment the funeral procession exited into the yard. Her astonished gaze and later confirmed identification with similar real events from the past are a poignant indicator of the intertwining of the dramatic

narrative and the scenic space; without pronounced conflict between acting protagonists, the audience's attention is directed toward the simulation of real life, with a thoroughly reversed premise of the relationship between performers and stage. Instead of the scenic space subordinating itself to the performers, in the first segment of the *Invisible City*, the performers carefully adjust with precisely dosed expressive means to the space.

3. URBAN UTOPIA

We have revived the dead city today.
With our hands, we chiseled the stone, built houses, and planted gardens.
Our city is as wonderful as the dreamed city.
And the smile of the sun makes it even more beautiful.[3]

Fig. 4. (The Invisible City, second part, photo by Matko Biljak)

The first part of the performance is abruptly interrupted by the roar of Allied planes, which in 1944 leveled a large part of the space it speaks of and where the performance takes place. After the deafening explosions, the actors performing in the second part hurriedly urge the audience to leave the first auditorium and, together with them, climb up a steep alley to the next performance space. The path is not long; from Duplančića dvori street, one turns right into Rokova street, where, after about fifty meters, there is a small piece of green space between old stone houses. The set designer at the second location builds a simple wooden platform-stage, as for a folk performance, without vertical elements, with a wide monolith of the side of a large civic house in the background. The second part of the performance is based on Radovan Ivšić's *Sun City*, a play that the author writes during the time of the mentioned bombing of Split, in occupied Zagreb. Ivšić's playful modernist work dreams of the utopian idea of a city, which from the war ruins is yet to be built, both architecturally and

3 Ivšić, 1978, p.

socially. Although it was banned in the early days of Yugoslav socialism, primarily due to its untamed mockery of ideological authorities, Ivšić in *Sun City* writes a poignant tribute to socialist enthusiasm, which in the structure of *Invisible City* occupies the place of a moving missed opportunity. Ivšić's utopia, in this sense, is recognized as a flicker of a constructive relationship toward one's own community amidst the *inferno of the living* (Calvino, 1974, p.165); after the religiously conditioned *utopias of escape* (Mumford, 2013, p.13) in the first part, we witness an attempt at a *utopia of reconstruction* (Mumford, 2013, p.13) in the central segment of the performance.

Sun City begins in complete darkness, where it remains for most of the time; the invisible city finally materializes in the literal sense of the word. The abolishment of the visual segment of the performance emphasizes being submerged in the atmosphere of the urban park within the neighborhood, so the auditory effects merge with the olfactory properties of a summer park and the rhythmic sound backdrop of crickets. Ivšić's choral parts are skillfully set to music by composer Vlado Sunko, with a mechanical rhythm in the foreground. The choir and extras from the first part are replaced by a young cast, which initially builds the atmosphere of post-war awakening of spring with their voices; the sounds of rain, wind, animals, human tools, and voices introduce the audience into the dramatic action without a single visual sign, merging with the scents of the space in which it unfolds. The play with scents here, of course, is not accidental; although urbanistically altered compared to the 1940s, Lučac in 2015 is olfactorily almost the same, with the smells of Mediterranean herbs and kitchens from nearby houses, so the abolishment of visuality can be understood as an additional contribution to the desire for complete integration of the performance into its own scenic space.

In the second, final part of the segment, the pale, atmospheric light designed by Marin Frankola gradually reveals the silhouettes of the actors, who transform from suggestive storytellers into Meyerholdian performers dedicated to the construction of a new world. The mechanistic choreography combined with the strict polyphony of Sunko's soundtrack finally liberates visual stage signs, which after a prolonged darkness are presented to the audience in a strong symbiosis with the environment. Thus, *Sun City* climbs to an ecstatic peak of utopia, emphasized in the final moment by a flash of shiny foil covering the entire surface of the house in the background. The scenographic interventions in the central part of the performance follow the logic established in the *City of the Dead Laborers*; the unobtrusive ambiance in each segment is only broken by one powerful artificial emphasis, which, like costumes on the actors, dresses the space in fictional attire.

4. CITY FOR SALE

Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules are absurd, their perspectives deceitful, and everything conceals something else.[4]

After the visual and auditory utopian paroxysm at the end of *Sun City*, the audience is led to the final stage by a tourist guide, or rather a young actor who charmingly and casually explains to the interested spectators the urban and social context of the journey that needs to be taken. From Rokova street, one must climb to the Gripe fortress, a defensive complex from the 17th century situated on the hill of the same name, from which there is a view of the entire Lučac and a large part of Split. At the very end, the protagonist reveals himself in full, even before the audience sits in the makeshift auditorium in the fortress's backyard. It is set up so that all the vertical elements of the scenery are the walls and windows of an old military building on the southern side of the complex. The artificial element of the set design in this segment is a cheaply made, plastic illuminated sign, with a telling content—ironically displaying the phrase *authentic experience*.

The finale of the performance summarizes the echoes of the utopias from the previous parts, both religious and social, shifting the action into the present. From Calvino's poetically intoned prose, only individual images are taken, without a narrative frame; what is invisible, burdensome, and hidden from view in the life of the city is at the center of interest in the third story. After abstract images in the first and energetic acting interplay in the second part, the final stop of the performance rests on the theater of movement and grim images of a life that exists only in traces. Houses without residents, taverns turned into cold tourist apartments, present ruins

4 Calvino, 1974, p. 44

as reminders of a former life—these are the visual frames for inscribing the final chapter about the spirit of a space and its people in the whirlwind of time.

The last segment, titled *City of Tourists*, completely inverts its musical logic; instead of the music of social gathering in the first two parts, a claustrophobic, partially atonal soundscape by composers Matko Botić and Igor Vasiljev emerges from the stage at the very end. The shaping of space also follows the same direction; after open vistas of the city-protagonist, the story ends in a cramped, secluded courtyard, where the gaze does not escape to the real life surrounding the fiction. The last story turns to intimacy, to what happens in the city behind closed doors and drawn curtains. In a desire not to disturb the fragile balance among the parts, the relationships between the characters are only hinted at in mostly non-verbal etudes, with the dynamics of urban life at the center of interest. The final chord of the performance is a sort of choreographed grotesque about the contemporary Split, pressed under the heavy burden of the ubiquitous terror of tourism.

Fig. 5. (The Invisible City, third part, photo by Matko Biljak)

After the utopia of escape from the first act and the utopia of reconstruction from the second part, the fundamental ideological determination of the third act is a striking lack of any utopian concept. *The City of Tourists* does not establish itself as a public place but as a space that is rented out, so the fragmented communication among characters is merely a symptom of social apathy and a systemic lack of concern for the public interest. The city, as the central character of the performance, changes in accordance with the stage play; it initially appears as a mythical hero, then as a young lover, and finally presents itself as a protagonist who is absent, a dramatic figure stripped of its ideological foundation.

5. CONCLUSION

Close the door!
From the wilted, shriveled petal, a small snail will emerge,
like those from the graveyard.
Moths from the wardrobe, from the bed, will greet its whisper.
Do not light the lamp!
At the touch of light,

all the threads on the curtains will loosen,
and the past will scatter into dust[5]

During that exceptionally hot summer of 2015, the cast of the play *Invisible City* brought additional life to Split's Lučac; residents and passersby attended rehearsals, technicians and stagehands rushed from one location to another, and the entire team socialized in courtyards and on the streets even after rehearsals were over. A complete, unpretentious integration into the space was a priority for the creative and performing team; the urban spaces in *Invisible City* were not used as exclusive archaeological backdrops, which is a common practice at Croatian summer theater festivals. The most famous ambient stages at the Dubrovnik Summer Festival and the Split Summer Festival, such as the Peristil or Lovrijenac, are emptied of any contemporary social context, so that, in sociological terms, no matter how captivating their antique beauty, they do not differ much from classic scenery in an indoor theater. In *Invisible City*, Lučac is not emptied of reality for fiction to settle in; instead, theater seeks to achieve coexistence with the society from which it arises.

Fig. 6. (The Invisible City, first part, photo by Matko Biljak)

The fundamental auditory medium of the play is music, predominantly polyphonic, sung music that echoed loudly through the streets, traveling through the neighborhood regardless of the spatial limitations of each theater space. Folk and church hymns in the first part, and simple yet effective choral pieces in the second act easily connected with passersby during rehearsals; *Invisible City*, through its structure and selection of expressive means, aimed to assert itself as a stage work that blurs the line between high and low culture. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu describes the peculiarities of this difference as follows: *The denial of lower, coarse, vulgar, venal, servile - in a word, natural - enjoyment, which constitutes the sacred sphere of culture, implies an affirmation of the superiority of those who can be satisfied with the sublimated, refined, disinterested, gratuitous, distinguished pleasures forever closed to the profane.*(Bourdieu, 1984, p.24) *Invisible City* endeavored to affirm precisely this lower, coarse, and vulgar aspect within the social context of the play, adapting the dramaturgical structure of the performance to that aspiration; the associative chain of

5 Cettineo, 1978, p.129

social rituals was designed as a democratic celebration open to all.

Mythical images at the beginning, choral pieces in the middle, and choreographed melancholy at the end serve to outline the social context in the urban environment; the central performance strategy revolves not around reading the dramatic text, but around *reading the city*. Each scenic station adapts to its own space, which is simultaneously the dramaturgical space referred to by the text, the actual space of the scene, and the playful space created by the performers. In constant motion from station to station, *Invisible City* ultimately reveals itself as a sound-filled space, or as a *space that dances*, since the architectural details of the scenic venues are an inseparable segment of the performance.

The woman who appears at the beginning of the performance as a witness to her own childhood, and in the second act as a young girl participating in the construction of a new world, at the very end of the performance becomes the aged mother of a hospitality worker; in her poetically intoned final monologue, she for the first time connects the scattered weight of the performance into a unified whole. Her experience across all three times and social systems is crucial for the staged embodiment of the conclusion from Calvino's novel, which, in line with the central protagonist, is primarily conceived as an eulogy for life in community: *The inferno of the living is not something that will be; if there is one, it is what is already here, the inferno where we live every day, that we form by being together. There are two ways to escape suffering it. The first is easy for many: accept the inferno and become such a part of it that you can no longer see it. The second is risky and demands constant vigilance and apprehension: seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space.* (Calvino, 1974, p.165)

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Biography

Dragana Vilotić is an architect, exhibition and stage designer. From 2006 to 2014, she worked as a designer and supervisor of architectural and construction projects. Since 2014, she has been working at the Sub-Department of Art and Design, at the Department of Architecture and Urbanism, at the Faculty of Technical Sciences in Novi Sad. She is a designer of spaces for various events – art exhibitions, music concerts, theatre shows and her research is in the field of theatre, scene design and universal design.

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TACTILE SCENOGRAPHIES

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to explain the process of creating artwork for blind and visually impaired people based on principles of scene design which raises question of boundaries between life and art since blind people experience space differently from people who can see. Borders of architectural space are not always recognized as such if person cannot see, so it was hard to locate border between life and art in process of creating this tactile artwork.

Example of tactile artwork *Touch a Word (Tactile Scenographies)* made in collaboration of Citizens' Association "ReAktor" Novi Sad and Sub-department of Art and Design (Department of Architecture and Urbanism, Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad) points a way for transferring spoken word into multisensory experience and importance of relation between space, sound and materials in conceiving ideas both for artwork and exhibition design. In case of artwork for blind and visually impaired people scenography becomes what Sodja Lotker defines as expanded scenography or performative environment which questions the activity of looking at scenography because looking happens with the whole body.

Keywords: blindness, multisensory, scene design, expanded scenography

1. INTRODUCTION

In year 2023 Citizens' Association "ReAktor" made project named *Come In-Inside* in order to expand theatre audience in Novi Sad and asked four visual artists to create tactile artwork based on poems of four contemporary poets. Primary idea was to include this project in theatre festival Sterijino pozorje in order to make possibility for blind people to come to festival and experience art. In 2024 "ReAktor" gave me a chance to be part of this project. This time it was named *Touch a Word (Tactile Scenographies)* so together with teaching assistants Dragana Pilipović (PhD), Vladimir Savić (PhD) and Katarina Keti Zaharijev (MArch) I made collaboration of third year students on teaching course *New Approaches to Design of Space in Art and Culture* at undergraduate studies of Scene architecture, technique and design and fourth year students on course *Scene Architecture – Design of Architectural Space* on same studies at Sub-department of Art and Design at Faculty of Technical Sciences (University of Novi Sad). Also one student of master studies of Scene Architecture and Technique took part in it[1].

Important goal highlighted by organizer of "ReAktor" project, visual artist Darija Dragojlović, was to display this installation in theatre foyer during festival in order to encourage artists, cultural workers and institutions to reconsider theatre art form in innovative ways since it is inaccessible to people with impaired eyesight.

In this paper I will explain process of creating artwork for blind and people with impaired eyesight, based on principles of scene design which raises question of boundaries between life and art since blind people experience space differently from people who can see. Final outcome of this project was making art part of these people's lives so aim of this paper is to explain how scene design helped in this process.

2. TACTILITY, VISION AND BLINDNESS IN THEATRE

In context of theatre that is predominantly based on vision, tactility as very rare opportunity for audience, is interesting topic to think about. Also it is not just the case with theatre, it implies for majority of contemporary art.

Patrice Pavis gives three points of view on tactility in theatre (Pavis, 2021). First implies to social convention of touch broken during the 60's in USA and Europe avant-garde theatre through performances which included change in way that audience receives those performances. Second point of view is on effect of tactility in the theatre based on materiality of scenography and stage space – sand, fire, water, which activate senses of audience. And third is based on audiences being able to indirectly (through an actor) take part in "cultivation" of "theatre material" during performance – in a way audience is touching tangible elements of theatre performance through an actor. His observations highlight use of certain materials that trigger multiple sensations – for example fire activates sensation of temperature and touch, vision and possibly smell. Also he refers to immersion in theatre that gives audience higher level of interaction just by watching actors on scene, but we can conclude that these interactions are based on eyesight.

In history of theatre there are examples that rely more on speaking, so hearing compensate other senses, including eyesight and touch. Elizabethan theatre was shaped around spoken word. There was no decor, scenography was reduced to some props but writers of that era, and specially Shakespeare, incorporated great imagery in text of their plays. Poet Patrick Gillespie explains imagery in literature as "any passage that evokes any of our senses: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, organic or kinaesthetic". Jennifer Rae McDermott even makes assumption that Shakespeare is "individual prone to synaesthesia – the condition where the simulation of one sensory pathway causes second sensory experience", in other to explain his highly imaginative plays and verses (McDermott, 2012, pp. 72). Architecture of Elizabethan theatre is based on small distances between audience and actors, so McDermott also highlights additional influence it had on behaviour and jostling of people in the audience and increased awareness of their and other people's bodies,

1 Students authors of tactile installation *Touch a Word (Tactile Scenographies)* are: Anđela Jokanović, Anja Kodić, Doroteja Dević, Ivan Nikolovski, Ivana Ačanski, Isidora Pokrajac, Jelena Kajtes, Jovana Dugonjić, Jovana Katić, Jovana Miletić, Katarina Blažić, Lara Dragaš, Lena Jankov, Lidija Mijatović, Marianna Travia, Marija Mladenović, Marko Župljanin, Marko Čizmanski, Miona Grujić, Nikoleta Radojičić, Sara Škvorc, Snežana Popin, Tanja Stefanović, Teodora Milovanović and Veronika Pavlov.

communication and presence (McDermott, 2012, pp. 72). Her hypothesis is that Shakespeare, amongst other poets, uses the "liminality of the physical senses to test newly emergent ideas of inwardness and individual consciousness" in English renaissance literature. At this point, it is important to emphasize that blind people state that they "see images" so they have developed imagery and vision, it is just not based on eyesight. In study *Perspective and the Blind* Barbara Ansaldi makes distinction between hedonic pleasure and aesthetic pleasure for non-sighted people: "the first one is immediate reaction to the contact with an object, while the second is the result of a complex mental processing triggered by the sensory input." (Ansaldi, 2019, pp. 6). She also explains intellectual re-creation of image "built through the sensory, objective data coming from tactile perception that interact with imagination. It is a process that requires a way more intense effort of memory and abstraction if compared to sight; the final destination, though, stays the same: an aesthetic experience which is not generated only by sensory inputs, but also from an intellectual process influenced by a series of "subjective variables" (cultural background, personality, past experience, sensitivity etc...)" (Ansaldi, 2019, pp. 6).

I would like to mention that in brief analysis of theatre plays I found blindness as topic in portrayal of blind characters, such as Tiresias and Oedipus in Sophocles' play *Oedipus Rex*, Gloucester in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Pozzo in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Hamm in *Endgame*. These are just a few examples as illustration, but deepened research and analysis can certainly be topic of another text.

3. ROLE OF SCENE DESIGN IN ARTICULATION OF SPACE FOR ARTISTIC EVENT

One of basic principles of scene design according to Tatjana Dadić Dinulović in book *Scene Design as Art* (Dadić Dinulović, 2012, pp. 285) is that it "relays on the primary need to establish and articulate the space for an artistic event". This principle had important role in creating artwork for blind and people with impaired eyesight because encounter of blind people with art is rarely possible. Cultural institutions in Serbia are often inaccessible and justification usually refer to fact that lot of cultural institution are located in protected buildings or areas and it is impossible to adapt them to needs of persons with disabilities. Turns out that architecture as built structure and environment is in fact obstacle for some people and scene design as practice of designing and articulating space for event could make some improvement in quality of space.

I want to point that there are no persons with disabilities, but there are environments that are making some people's lives more complicated and disable them in living their lives freely. Selwyn Goldsmith in his book *Designing for Disabled – The New Paradigm* adopts term architecturally disabled persons and says: "They are disabled because architect who designed the building did not anticipate their needs, or did not care about them. Congregately, they are people whom the architect can disable but whom he need not disable, or not disable as severely as he commonly does."[2] We could say that architecture is physical platform on which we deliver performance of movement by passing through it but it is evident that buildings of cultural institutions in Serbia demand standardization of body to fit the architecture.

Before we started developing idea for tactile artwork we chose space for installation to be foyer of Novosadsko pozorište – Újvidéki Színház which is located on corner of two streets in city centre. Foyer is on ground level and accessible from small square. It also serves as exhibition space and it is equipped with hanging system for posters, drawings, photographs. Program of this theatre includes plays performed in Hungarian, on two stages. Productions are simultaneously translated to Serbian and it is first theatre in Novi Sad to incorporate subtitles in Russian for recently settled growing population in the city. Besides multilingual character this theatre is well known for excellent physical acting ensemble performing dramas, operettas, musicals, vaudevilles etc. Audience certainly appreciate bodily expression and body conscious program of this theatre which I find subtly visible on two symmetrical murals painted on main facade facing busy street.

In process of developing tactile installation and articulation of space of artistic event it was very important to have consultants. Mentors and lecturers, Mirjana Isakov and Snežana Nikolić from Elementary and

2 In Preface of book *Designing for Disabled – The New Paradigm* architect, Selwyn Goldsmith, inventor of idea of dropped kerb in 1960s, explained meaning of terms medically disabled, financially disabled, and added term architecturally disabled

Secondary Boarding school “Milan Petrović” which is bringing up, educating, supporting, and empowering children and adults with all kinds of needs, gave us a lecture. It was devoted to principles of universal design and articulation of space for events for blind and people with impaired eyesight. They talked about entering and moving through space, audience interaction, design of pedestals and information about exhibition and extremely important instructions about tactile and visual perception of art. Our artistic event unfortunately did not have developed seamless mobility chain which would secure independent preparation for coming to event, transport through the city, coming to the building, attending event and leaving back for all the people, because it requires improvement of built environment, city transport, facilities, services and information. But it is evident that scene design as practice of articulation of space for artistic event is important part of this chain.

Ann Heylighen collected range of empirical material in study about how disabled people experience and understand the built environment. She says that blind people experience different building elements such as floors, ceiling, walls as one - as whole, and “people who are born blind consider furniture as part of that same whole, suggesting that they do not distinguish between fixed building elements, such as a wall, and movable objects, like a sofa” (Heylighen, 2019, pp. 5). She defines sound as extra boundary in space and mentions experience of professor Hull who liked sound of rain because it makes possible to him to perceive different silent objects from a distance by making different sounds against the windows, in the driveway, on the bushes, on the street (Heylighen, 2019, pp. 6). These observations point out the important role of theatre means, such as sound, in making art for blind and states the necessity to develop artwork in strong relation to space which is important principle of scene design.

4. TACTILE INSTALLATION AS EXPANDED SCENOGRAPHY

Principle of scene design in theatre, or scenography, is transfiguration of space of story into the stage space. Scenography is defined by architectural context and it is conditioned by performance shaped with different stage means. Scenography also determines the way in which audience participates in spectacle, and that makes spectacle complete. In case of artwork for blind and visually impaired people scenography becomes what Sodja Lotker defines as expanded scenography or performative environment which questions the activity of looking at scenography because looking happens with the whole body. Different possible meanings of the term scenography Tatjana Dadić Dinulović gives in book *Scene Design as Art* and highlights Sodja Lotker’s expanding of term scenography to a spatial situation which holds dynamic relation of artist and audience thus making a socially responsible space.

Tactile artwork *Touch a Word (Tactile Scenographies)* is based on transfiguration of poetry into multisensory experience and it was determined with idea that the blind audience, audience with impaired eyesight and other audience (wearing sleeping mask) could experience this installation. Concept of this installation is based on touching a “rope“ of different materials, leading audience parallel to sound of voice reading a poetry. Passages of poetry are connected to the feeling of touching the ropes made of materials with different thicknesses and textures. Rhythm of movement is dictated by voice and different ambient sound which appear between verses. In the end all those sounds transform into sound of violin playing music.

In first part of process, during workshop with poet and dramaturge Jelena Anđelovska, students created collective poem with cross-poetry method. Then this written text was transformed into spoken word – we recorded reading of poetry by student Jovana Katić. Since spoken word and sound is leading audience through installation, audio description of physical parts of installation was necessary, so we added a voice of student Marianna Travia as a guide. Another voice that was part of this artwork was from students who were mediators on exhibition and helped audience to put headphones and masks if necessary. All these voices represented sound of small student society which was telling how they feel through the verses, sounds and tactile characteristics of materials. Reading of description of installation and instruction for moving blended well with verses so border between material and designed aspects of installation was blurred with poetics. Construction carrying “ropes“ was made of metal and “ropes“ were made of nautical rope, elastic transparent tubes, fitness rope, guitar strings and gauze (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Tactile installation *Touch a Word (Tactile Scenographies)*, Photo: Stefan Stefanovski, 2024

Placement of installation was determined by condition that it has its own space inside foyer so it was further away from entry into theatre hall. Passing vestibule of theatre students placed poster of the artwork which was designed by standards for vision of people with impaired eyesight – it had black, white and yellow colour scheme, simple design and easy readable typography. Also tactile path and tactile map with drawing of space and information in braille (in Serbian and Hungarian) leading to installation were added so audience could orientate to a place where they could pick up headphones and experience tactile artwork (Fig. 2). Audience was coming on nights of performances played at Sterijino pozorje festival and responding very well to this multisensory experience as some kind of intro and preparation for beginning of the theatre show. Also individuals and groups came during the daytime since theatre foyer was open.

5. CONCLUSION

After participating in creation of artwork for blind and people with impaired eyesight I wrote this paper trying to come closer to their experience and understand role of art in their lives. Use of voice, spoken word and sound as guide for movement and feeling of placement in undefined, vast space of the world perceived as such from point of view of blind people, should be reminder and interesting topic to think about for theatre makers who want to broaden theatre audience. Touch and tactility in controlled conditions and safe spaces like galleries, museums, theatres and cultural institutions give opportunity for building complex aesthetic and intellectual responses, so it is important to make possible for these people to enter and move through these institutions in Novi Sad because it is only way to provide direct social connection. Since architecture established as an obstacle in our built environment, scene design as practice of articulation of spaces of artistic events can help in making art part of people’s lives. Theatre and art events have ephemeral nature so it is required to always consider possible relation of artistic content and art form with space and architecture.

Fig. 2. Tactile map of tactile installation *Touch a Word (Tactile Scenographies)*,with braille in Serbian and Hungarian (Photo: Tanja Stefanović, 2024)

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3 This paper's abstract was published in the *Book of Abstracts* prior to the International Scientific and Professional Conference "*Life is Serious; Art Serene*: Architectural-Scenic Research," which took place from October 23 to 25, 2024. Subsequently, the full paper was written and published in the *Book of Proceedings* in 2025.

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Biography

Anđelka Nikolić graduated from the Department of Theater and Radio Directing at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts and from the Department of French Language at the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade. She is currently studying for a PhD in Scenic Design at the Faculty of Technical Sciences in Novi Sad. She directed more than forty plays in the theaters of Serbia and Slovenia, for adults and children. She participated in theater festivals in the country and the region. She is the winner of Sterija's directing prize and other awards in the field of theater, work in culture and activism. She was a member of the Executive Board of the Assitej Center Serbia and the Board of Directors of the National Theater in Belgrade, as well as a member of the jury at numerous festivals. Within the Art Group Hop.la! she creates artistic and activist projects, and collaborates with the SeVeDa Institute (Slovenia) as a drama teacher. She initiated the establishment of the gender-just library "Ekatarina Pavlović" and Rural Cultural Center Markovac, oriented towards cultural decentralization and the development of experimental artistic and pedagogical projects.

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APPLICATION OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN THEATER FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

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Abstract

Since the end of the twentieth century new technologies play a significant role in the development of art, which is particularly visible in the domain of performing arts - theater, dance and performance.

Through a comparative analysis of the digital theater plays "Screenagers Vol. II" and " The Adventures of Bole the Comet", I explore two recent examples of the use of new technologies in theater for young audiences. In the selected performances, I analyze the aesthetic justification of the use of new technologies, as well as the relationship between new technologies and the live performer, dramaturgy, scenography, costumes, sound and light.

In addition to that, I pay special attention to the connection between the use of new technologies and the pedagogical and developmental function of theater for young audience, in the light of modern theories about the harmful impact of excessive exposure of young people to new media. I'm guided by the question: do artists who create for children have a special responsibility, since they, together with teachers and parents, have the opportunity to prepare the youngest generations for the *seriousness of life?*

Keywords: new technologies, digital theater, theater for young audiences, theater methodology, children and media

1. INTRODUCTION

At the World Conference of Assitej[1] held in 2023 in Belgrade and Novi Sad, one of the priority topics was the use of new technologies in theater for young audiences. At the *Day of Stage Design and New Technologies,* which was organized in cooperation with the Faculty of Technical Sciences in Novi Sad, the experts from different disciplines discussed the questions: how to monitor the development of technology in the theater for young people, given that it has become an important, integral part of life? How to really integrate technology and not use it as a spectacle? What does technology allow us to talk about? What technological means have become so involved in everyday life that now authors necessarily integrate them into theatrical expression? Can technology help us get closer to children and young people? What are the challenges and advantages of the technological revolution, and how to talk about them? [2]

Educators, psychologists, and especially parents of the youngest audience might add one more question: aren't children and young people today too exposed to new technologies, which can have an unfavorable effect on them, in terms of the development of attention, concentration, socialization, exposure to uncensored information? Is it necessary to further spread that influence through the theater? As a contribution to the research of this topic, in this paper I will make a comparative analysis of two theater plays for young audiences that are thoroughly based on the use of new technologies. I will especially take into account the functions and goals of the theater intended for this sensitive group, and the role of new technologies in the realization of those functions and goals.

2. DEFINITIONS OF THEATER FOR YOUNG AUDIENCE

The search for a scientific definition of theater for young audiences reveals the surprising fact that in several relevant theater dictionaries, this type of theater is not recognized as specific at all, and thus is not singled out or defined. With Raško Jovanović, we only come across the term children's theater, which he defines as a theater performed by children, and its purpose is to "have an instructive, but also entertaining, effect on the audience." (Jovanović, 1984, pp. 63). In the "Theater Terminology Dictionary" (Humar, Sušec Michieli, Podbevšek, Lokar, 2011, pp 254-256), a play for children is defined as "a play with simplified content that has an educational function, intended for children." In the same book, a distinction is made between theater for children, which is intended for children up to 12 years of age (children's theater), and youth theater, which is intended for young people.

In international practice, the term *theater for young audience* (TYA) is becoming more and more established. It combines theater performed *by* children and young people, as well as theater intended *for* them. This unification is not only formal: it is also a kind of reaction to an old ideological problem which consists in imposing on children the concept of childhood from the perspective of adults, which is (was?) a common practice in all kinds of art for children, and finally in the theater as well. An integral part of that concept, on the one hand, can be simplification, and on the other hand, didactic and moralistic points that do not come from an in-depth understanding of the child, but from the need to keep him under the control of adults. That is why it is significant that in recent decades the theory and even the practice of theater for children and young people has become more and more interdisciplinary. In addition to that, it includes important scientific branches such as pedagogy and psychology, and the development of participatory models, where performances, even if they are designed and performed by adults, yet they also open up space for the voice and experience of the young audience (Reason, Schuitema, 2021).

1 ASSITEJ, the International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People, (French: *Association Internationale du Théâtre de l'Enfance et la Jeunesse*) was established in 1965 as an international alliance of professionals involved in theatre for children and young people. There are 83 national centres globally.

2 Retrieved from https://assitejsrbija.org.rs/scenski-dizajn-i-nove-tehnologije/ 15.08.2024.

3. NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND THEATER

In the last decade of the twentieth century, computer technologies played a significant role in the development of art. Some believe that this influence is particularly visible in the domain of performing arts - theater, dance and performance. "While digital film and optical-chemical film differ only in the type of technology that leads, roughly speaking, to a similar screen image effect, live theater and digital theater are based as incomparably different phenomenal-ontological systems of presentation of a living and mechanical event" (Šuvaković, 2004, pp. 9).

The term digital theater refers to performances "in which computer technologies play a key role, both in the domain of content and in the domain of technique, aesthetics and communication with the audience" (Dixon, 2007, pp. 3), and although the authors themselves did not use it in describing their works, I believe that it is applicable to two performances that I will analyze.

4. THE SELECTION OF PLAYS

The project "The Adventures of Bole Comet" is specified in the subtitle as *an animated fairy tale for children, youth and adults from three to 133 years old*. Marko Dukić is the author of the text, director, author and performer of music, animator, illustrator and designer. The premiere was held on March 25, 2016, at the City Theater Jazavac, Banja Luka, as a co-production of Nevid Theater and the City Theater Jazavac.[3] In Serbia we had the opportunity to see this play in August 2016, at the Ecological Theater Festival in Bačka Palanka, where it also won the award for the best play.

The authors define the play "Screenagers Vol.II" as a "reflexive DIY musical".

„In a firsthand, first-person approach to songwriting, the performer presents us with an intimate compendium of songs about obscure emotions that she can feel but cannot find a word for in her everyday life. Her mission is to capture through songs the aches, demons, vibes, joys and urges that roam the wilderness of her psychological interior – an interior that strangely resembles our online media landscape, materialising on stage in the form of haunting QR codes, prophetic chat-bots and deceptive green screens with which the spectators can interact via their smartphones."[4]

The play was directed by Giuseppe Chico and Barbara Matijević, produced by the OMNIBUS Art Organization (Zagreb) and Premier Stratagème (Paris). It premiered in June 2022, and Serbian audience had the opportunity to see it in the fall of 2023, at the Desiré Central Station festival in Subotica, and in Belgrade, at the Assitej festival. It is intended for teenagers.

These performances are relevant for the analysis, because the above-cited definition of digital theater, i.e. performance, can be applied to both of them (we will clarify the difference between these two terms in the rest of the text). They received positive reviews, participated in numerous festivals and won awards, which also proves that the professional public considers them relevant.

5. APPLICATION OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

5.1. The function and justification of the application of new technologies in the analyzed examples

Both of these performances could be called digital theater, if we take into account the definition according to which "digital theater is the artistic practice of realizing an image (hybrid media tableau) of a situation (relational in real or virtual space and time) or event, in the context of tradition, history, institution and discourse of the theater through digital technology" (Šuvaković, 2004, pp. 9). In the play "The Adventures of Bole Comet" we have the realization of a digitally animated image that, in the coaction with a live performer, and in the presence of a live audience, becomes a theatrical event. This coaction is continuous; minimal compositional changes occur at the moment when the screen turns off (short intermediate scenes in

3 http://nevidteatar.com/predstave/pustolovine-boleta-komete/

4 https://www.premierstratageme.net/en/screenagers-vol-2/

which the actress is alone on stage, in the role of narrator), that is, when the screen completely takes over the primacy (the actress “hands over” the role to the avatar, and physically withdraws from the stage). The animation function otherwise does not change until the end of the play.

If we look for an analogy in classical theater, we would assign the screen the role of scenography. The technological aspect of the play is not visually accentuated (we do not see parts of the equipment, nor the technicians involved in the production), so it can be said that the aim is to preserve the theatrical illusion. Can we imagine that some other technology was used instead of digital animation? In the narration itself, the naming and description of the spaces where the action takes place is already present (for the imagination of the viewer of the Elizabethan theatre, this would be quite enough). If, however, one wanted to physically recreate the space on the stage, the set designer of this play would have a wide range of possibilities to do so, by devising the decor or painting the props. Even for a quick change of space, a solution could be found, in some process of analogue animation.[5]With the engagement of additional performers, other characters would be recreated; one can easily imagine a puppet version of the show.

The question of justification can also be asked the other way around: what would we lose if this play were realized without the use of digital animation? The answer is very simple: the association with video games, which are a very important part of the lives of today’s children (whatever we think about it). I emphasize, however, that it would be good if this justification was practically validated by not only citing the motif of video games in the play, but also thematizing and problematizing it, but that does not happen in this case.

In the play “Screenagers Vol. II” the use of technology is much more varied. The screen is used to project photos, sequences of digital animation, live broadcasts, and as a large output device on which we monitor joint work with the audience (searching the Internet, playing video games, exchanging messages, Internet mimes). The laptop from which the actress conducts the performance, the microphone and the cables are intentionally visible, which is why it can be said that this event approaches the format of digital performance - “the artistic practice of the obviously presented concept, procedure and phenomenal performance using heterogeneous and hybrid digital technologies as dominant aspects of the artistic work.“[6] Accordingly, we can also say that the function of new technologies is more complex here. In some moments it has a function of visual clarification and supplementing of the dramatic action (scenography effect), but the event often completely moves into virtual space (although the participants, including the audience, are in the same space all the time). As the play progresses, technology becomes less and less a tool and more and more the theme of the play, and therefore an inseparable part of it. In the context of this comparative analysis, it is worth mentioning that here the motif of video games is treated from a psychological aspect, from the point of view of the user, who is imposed a model of measuring success and efficiency, in all segments of life, including in the sphere of free time. This critical attitude towards new technologies is an important argument for their use in theater for young audiences. This is just one more proof that the play “Screenagers Vol II “ is impossible to imagine without the application of new technologies, and those that have been used.

5.2. Used technologies and other elements of the performances

The play “The Adventures of Bole Comet” is described more by the authors as “an interweaving of live acting, digital animation projected on the screen, sound and light effects.” [7] The play is performed on the proscenium stage, in the most common stage configuration, in which the “world of illusions is clearly separated from the real world of the spectators in which the and scenography looks like a flat projection in the open plane of the curtain.” [8] This configuration is further emphasized by the light (the auditorium is always in the dark, and the stage is lit), as well as by the installation of the projection screen on the back wall of the stage, which gives us the impression that the actress is performing in front of a painted scenography.

5 Kamishibaji is a theatrical form created in medieval Japan, which consists of the manual switching of a series of images, by a live performer-storyteller-actor, in close contact with the audience, which could be cited as an example of analog animation. The increasing popularity of this genre nowadays is explained by the fact that this old-fashioned theater style has an exciting and even therapeutic effect for the modern young audience.

6 Ibid.

7 http://nevidteatar.com/predstave/pustolovine-boleta-komete/ Retrieved on 15.8.2024.

8 The third, most common basic spatial form of stage events, as defined in his typology by Walter Gropius (Dinulović, 2005)

The connection between the physically unchanging space of the acting (an empty stage without scenography) and the different spaces that are projected on the screen is established primarily

- by connecting the image to the narrative (the performer, in the character of Bole, describes the spaces that are projected on the screen)
- by identifying a live performer with an avatar in animation
- through the interaction of the performer with the animation
- by connecting the image and acting to the sound effects.

For example, in one scene, the movement of a car (said to be driven by Bole Comet), as an integral part of the projection, is replaced by the movement of the performer who imitates the movement of the car on stage, in front of the screen, practically within the projected landscape, holding in her hand a prop. – steering wheel. In the earthquake scene, the sound, the image movement and the actress’s reaction are coordinated. Recorded dialogue sequences are also part of the sound image - actually a combination of the actress’ live spoken lines and the previously recorded lines of the characters that are part of the animation. It is important to emphasize that the interactivity is one-way, that is, that the actress has obviously thoroughly practiced the play with the animated image and sound - to the extent that sometimes it seems as if the image is actually reacting to her. This is especially noticeable in a situation of rapid changes, such as when the actress uses props - slingshots to eliminate enemies who spontaneously attack her from the screen (these are the moments when the play really acts like a theatrical version of a video game).

The costume is also in the function of connecting the live performer and the avatar (the image is compatible with the real costume).

The light follows the dynamics and the brightness of the image, so that the actress, again in relation to how close she is to the projection screen, plays in the light emitted by the projection, or is illuminated by theater light, or it is a combination, which is the worst solution, because it occasionally acts as a realization error

The interweaving of all the mentioned means throughout the performance is consistently subordinated to the goal of creating and maintaining the illusion and making the plot understandable. At some moments, however, it seems that this concern has gone too far, and produces illustration and redundancy: for example, when Bole describes the appearance of the giant’s shoes, which are clearly visible in the projection, but are not essential to the story. Such duplication of information, which come, for example, from the visual and auditory code, is probably the result of the need to make everything clear to young audience. On the other hand, one gets the impression that in this way the audience is underestimated and put in a passive position, in which there is no the tendency to participate in designing, supplementing, interpreting the content that is received from the stage.

The show “Screenagers Vol. II “ is described by the authors as a mixture of stand-up comedy, conference, concert and VJ-ing, which examines how (everything) the internet affects our lives, through phenomena such as e-learning, online communities, video games, internet culture mimes.

The play is performed on an empty stage, covered with a ballet floor, also in the proscenium theater configuration. There is a projection screen on the back wall. The only element od scenography is the pedestal on which the equipment is placed. In the post-dramatic manner (which is also the manner of digital performance), the elements of the stage technique are not hidden, on the contrary: all technological processes are deliberately “exposed” to the eye of the audience.

The play consists of short, relatively independent scenes. Already in the first one, which takes the form of VJ session (the actress performs a recitative, accompanying herself on a small mobile keyboard, which is coordinated with a series of projected photos), communication with the audience is established. It is first one-way. However, already in the second scene, conceived as a deliberately clumsy animation - a tutorial, which is partly shown and partly recounted (now not live, but through subtitles), audience is invited to access the Screenagers internet network via smartphones. This means that, in the further course of the play, they are enabled to participate directly in the play. The first challenge of is playing a video game, moderated by an actress. Later, the audience gets the opportunity to take and send selfies, which will be projected on the big screen with humorous comments, and the very end of the performance consists of a song that the actress improvises from sentences sent by the audience at that moment.

In one remarkable scene, the performer takes different positions in the space, filming herself with the help of a mobile phone, with the direct transmission of the image. She plays with mise-en-scène and perspectives: she turns her back to the audience, while addressing them face to face from the projection screen. Analogous to that is communication with the audience via chat, even though the performer is in the same room all the time. The constant change of the way of presence, the simultaneous coexistence in different media and levels of reality, are the leitmotif of the play, which humorously and easily, but on the other hand honestly and seriously, deals with the theme of simplicity, but also the superficiality of communication via the Internet, easy access into large online communities and knowledge bases, but also loneliness. Playing a video game, as already mentioned, thematizes the problem of competitiveness, constant measurement of success, taking a selfie talks about the need to fabricate a reality that does not exist.

The performer uses the keyboard not only to play the melodic background of the song she performs, but also to produce various effects, which are most often quotations of Windows sound effects or quotations of movie effects. Her voice is transmitted via a wireless microphone, and is often computer modeled, or overdubbed with someone else's voice. Sequences of video games, animations and other video materials are accompanied by a sound image characteristic of such content, dividing the screen into several fields often multiplies the sound image, to the point of intentional cacophony.

It is clear that the fabric of this play is very meticulously woven using different technologies (sound, light, various video material), which sovereignly reconstructs the atmosphere of the unlimited space of the Internet from which we are "attacked" by various stimuli and contents. In the precise composition of the play, moments of pause, stagnation, silence, which is sometimes accentuated through a white or black screen, the interruption of all sound, when the actress is only present live, are particularly important. Theatrical elements of the play are very carefully selected: it is interesting how the performer sometimes uses an instrument or parts of the equipment as a theatrical prop. For example, she manipulates the laptop so that the image on its screen becomes an extension of her body (hand, foot), thereby approaching the medium of object theater, even puppetry.

5.3. Effects of the use of new technologies

The effect of the use of new technologies, relevant to the goals of TYA	*„The Adventures of Bole Comet"*	*„Screenagers Vol.II"*
Popularization of the theater, using a vocabulary that is familiar to the young audience	Young people recognize the video game analogy, it makes it easier for them to follow the play	Young people recognize the analogies with the different media they use, the more they are invited to get directly involved in the play, using those media.
It makes theater fun	It imitates the way users are entertained by a video game.	It satirizes the technologies it uses, and produces laughter and fun in theatrical ways
Contributes to education	It has no pretensions to educate	Educates in the field of Internet history, animation technology; indirectly, without teaching, educates on the topic of the dangers of cyber violence
Contributes to psychological well-being and development	It remains within the stereotype of a fairy tale; does not problematize the usual treatment of violence in fairy tales/video games, does not deepen the motives that the original story contains, which may be relevant for children (the disappearance of one of the parents, loneliness, fear...)	It explores topics related to the life of young people: issues of identity, socialization, fear of disease, death, environmental disasters, etc. Develops a critical distance towards new technologies and media. Empowers the young viewer by opening space for participation.
It contributes to the development of taste and aesthetic sensitivity	It remains within the horizon of expectations of the average video game user	It combines different visual and musical styles; stimulates the imagination with the unexpected use of technical equipment, fantasizes the connections between the physical and virtual worlds; develops vocabulary through online language games

Fig. 1. Comparative analysis of the effects of new technologies in two plays

5.4. Justification of the use of new technologies in relation to the age of the young audience

One of the important reasons for the use of new technologies in the theater for young audiences is to help them to get to know those technologies better. The theater is an opportunity for adults and young people to understand together how new technologies work and how they can be used, but also what psychological and ideological challenges they bring us (Bakingem, 2004, pp. 276-297).

But when exactly is the moment for young people to start getting to know the world of computer animation, video games, the internet, and virtual reality better? Modern research increasingly shows a slowdown in the motor, neurological, psychological, cognitive, and social development of children because they are less and less exposed to unstructured play in the preschool period, which implies increased motor activity and getting to know the outside world with all their senses. Excessive watching of television, playing video games, lack of graphomotor activities and physical inactivity damage and reduce the development of certain biological potentials. "The fact is that this period (up to the age of 7), which represents the basis on which the future development of each child's intellectual abilities will depend, is still not enough researched area and that parents sometimes inadvertently do wrong things with children or do not know how to optimally way to stimulate their development" (Rajović, 2010, pp. 10)

Therefore, let's not forget the important fact that the theater for young audiences should be also a place of education and support for parents. If a play for the age of 3+ uses new technologies with the aim of getting closer to the audience, doesn't that mean that we assume, that is, promote the idea that three-year-old should know and recognize the world of cartoons, video games, social networks, virtual reality? If we take into account the opinions of experts, we will understand that more appropriate theater references for this age would be storytelling, puppetry, new circus, kamishibai (not to go further into the rich history of the theater), and that actually the theater, with its here and now, is an exemplary space in which the battle against the spectacle society can and must be fought.

6. CONCLUSION

Through a comparative analysis of the theater performances "Screenagers Vol. II" and "The Adventures of Bole Comet", I investigated two examples of the use of new technologies in contemporary stage design practices intended for young audiences. Much more material for analysis, and a greater richness and complexity of the relationship between new technology and other segments of the play, I discovered in the play "Screenagers vol II", while I experienced "The Adventure of Bole Comet" as a simpler attempt to approach the audience by imitating a form that is supposed to be close and recognizable even to very young viewers. I conclude that in choosing new technologies to be used in the work on a play, we should deal with the issue of the relationship between form and content, and pedagogical and artistic goals, with full awareness of the age and needs of the audience we are addressing. A serious methodological problem is the lack of insight into how the audience itself perceives and evaluates these performances (except, partially, in the case of "Screenagers Vol 2", where the reaction can be measured by the degree of audience involvement in the performance and the qualitative and quantitative share in content generation) which could also be the subject of new research endeavours.

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Biography

Dr Flaviana Xavier Antunes Sampaio Skalska is a Professor of Lighting Design and Introduction to the Fine Arts at Southwest State Bahia University (Brazil). Her research focuses on dance lighting through both practical and theoretical approaches, exploring how artists and spectators can engage with performances. She is the author of Lighting Dance: A Study of Technical, Philosophical, and Psychological Shadows (2020), among numerous other publications. She was shortlisted for the Prague Quadrennial Best Publication Award in 2023.
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BREAKING WALLS: REINVENTING SPACES THROUGH LIGHTING DESIGN

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Abstract

Does art in academia sometimes feel overly serious? How can the study of lighting be approached in a way that is creative, accessible, and serene? This essay draws on my teaching experience at Bahia Southwest State University (UESB) in Brazil, exploring innovative strategies for engaging students with both natural and artificial lighting. By emphasizing hands-on experiments and small-group collaboration, beyond purely technical approaches, it demonstrates how such practices can deepen students' understanding of dance lighting, transform ordinary spaces, challenge the audience's role, and imbue symbolic meaning in a black-box studio. The discussion will show how an exploratory and interactive approach to lighting can make the study both creatively enriching and educationally engaging.

Keywords: lighting, dance, space

1. A TERRAIN TO BE SHAKEN IN CURIOSITY

The words ‘academia’ and ‘art’ share some similarities. By definition, ‘academia’ is connected to studying and intellectual inquiry within a subject, typically in universities. In parallel, ‘art’ derives from the Latin and French words, both of which are linked to learning a skill through practice. The connection between academia and art occurs not only when universities provide and stimulate artistic activities, but also in a broader sense—by creating space for creativity and critical thinking to flow, driving scientific research across various disciplines.

Literature has shown that art and science can stimulate each other. American dancer Loie Fuller (1862–1928) was deeply fascinated by science and sought to integrate innovation into her dance pieces. Liz Heinecke notes that Fuller was friends with Marie and Pierre Curie, and she even inquired about the possibility of creating a costume made from radium. On the other hand, contemporary neuroscientists have turned to dance performances to explore brain behavior. Scientists like Foster et al., Jola, and Calmeiro have conducted studies examining how brain regions associated with pleasure are activated when people enjoy watching a performance.

The understanding of dance as an embodied, multi-layered, and complex art form has contributed to the development of new academic degrees, such as Dance Science programs, which focus on biomechanics and integrative health. These programs are significant for advancing interdisciplinary research and highlighting the benefits of dance for both professionals and audiences alike.

In Brazil, dance degrees are primarily offered by state universities, tuition-free, with the goal of preparing future dance teachers and professionals. At UESB, the dance degree offers a curriculum that includes modules in project development, performance creation and critique, and the contextualization of dance through critical thinking. In this setting, dance occurs both inside and outside the classroom, allowing students to test ideas in various venues and engage with diverse audiences, from classmates to passersby.

1.1 Some reasons to be serious

Lighting design as a discipline – or an art form as I like to think of it – is relatively young. (Dreyer, 2020, pp. 14)

The UESB, where I work, is 44 years old and introduced the Dance course in 2010 at its Jequié campus, located 367 km from Salvador, the state capital. My teaching covers various modules, including choreography, dance technique, dance pedagogy, and an introduction to fine arts and lighting design, with the latter two being my main areas of focus. Jequié is known as the “City of the Sun” and, alongside Dance, UESB offers seventeen other degree programs, including Biological Sciences (bachelor’s and degree), Nursing, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy, Medicine, Dentistry, Chemistry, Information Systems, Physical Education, Literature, Mathematics with a focus on IT, Pedagogy, Drama, and Chemistry (bachelor’s and degree).

One advantage of UESB is the shared use of some classrooms and conference rooms across different programs. While not simultaneous, this circulation of people in common areas, including the library, facilitates exchange and interaction between students from different fields. Teaching lighting design at such a diverse university can be both challenging and rewarding, depending on the available space and the teaching methodology I choose. These methods, in turn, also help to motivate me as both a lecturer and a practitioner.

Lighting design has intrigued me since childhood. I remember rehearsing on theater stages and struggling to understand my proper position in space. As I grew older, my curiosity deepened. Volunteering at the Movement Theater while pursuing my bachelor’s in dance at the Federal University of Bahia laid the groundwork for my current path in lighting design, which directly informs my teaching practices.

A challenge in teaching lighting design at UESB is the lack of a dedicated space with fixed lighting equipment for experimentation. Currently, the Dance and Drama programs only have two large studios with black walls and wooden floors for practical classes, which include movement-based activities like dance technique and creative processes. As a result, the lighting design module is often taught in a room with chairs and tables, a professor’s desk, a projector, and a whiteboard—far from ideal for hands-on lighting experimentation.

1.1.1 *Seeds from buildings*

Solutions are personal. Asking questions helps. Concealing that you know it all can help. [...] The gentle thought that you want some new wrinkle, and the quiet and persistent “let’s try it” can be an interesting

challenge to the most entrenched. (Rays, 1998, pp. 113).

Working with lighting requires teamwork. The concept of “rays” reflects strategies used by a production crew to overcome challenges. My experience teaching lighting to undergraduate students at UESB is similar to this notion.

At the Jequié campus, UESB does not have a theater or a fully equipped studio for lighting. However, there are some instruments available, such as PARs and PCs. Unfortunately, there isn’t a dedicated lighting cabin, so we have to adapt these instruments for use in temporary installations. Teaching lighting in a traditional classroom is useful for theoretical discussions, presenting historical data, and introducing lighting concepts. However, as the semester progresses, the classroom may become too limited for stimulating practical investigation into the subject. To address this, I structure each class with a combination of seminars, text study, discussions, and experiments led by the students, using a variety of formats (live and video) and locations—both indoors and outdoors.

Given the prevalent heat in Jequié, natural light is the starting point and key element for the students’ practice. To begin, I often invite them to take a walk around campus to observe the behavior of the sun and how it affects them, passersby, and the appearance of buildings and surrounding environments. As part of this, one of the tasks is to create a performance where the audience views it from a lower perspective.

To encourage students to rethink public spaces, I first ask them to reflect on their relationship with the sun. These reflections are crucial for helping them realize how our moods and preferences - shaped by heat and intense light - can influence our experiences. Students explore both positive aspects, such as the joy of going to the beach, and negative ones, like the challenge of walking outdoors away from shade at midday. Following this, they are asked to walk around campus, analyzing how sunlight affects the buildings and the people passing by, and how these elements can inspire the creation of a small performance. The results, typically completed in about an hour, demonstrate various ways of transforming buildings into performance spaces.

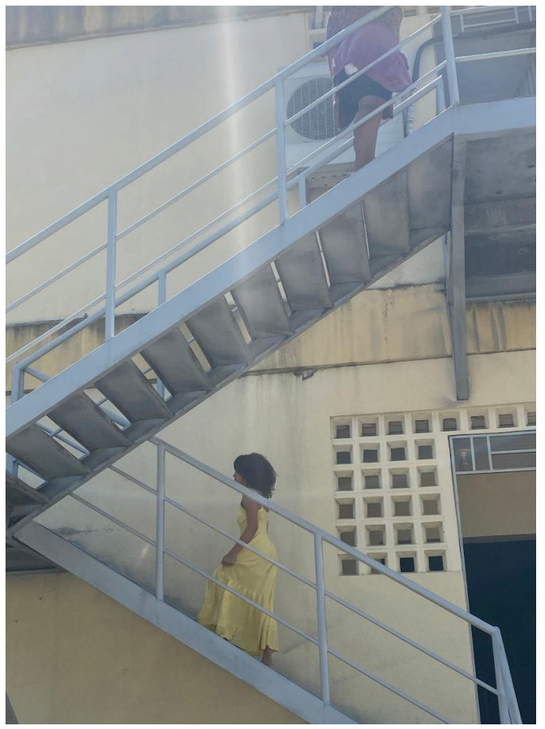

Fig. 1. Lorrayne Bomfim and Edna Cardoso

Fig. 1 depicts an experiment where students Bomfim and Cardoso sought to create a dance that emphasizes the interaction between sunlight, the building, the dancers, and the passersby within the given environment. The yellowish color of the building matched the color of one of the dancers' dresses, creating a camouflage effect. In contrast, the dancer on the upper level wore black, which created a visual contrast and provided diverse color and positioning cues for the audience.

One key point for discussion in the experiment is the use of and adaptation to shadows. Bomfim and Cardoso explored the idea of dancing in a shaded area. The sun is partly blocked by the building behind the steps where the performance takes place. This creates an interesting dynamic, with the performance occurring in a space partially masked by shadows, in contrast to the audience, who were exposed to natural lighting.

Fig. 2. Vanessa Braga, Eisa Santos e Emílio Sobrinho

Fig. 2 shows part of the audience for Bomfim and Cardoso's experiment. The audience consists of classmates and illustrates a strategy for dealing with the heat and brightness of daylight: standing in the shadow of a light post. The spectators' positioning at a lower height added spatial tension to the performance, already created by the dancers' placement on two different levels. This configuration emphasized the distance between the dancers and the audience, using light and shadow as performative elements.

As a result, the audience became active participants, compelled by the effort required to look up and feel the sun's rays on their faces. Some viewers raised their hands to block the sunlight. The dynamics of the performance suggested an imminent encounter between the dancers, at times leaving the audience to adopt the role of voyeurs—as though the dancers were meant to connect only with each other. The performance seemed to exist solely within the sunlight, designed to attract and engage a transient public.

2. CULTIVATING JOY

In his classic essay Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics, Gernot Böhme asserts that "entering a room, one can feel oneself enveloped by a friendly atmosphere or caught up in a tense atmosphere" (Böhme, 1993, p. 113).

In my work with students experimenting with light, I often engage with Böhme's dualism. While other atmospheres are possible, the core dynamic remains: light can stimulate actions that are perceived as either friendly or tense. Throughout the course, I encourage students to create friendly atmospheres, but they also frequently work with tension, which is essential for providing contrast and stimulating discussions about intention.

2.1 Many reasons to be serene

Tim Ingold asserts that people tend to observe objects rather than patterns of light, and that the eyes gradually assimilate reflections of light from surfaces (Ingold, 2000, p. 166). In my teaching routine, I often ask students to reflect on their own work and that of their peers before offering my opinion. This strategy encourages them to think more deeply about their work while being influenced by their classmates' perspectives.

An enriching aspect of teaching for me is observing students as they struggle to overcome challenges and tap into their creativity. To support this process, providing texts on the concept, history, and qualities of light is crucial for expanding their vocabulary and sparking inspiration. Students are often particularly curious about the idea that light is perceived through surfaces. The lessons on reflection, absorption, and refraction—topics that are part of secondary school physics—are revisited and explored through experiments that deepen their understanding of how light interacts with surfaces.

Another important consideration regarding surfaces and light is how they affect the audience's engagement with a performance. Factors such as exposure time, intensity, and the overall environment are discussed alongside experiments in visible and tactile lighting. In particular, experiments in a dark room are essential for exploring symbolism and conducting introspective work.

2.1.1 Flourishing of students

Accounts of dances, written by the choreographer, a dancer or critic, and drawings and photographs bring their own problems in being open to (mis)interpretation but therein lies the interest also, in the point of view that accompanies, or is built into the description and interpretation of the dance (Adshead, 1988, pp. 20).

Documenting dance through photos and using them to critique creative processes based on lighting is a challenging task. The angle, direction, and framing of the image are chosen for a specific purpose, which may not always align with the students' own inspirations. However, this reflection is valuable, as it offers one of many possible perspectives. Rather than being a problem, as Adshead might suggest, it serves to exponentially provoke more interpretations of the matter.

A key aspect of my teaching is encouraging students to experiment with alternative lighting techniques.

Fig. 3. Hillary Galvão

By analyzing the photo above (Fig. 3), we can consider strategies for making lighting move in a way that serves the dancer, as opposed to fixed lighting, which operates in the opposite manner. Depending on the group's progress and preferences, students experiment with ways of interacting with different colored LED lights in a dark room.

Color and intensity are often cited as key lighting properties (McCandless, 1932; Shelley, 2012; Chybowski, 2024). Other characteristics, such as angle, distribution, and movement, also play important roles. The literature generally suggests that lighting can be controlled, particularly with consoles equipped with dimmers. However, little has been said about the surface on which light is perceived.

Light interacts with surfaces, affecting their hue, value, and chroma. A lack of attention to the surface when working with lighting may result in color that "ends up drab and dingy, or overly intense in appearance" (Steffy, 2002, p. 51).

In Fig. 3, the properties of the space are acknowledged, but they are not dominant in the experiment. The dancer is the key factor for the lighting. Here, we can explore the idea of light as a partner to the dancer, considering how its brightness and color can influence the dancer's movement and expression.

How can LEDs suggest the notion of a dancer's partner, moving away from the concept of another individual? Following this, another intriguing question is the exploration of the limits of interaction between individuals—such as skin-to-skin contact—versus a more poetic and abstract relationship between the individual and the light, where the dancer's skin is enveloped by light and transformed, yet still in conversation with it. The appearance of LED devices in the space for the audience is also notable, reinforcing the idea of light as a partner. Additionally, it sparks creative insights through the rays of light, which are less noticeable in the air compared to conventional spotlights (such as PCs), but whose color intensity is evident on the dancer's skin.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Teaching lighting at UESB combines serious and fun activities, with a prevalence of the latter. By nature and tradition, lighting in Dance degrees is primarily taught in black-box studios equipped with professional lighting. However, this is not the case at my workplace, which allows for more creative freedom. This flexibility enables activities to be showcased to the University community on a regular basis, once a week.

The focus of this essay was student experimentation, which I associate with many of the most rewarding moments in teaching. Discussions on the quality of popular lighting equipment, creating light maps, and writing dance reviews based on lighting effects can be connected to the more serious aspects of the course. For some students, these activities are also perceived as exciting.

By balancing fun and seriousness, my role as a lecturer is to guide students through the module with calmness, encouraging discussions on various topics and investing in practical activities. A common challenge, particularly toward the end of the semester, is the anxiety or fear students experience regarding the workload—especially when tasks are poorly organized or when they struggle with time management. Creating a supportive and stimulating atmosphere is crucial to the success of the learning process, and this often has a positive impact on their further studies after the module ends.

It is also important to acknowledge that Jequié has two well-equipped theaters, which, through partnerships, contribute to the classes. I often take students on guided visits to these theaters, where they have the opportunity to work with local lighting technicians.

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Biography

José Capela, architect, PhD earned with the dissertation Operating conceptually in art. Operating conceptually in architecture. He works as a teacher at University of Minho since 2000, where he currently lectures in architecture and theatre. He was Head of the PhD course and is a researcher at Lab2PT. With Jorge Andrade, he is co-founder (2003) and co-artistic director of mala voadora. He is responsible for the company's stage designs. Over the last few years, he also collaborated with Ballet National Company, Opera National Theatre São Carlos and Gus Van Sant; he designed the permanent exhibition of Porto's new Port Wine Museum and a set/installation for the public spaces of Teatro do Bairro Alto. He is the author of the installation Windows, which represented Portugal at the 2019 Prague Quadrennial (Countries and Regions), and presented his work at World Stage Design Calgary 2022. Together with Cláudia Taborda, he curated the international conference Architecture [in]]out[Politics for the 2010 Lisbon Architecture Triennale. He is the author of the stage design catalogues Ways of Doing Nothing, and, with José Carlos Duarte, W : JC + JCD; and the chapter 'A bottle of Coca-Cola and two greenhouses: internal politics in the arts and architecture' of the book Aesthetics and Politics in the Arts (Edições 70). He was the chairman of the board of the Portuguese Association of Scenography from 2016 to 2018. A two-time nominee to the Prémio Autores as 'best scenographic work' in 2012 and 2017, he received this award in 2016 for mala voadora's Pirandello.

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DOMESTICITY AT PLAY: A HOUSE LITERALLY MADE OUT OF PHOTOGRAPHS

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Abstract

This text is a reflection on a scenography project carried out for the artist Raquel André. It's an installation made from a large number of photographs depicting a series of encounters the artist had over several years with a wide variety of people: a *Collection of Lovers*. The installation recreates a (fictional) house, entirely made up of photographs of people inhabiting (real) houses, so it provides an opportunity to discuss: (1) the difference in status between mundane photographs and artistic photography; (2) the difference between inhabiting a space and observing it; and (3) the difference between architecture and scenography. It is argued that the awareness of being in a situation that can be observed as art prevents what we call "inhabiting" from taking place. Finally, an attempt is made to dilute these dualities in the light of Bernard Tschumi's theory on the "architecture of pleasure".

Keywords: scenography, photographic installation, everyday life photography, vertigo of images

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2021, I was invited by the artist Raquel André to design a set to exhibit her *Collection of Lovers*. For several years, Raquel met for an hour with people (known or unknown) who responded to a public advert. The meetings always took place in the intimacy of a home and the two people could chat, have a drink, eat, hug or do anything else they both felt like doing (André, 2022). Each meeting was always recorded with a few photographs. My task was to design a space that was also 'domestic' (a set) from these photographic records: the *Collection of Lovers* would give rise to the *Exhibition of Lovers*. This installation was meant to be visited by two people at a time, who entered through different doors and were audio-guided so they meet.

So, I had to do (almost) an architect's job: designing a house (albeit a theatrical one). I had to design a *fictional* house to show the experience of multiple *real* houses, and the raw material available were images that portrayed this experience. Everything was built or produced with images: walls, floors, furniture, curtains, sheets, plates, napkins, etc. I worked with my colleague and friend António Faria on this project.

What I'm proposing here is to look at this installation from a certain distance, in an analytical way. But I'd like to make it clear that, at the time, this work was above all a pleasure for me. I really had fun doing it. I didn't think about any theoretical issues, nor did I adopt a theme on which I was doing a practical experiment. I don't claim the 'practice as research' model for myself. The one who conceived the scenario and the one I am here analyzing that work are not quite the same person.

2. THE FUNCTION OF PHOTOGRAPHS

The photographs of Raquel's meetings have no artistic quality in themselves. They are informal, or 'amateurish'. They are mainly affective in nature, like the photographs people take at family or friend gatherings. However, they exist in an artistic context. They are part of an artist's work. I ask: How can we define their artistic function?

Essentially, the photographs are testimonies to Raquel's encounters. They are 'memories' of a moment of sharing. But they are more than that. They can be included in the category of records that began to be used when art freed itself from the preponderance of the object; and actions, happenings and performances were invented. In this sense, Raquel's photographs are hybrids, between the objectivity of recording an artistic event and the affectivity of personal photographs that record gatherings of friends. Art mixes with life.

But there is more to say about the images from the moment they are inserted into the installation. If they originate from an artistic event (the meetings), now the photographs are reintegrated into a new artistic product. They are returned to an artistic context. And in this transit, two types of displacement can be distinguished: (1) the displacement of certain portions of life into the context of the installation – a displacement for which the photograph serves as a vehicle; and (2) the displacement into the artistic context of photographs that, in themselves, had no artistic quality, a bit like a readymade.

The images are both the *support* of a displacement (the displacement of what happened in the meetings) and the *object* of a displacement (the displacement of mundane photographs, as artefacts of representation, to this new artistic context).

3. THE CONTENT OF THE PHOTOGRAPHS

The testimony that the photographs give us is very partial to what actually happened at the meetings. Firstly, photographs are only visual in nature. The experience of the protagonists and the space where they met are reduced to their visual aspect to the exclusion of the other senses. Secondly, they only capture a few moments, representative of a time that lasts approximately one hour. That's the condition of the images. They are suspended. They capture the moment in which an event can be concentrated – the *punctum temporis*. Finally, images are confined. They exist within a certain framework that includes some things and excludes many others. What we see in the installation is the result of a choice made by the protagonists of the meeting, who turned the camera on themselves. Despite the spontaneity of the photographs, they nevertheless reflect this choice, more or less intentional, of a frame; and framing is an act that generates meanings.

According to Roland Barthes, the simple act of framing a piece of reality implies an intellectualization of our

relationship with the world (Barthes, 1977). The self-reflexivity of representation derives directly from the act of framing and from the 'intellectual' nature of this act: the frame *knows* how to represent. For Barthes, the process of defining a particular frame is common to theatre, cinema, painting and even literature – arts that he classifies as *dioptric*[1].

So, although the photographs of the meetings are spontaneous, if we look at them in the light of Barthes' statements, it becomes clear that they imply an ideological program. And this program is constructed through the presence of Raquel and the person she meets, but also through the presence of domestic spaces. And when it comes to presenting spaces, it's interesting to compare these images with those that are usually used to publish architectural projects and, in particular, houses. In these images, there are usually no people. Nor are there any signs of domestic life, such as newspapers next to the sofa, condiments in the kitchen or shampoo bottles in the shower. Often, there is no furniture at all. The phenomenon we call 'dwelling' is eclipsed. The vicissitudes of everyday life are thus consigned to the realm of adversity. We dream of a pristine world. Ideologically, these photographs have a formal rigor that excludes the mundanity of life. They are puritanical. Or authoritarian. These photographs are not only *authorial*; they are also *authoritarian*.

On the contrary, Raquel's photographs depict houses as they are: as supports for what happens in them. We can see spaces being used for eating, bathing, sitting or lying around chatting, for intimacy, for fun. They are behind what happens.

I make these statements, but I'm an architect myself. When I started doing scenography, I was already an architect. I believed that the two activities couldn't be confused, not so much because there is a difference when it comes to artefacts, but because the attitude of those who occupy the spaces is different. The audience has an intensely attentive perception, unlike the common inhabitants of the spaces who don't necessarily have a keen awareness of their metric or material characteristics. Walter Benjamin refers to a 'distracted perception' (Benjamin, 1968). As opposed to the abstract way in which architects deal with space, distracted perception is characteristic of the mundane experience of spaces by people in their daily lives.

I think this difference can be applied directly to architectural photographs and to Raquel's photographs. In architectural photographs, the viewer concentrates *on the space*. That's what there is to see. In photographs like Raquel's, what you see is above all *what is happening in the space*, to the detriment of the space itself. In other words, the two attitudes you can have when you're in a space – attentive perception and distracted perception – apply to those who see the space through the intermediary of photography.

4. THE HOUSE OF PHOTOGRAPHS

My task was therefore to create an installation – which, being in the artistic sphere, is subject to an attentive gaze – from a set of photographs in which the space is simply being inhabited. The *attentive* perception of the installation's visitors was directed towards images of the *distracted* lives of the people in the photographs. But the situation becomes more complex if we consider that the visitors to the installation were going to inhabit that house themselves, namely when they become the protagonists of a meeting. In this sense, the installation fulfils an ambiguous function, between being *contemplated* and being *inhabited* – between being an artistic setting *like those made in theatres* and being a setting to be inhabited *like architecture*. In this circumstance, the visitor is ambiguously inside and outside the situation, simultaneously an observer and an inhabitant.

And the question isn't just about the beholder. The photographer can also be considered. For those photographing architecture, the space is external to them, even if they are physically in it. They are not inhabiting it. They are voyeurs, like someone peering through a keyhole (the camera lens). And in Raquel's case? This is where the difference between architecture and scenography becomes difficult. On the one hand, Raquel's photographs are taken by people who are actually inhabiting the space. You could even say that the act of photographing is part of 'inhabiting'. But that's no longer true when Raquel knows she's being photographed. *She knows that she is going to be the object of the public's attentive perception and,*

1 Dioptrics is the branch of optics that deals with the phenomena of light or image refraction.

at least at that moment, the house she is in is a theatre set. This is the answer I propose to give to the theme of this conference, i.e. the difference between *art* and *life* in terms of the spaces in which their respective performativities operate. Architecture is made to be inhabited, and inhabiting has a functional aim that is autonomous, and not dependent on "being seen for an artistic purpose". Spaces that are designed or used for "events intended to be seen as art" belong to the realm of scenography (or set design, or performance design, or stage design, or...). Performers are by definition unable to 'inhabit' from the moment their behaviour is subjected to a gaze that transforms it into art.

5. ARCHITECTURE OF PLEASURE

In the theory of architecture that Bernard Tschumi produced in the 1970s and 1980s, he also identifies a split between the objective nature of architectural space and the presence of people in this space (Tschumi, 1999a). And among the various considerations he has made on this subject, I would like to emphasize two that could be related to the installation I designed for Raquel.

One has to do with the hegemony of order, a hegemony that Tschumi claims dominates the entire history of architecture. I can't say that the installation doesn't obey an order. On the contrary, for ease of assembly and disassembly, I used a modular system for the construction and layout of the walls of the 'house'. However, this order is not apparent. On the one hand, the panels have been arranged in such a way as to create a labyrinth. The house is a labyrinth. I thought it would be interesting for visitors to discover the spaces progressively. On the other hand, the possibility of understanding an order doesn't survive the profusion of images either. The configuration of the space is diluted by the presence of the images, as if we were inside a photo album rather than compartments. In fact, there are so many images that it's impossible to grasp them all in one visit. The eye drifts through the images, movement which is itself contrary to any order. I think the excess of images causes a vertigo effect - a *vertigo of images*.

Secondly, Tschumi uses the expression 'architecture of pleasure' and states that "The architecture of pleasure is to be found where the concept and the experience of space abruptly coincide." (Tschumi, 1999b) I would like to believe that the house I designed for Raquel could be close to being an 'architecture of pleasure'. After all, it's about exhibiting a collection of lovers.

6. CONCLUSION

If the possibility of an art that blends with life is a little over 100 years old, bringing theatre closer to reality is almost as old as theatre itself. The fact that theatre is an art in which people can act in a way that is similar to the way they act in their lives has meant that it has always been a particularly 'realistic' art. But I think that this proximity between art and life only makes the difference between the two evident. The more theatre resembles our daily lives, the more we realise that it is not daily life. A readymade artwork only highlights how the artistic context modifies what comes from life, removing the mundanity of life from these objects. The form is the same (it coincides), but the thing is not. The same happens in theatre. (1) What an actor does is denaturalised by the social device called 'theatre', and even what appears to be 'dwelling' becomes a performance, meant to be seen. The actors know that what they do acquires meaning to the extent that it is observed. (2) The forms created or adopted to contextualise the performance, even if they have a previous existence (a 'real' existence, in the context of everyday life), become scenographic. What Tschumi imagines when he thinks of an 'architecture of pleasure' is that an architect can produce spaces in which this disjunction between their free and unconscious enjoyment (spaces that are the target of distracted perception) and conscious enjoyment (the target of observation) is broken. In the *Exhibition of Lovers*, I also tried to deal with this disjunction: on the one hand, the checkered matrix of spaces; on the other, the labyrinth and the vertigo of images.

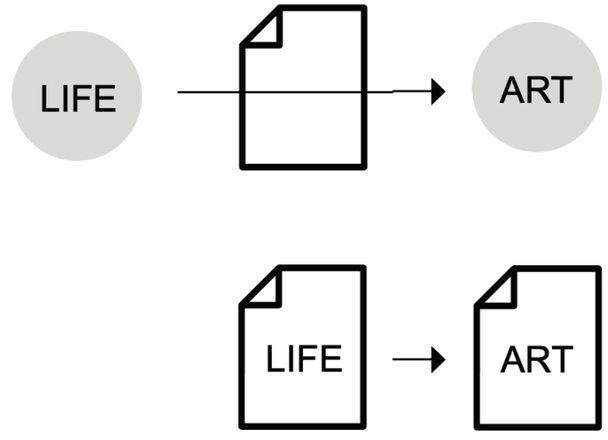

Fig. 1. *The dual function of the* Exhibition of Lovers *photographs: (1) photography as a vehicle for moving a portion of life into the realm of the installation; (2) banal photographs moved into the artistic realm as a readymade.*

Fig. 2. *Exhibition of Lovers*: top view (photo: TBA / Tiago de Jesus Brás)

Fig. 3. *Exhibition of Lovers*: dining room (photo: TBA / Tiago de Jesus Brás)

Fig. 4. *Exhibition of Lovers*: bedroom (photo: TBA / Tiago de Jesus Brás)

Fig. 5. *Exhibition of Lovers*: living room – back of sofa and wall (photo: TBA / Tiago de Jesus Brás)

ARTISTS, PRODUCERS AND INSTITUTIONS

Conception: Raquel André

Scenography: José Capela, with the assistance of António Pedro Faria
Light Design: Carin Geada, with the assistance of Ana Carocinho
Music: Odete
Artistic Collaboration: Leonor Buescu
Production: Missanga

Video Comunication: Afonso Sousa
Dufusion: Mikado Blue
Co-production: Teatro do Bairro Alto (TBA)
Project financed by: Direção Geral das artes / República Portuguesa

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Biography

Theatre researcher with training in scenography, specialist in art history and master in Aesthetics and Art. Scenic designer with 15 years of experience in different creative and technical areas of theatre, television and cinema. Teacher in different cultural institutions. Secretary of the Executive Committee of the Mexican Association of Theatre Research 2022-2025. Member of the research group Teatro de Fronteras of AMIT. Member of the Mexican College of Scenic Design. Currently, I am a costume designer in the Wardrobe Department of the show Joyá by Cirque du Soleil, Riviera Maya. Links:

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SCENOGRAPHY AND INTERMEDIALITY. A STUDY OF MACHINE BODIES AND ATMOSPHERES IN STAGING: EL VIAJE A LA LUNA O VIAJE A LA X (DE LA LUNA A LA TIERRA)

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Abstract

The paper is part of my research carried out in the speciality of Art History at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, in the 2022 year. In this project I propose to analyse the visual and spatial narrative of the notion “human-machine” in Alejandro Luna’s scenographic design for the dance piece, El viaje a la luna o viaje a la X (De la luna a la tierra) premiered in 2002. The staging is a free version of Le Voyage dans La Lune by Georges Méliès, directed by Raúl Parrao as part of the homage that the Compañía Nacional de Danza paid to the feature film.

The concept of the “human-machine” was first described in the 18th century by the philosopher René Descartes, who compared the complexity of the functioning of the human body to the machine. For the play, Alejandro Luna designed atmospheres that from my perspective establish an analogy between the body and the machine. To study this phenomenon, I focused on the scenographic elements and the multimedia, which was made with stereoscopic images that recall the cinematographic trickery of Georges Méliès. The script consists of digital images, combining flat and stereoscopic images. To describe the different atmospheres, I chose three images. The first, the stereoscopic image of the Golconda; the second, a photographic impression of the biomechanised movements of the dancers among the scenographic elements, which allude to machines. Finally, the flat image of the architecture of the factories. The choice of different types of images helps us to understand the role that atmospheres play in an immersive experience. The importance of this staging from the beginning of the 21st century lies precisely in the fact that for the first time, the spectators were part of a Mexican production that integrated multimedia into the language of the stage.

Keywords: human machine, scenography, stereoscopic images, atmospheres, mise-en-scène, cinematic trickery.

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout their history, cinema and theatre have shared a set of tricks, skills and technical discoveries that have contributed to the development of illusionism; it is possible to draw parallels between the spectacular scene of the Roman circus to the special effects cinema and 3D virtual theatre (Bradley, 2020) of the 21st century. Even before the invention of the camera and the cinematograph, trickery played an important role in the development of stage machinery. Since the 18th century, various mechanical devices were created, such as the image projector and the stereoscope, which gradually fostered the formation of audiovisual language and new atmospheres in magicians' shows, cinema and later, theatre, a language that paved the way for immersive experiences. In this research, I will analyze Alejandro Luna's scenographic design for the dance piece El viaje a la luna o viaje a la X (de la luna a la tierra), premiered in 2002 at the Teatro de las Artes del Centro Nacional de las Artes in Mexico City, under the direction of the choreographer Raúl Parrao. I will concentrate on the scenography and the multimedia proposal that Raúl Luna developed with digital images. Also, with the costume designers María and Tolita Figueroa, Marcelo Gaete as musical compositor and Víctor Flores as the executive producer. This production was part of the international tribute to the centenary of the film Le Voyage dans La Lune, by Georges Méliès, presented by the Compañía Nacional de Danza in Mexico City and Lyon, France.

As will be observed, this study considers scenography as a piece in itself that integrates or enters into dialogue with the other elements of the staging, in a parallel way to how one can contemplate a part of a whole, how a sculptural ensemble or a mural integrated into the architecture can be study separate. In this essay I will only try to outline the way in which Luna used certain resources, atmospheres, and languages to pay homage to the film by Georges Méliès. Due to the scope of this research and the intrinsic complexity of studying a montage, especially when there is no access to the audiovisual records of the play, I will focus on outlining Alejandro Luna's visual homage to Méliès' tricks through scenographic and multimedia design. The innovative proposal combined visual narrative with the technological resources of cinema, as well as integrating the languages of theatre and dance. The piece invited the spectator to take a journey through the history of cinema through Méliès; it was based on the cyclorama as a projection screen, and included optical games, atmospheres, light effects and scenographic objects that brought the spectators' senses into play. The multimedia proposal functioned as a reference to trickery and the beginning of special effects in cinema, which permeated the living arts throughout the 20th century.

It should be noted that, although this staging is very relevant because it introduced virtual reality into Mexican dance and theatre, no video record has been located. This research was based on the analysis of photographic material, some sketches, and other available images. Although a version of the story board was located, it is not known if it is complete, if there were modifications for the staging, the time that each projection lasted, the characteristics of the musical script, the relationship between the choreographic design and the multimedia. All of these are very important elements for the aesthetic experience of the scenic phenomenon.

2. *EL VIAJE A LA LUNA O VIAJE A LA X (DE LA LUNA A LA TIERRA)*: STEREOSCOPIC IMAGES AS A REPLACEMENT FOR THE TRICKERY OF GEORGES MÉLIÈS

El viaje a la luna o viaje a la X (De la luna a la tierra) is inspired by Jules Verne's 1865 literary work From the Earth to the Moon and the 1902 feature film Le Voyage dans la Lune. The choreography is based on the bizarre dance concept of Raúl Parrao . Where the bizarre is the unusual terror that beats underneath everyday life. It is influenced by theatre, comic art, and special effects to explore the unknown of everyday life and the body. The choreographic piece includes the letter X, which alludes to the group U.X. Onodanza, founded by the choreographer, represents the network of meanings implied in this letter: '[...] a connotation of unknown, mathematical and genetic, even a prohibition, rejection, danger and even death' (Correa & Vasconcelos). (Correa & Vasconcelos, 1996). Based on Parrao's proposal, the production design delves into the illusory possibilities of stereoscopic images, the magic of trickery and the special effects that more than a century ago materialised man's dream of travelling to the moon with stop motion and photomontage. These are simple effects, but potentially important for cinema and the living arts of the 20th century. The choreography takes elements from contemporary ballet and bizarre dance to create scenes full of illusionism and trickery in the manner of Méliès, who conceived the cinema as a 'magical artefact' capable of combining different artistic disciplines. Optical illusions, image substitution, animated photography and film photomontage were replaced by stereoscopic images, special effects, and lighting with the intention of bringing viewers closer to an immersive experience.

In this dance and theatre production, the success of the multimedia work lies in the fact that it provided a new way of telling a story visually and corporeally. Twenty years ago, the technology that made it possible to create images and simulated spaces by visual devices were not interesting to stage creators, because they were considered languages made for the visual arts, cinema, video games, and above all for science. In fact, Raúl Luna's professional experience was based on animation productions for television and film; it was Alejandro Luna who, from his theatrical and cinematographic experience, created the narrative and the visual script of the project. In the case of the choreography, the multimedia work mainly influenced the way in which the dancers inhabited the space and related to that other materiality that was generated from the back of the stage, with two projectors with DLP technology and a cyclorama as a projection screen in Italian format. As for the reception, the spectator not only concentrated on the bodies in movement, the music, the sounds, the objects, the lighting, the costumes, but also on the illusionism produced by the movement of the images. For the multimedia design, original scenes were taken from the film, such as the meeting of the astronomers, the construction of the rocket, the chimneys on the roof of the laboratory, the take-off platform, the impact of the rocket on the space station, the impact of the rocket on the moon, the arrival of the astronomers, the dream of the stars, the dream of Phoebus and Saturn, the journey to earth of the Selenites, the Selenites and the palace, the fall of the rocket to earth, underwater scenes, the steamship, the arrival and reception of the astronomers on earth. (Fig.1)

Over the course of 60 minutes, 29 representative shots of the feature film were projected, 23 of which were a combination of flat and stereoscopic images influenced by the plastic art of Méliès. The anaglyph technique was used, which consists of a single image containing two mixed images corresponding to the points of view of each eye, but printed in different colors, such as red and blue, or red and green. For this production, the first color combination was used. This effect can only be seen with glasses or 3D viewers; their lenses or filters must be of the same colors as the images produced, in this case red and blue. The effect of the glasses is to hide one of the mixed images from one of the eyes. That is, the red lens hides the red part of the image from your eye and the blue lens does the same with its respective eye and image. The result is that each eye sees a different image. The fact that the stereoscopic images are slightly displaced is so that each eye sees them independently and the brain processes them by joining them together to obtain a three-dimensional image, like a real image (Navarro & Martínez, 2018, pp.18). In the end, the projection hosted three-dimensional static images through stereography and moving images with an immersive experience. The immersive experience was similar to 3D cinema with stereoscopic projections in colour accompanied by the orchestra.

Considering that the concept of the virtual was still unnamed in Mexican theatre, the trick (or effect) of bringing the spectator closer to virtual reality (VR) through stereoscopic images was remarkably innovative for the stage at the beginning of the 21st century. Once the spectator agreed to put on the 3D glasses, the sensorial experience became immersive and for a few seconds, their body forgot the frontality of their seat to enter an artificial 3D scenario.

What is interesting about this experience is the relationship that the spectator established with his or her body and the stage space. On the one hand, the Italian-style distribution of the scenographic space and its theatrical elements (objects) reaffirmed the theatrical convention of the black box in conjunction with the bodies of the dancers. On the other hand, the experience of cinema and virtual reality adapted to the staging questioned the place of bodies or non-bodies in a kind of mixed experience, which started from presentiality and conviviality, and culminated in the immersion into an artificial 3D stage. In this way, the spectator's experience approached the experience of special effects cinema.

Fig.1. Sequence of images from the film *Le Voyage dans la Lune*. Collage of images: The meeting of the astronomers; the construction of the rocket; the chimneys on the roof of the laboratory; the launch pad; the impact of the rocket on the moon; the arrival of the astronomers. *Note.* By Mahatma Ordaz, 2022.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE SCENOGRAPHIC AND MULTIMEDIA SPACE

In the darkness of the third call, the musical accompaniment of the orchestra can be heard. The musicians are placed concentrically on the stage and are surrounded by a dim, warm overhead light that helps to highlight the projection of the title of the work, the image is present from the back of the cyclorama. Meanwhile, the dancers move around the stage. Gloom and haze take over the scene until it gradually becomes empty. The stillness of the stage is interrupted by the entrance of a dancer, who turns his back to the audience and stands at the centre of the stage while staring at the cyclorama. The screen is illuminated by a collage of six images of 19th century toys: a locomotive, a drum, a horse statuette, a rag doll, a clown and a caricatured image of Méliès in his youth. The images fade away and two characters take centre stage, with taciturn movements they invite the rest of the dancers to occupy the rest of the space. From stillness to chaos. A stereoscopic image of René Magritte's Golconda (1953) is projected onto the cyclorama. The static bodies in the painting appear to fall slowly onto the stage while the bodies that inhabit the stage become agile, repetitive to the point of becoming mechanical. (Fig.2) The Golconda becomes part of the playful space. As a trick, the performer invites the spectators to reflect about the play of realities (virtual and real reality) that coexist on stage.

The relationship of similarities between the bodies of the dancers and the character of René Magritte is suggested by the costumes: white shirt, black suit, and bowler hat with which the artist often photographed or painted himself. This play of projected images and bodies in movement makes us think of stage reality as a trick or a game of perceptions that at times makes us notice the 'physical I' and at others, the 'virtual I' of the dancers. Let us understand the 'virtual self' as the expression and extension of the 'physical self' within the plane of virtual existence that functions as, '[...] the active principle, that which reveals the split potency of the real [...]' (Diodato Roberto, 2011, pp. 19). In the case of the spectator, his or her attention is divided between the two planes, the physical one that happens in the frame of the black box and the stage, and the virtual one that happens on the projection on the cyclorama. The projections take influence from futurist architecture to place the spectator in the technical progress of the 20th century and in the surrealism of Magritte.

One of the questions that arises in this reflection is how does Magritte's pictorial play relate to the film Le Voyage dans la Lune and the choreography of Journey to the Moon? It is possible to think that the three works problematize from their resources the place of the material body and the body as metaphor. That is to say, a body exists, relates, has limits and in contrast, creates extensions and imaginaries, and at times, thinks itself as the imagination of an existence. However, the action of imagining other bodies imperiously needs the body itself in order to feel and perceive other materialities.

From the discourse of technical progress, the dreamed journey to the moon had already been glimpsed by Galileo, Copernicus and of course reflected upon by the enlightened, such as René Descartes and his concept of the 'human machine' (Aguilar, 2010, pp. 764). However, it was literature that appealed to the reader's imagination to make the journey to the moon a reality.

Fig. 2. *El viaje a la luna o viaje a la X (De la luna a la tierra)* [Photograph]. Centro Nacional de investigación, Documentación e Información Teatral Rodolfo Usigli (2002).

Fig. 3. *El viaje a la luna o viaje a la X (De la luna a la tierra)* [Photograph]. Centro Nacional de investigación, Documentación e Información Teatral Rodolfo Usigli (2002).

In Figure 3, Méliès presents a frontal space, with a background scenography made of canvas painted frames that simulate a construction workshop. The scene is saturated with workers at work. The metal building dominates the scene; the repetition in perspective of the roof gives a sense of enclosure and solidity to the space. The seriality of the industrial structure and the objects in the warehouse match the sensation of the constant movement of the machines and the dynamism of the workers' bodies banging against the

metal structures. The actions of the men emphasize the importance of the body, the strength and precision of the workers in the mechanization of the tools. In contrast, in the scenography. Luna proposes a stage in chiaroscuro, inhabited by the bodies of the dancers in movement, bodies that seem biomechanised and referenced by coordinates. The position and movement of the six dancers ambiguously draw the axes of the Cartesian plane (perpendicular movements that evoke two axes: the horizontal x-axis and a vertical y-axis). A path from 'x' to 'y' defines the direction of the dancers, two perpendicular axes that intersect, intersected by the lighting, and approaching the center of the stage. According to Luna, 'X' refers to the illusion of travelling to the third dimension, but also represents the rocket's return journey to earth.

There are three representations that do not escape Descartes' orthogonal axes: the cylinder, represented by the vibrant wooden bowl that houses the founding fuel of homo machine; the sphere that functions as the propellant of the slightest movement and takes the form of the cold gears of the machine; and finally, the rectangle materialized on the projection screen and placed at the back of the stage. The sepia-colored smoke completely envelops the space and the outlines of the orthogonal projection on the cyclorama.

Luna visualizes the choreographic sequence as the detonator, the founding fuel of the machine. The circle is present in the form of the moon, the rocket, and the gear in the choreographic piece. In the film, Méliès makes a general shot of a giant gear, which occupies half the frame; he repeats the formula with the rocket, but now from the center of the frame. In the choreography, the gear is replicated in space; first, it is projected onto the cyclorama as an isometric projection, then it is presented as a break in front of the audience, and finally, it takes the form of a boiling cauldron. The scenographic design is conceived as an analogy of the human body and the machine. The scenographic objects such as the cauldron and the gear are understood as a metaphor for biomechanising bodies: the dancers enveloped by lights and smoke. The stereoscopic projections of the gears and the roofs of the industrial buildings are repeated cyclically, others are transformed, such as the rocket reaching the moon, which acts as a telescope and the lens of George Méliès' camera.

4. CONCLUSION

With this brief reflection we are interested, on the one hand, in rescuing an innovative stage project and precursor of audiovisual media in the Mexican performing arts of the 20th century, and on the other, in recovering Alejandro Luna's homage to the feature film Le Voyage dans la Lune, and to the technical and artistic legacy of the filmmaker George Méliès. In an effort not to forget both creators and their contributions to 20th century theatre and cinema, we sought to understand a multidisciplinary project from the influence of the French director, but also from the complexity of cinematographic language, the performativity of visual discourses, theatricality, theatrical atmospheres, lighting and stage space.

The re-signification of the body and gesturality in Journey to the Moon recalls what for Antonin Artaud was truly theatrical: corporeality, gesturality and glossolalia in substitution of the word, what it meant for cinema at the end of the 19th century: the possibility of substituting verbal expression for gesture. In the 'theatre of cruelty', Artaud describes the concrete language of the theatre as a language that satisfies all the senses and not the word. This language is the gesture recovered from oriental theatre, expressed on stage by the actor, who is the possessor of gestural, bodily, and visual language. Visual language is the poetry of space that creates images with bodies, with the vibratory quality of sound (Artaud, 1978, pp. 94) and light, which not only colors the scene, but also brings suggestion, movement, and dynamism. What Artaud did not foresee at the time was that, in the last forty years of the twentieth century, technology and the relations of technical production would penetrate the experience of socio-cultural and artistic relations, bringing about an imminent change in human and artistic interactions.

The 20th century theatre experience not only involved the experience of ephemerality and cruelty, but also the search for other means of expression, audiovisual technologies and multi-sensory experiences that would motivate audiences to go to theatres. The trip to the moon happened 20 years ago, the details and the experience remained only in the minds of those who attended. However, the photographic record and the story board allow us to outline the creative richness of an avant-garde production that broke with artistic frontiers and opted for the hybridisation of media on stage. In this sense, Luna made two great contributions to the 21st century stage: first, he transformed the stage space into a place for new artistic and technological relations

and intersections. Second, through the visual language and the atmospheres of the spaces, he constructed an idea of scene, body and spectator that was totally different from that used in 20th century staging.

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Biography

Jovana Stefanović is a Belgrade-based architect, opera singer and PhD candidate at the University of Belgrade Faculty of Architecture. She has been the recipient of various scholarships and awards, including the Austria's Agency for Education and Internationalisation Scholarship for an exchange at the Faculty of Applied Arts in Vienna and the Dositeja scholarship for the best final year students in Serbia. In addition to her architectural practice, Jovana is actively involved in exhibition and set design. With a background as a professionally classically trained musician, she expresses her passion for music and theater through scenography, working on plays such as "Twelfth Night", "Half Life", "Hrabra Hajdučica" and "Kruna Jovanova".

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OPERA THROUGH ATMOSPHERIC NARRATIVES

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Abstract

By analyzing the relationship between character portrayal in contemporary opera productions and the creation of architectural atmosphere, this study interprets how theatrical staging can serve as a clear platform for critiquing societal norms, focusing on the position of women, particularly those depicted as sex workers, through a comparative analysis of various productions of Verdi's *La Traviata*.

The study examines directorial approaches to portraying diverse facets of Violetta Valéry, a prominent marginalized female character. Through a comparative analysis of three distinct stagings that underscore different dimensions of her complex personality, the research investigates the interplay between character portrayal and spatial representation of pivotal moments in libretto. This interpretive analysis, framed by the architectural responses in realizing visionary opera staging concepts (*Regieoper*), sheds light on how architectural choices reflect societal attitudes. By emphasizing varied facets of Violetta's character, these productions offer novel insights into familiar narratives, amplifying subtle messages that might otherwise be overlooked.

Ultimately, this research emphasizes the potency of architectural atmospheres in visual storytelling and shaping perceptions of marginalized individuals, underscoring the potential for theatrical productions to serve as platforms for social critique and catalysts for change. The nuanced use of atmosphere enriches our interpretation of Violetta's character, revealing layers of her personality and societal constraints that traditional staging might overlook. The spatial dynamics and scenic design not only frame her narrative but also evoke emotional and psychological responses that deepen our understanding of her plight and resilience

Keywords: affective atmosphere, spatial dramaturgy, opera production, La Traviata

1. INTRODUCTION

This research seeks to deepen our understanding of the specific elements linked to the creation of affective atmospheres, further contributing directly to the shaping of spatial narratives and dramaturgy in opera productions. On the broader plan, it is inevitable to stress the fact that theatre *always* operates within the field of socio-symbolic practice, making the aesthetic investigations of several analysed productions intersect with ethical, moral, political, and social aspects. This phenomenon will be examined through the list of different opera productions of Giuseppe Verdi's *La Traviata* both set accurately in epoch following well-known traditional staging tendencies, and also contemporary productions that base their entire aesthetic appeal on accentuating specific aspects of the main heroine's persona. By identifying the individual components that construct atmospheric narratives and linking them to key moments in the libretto, the aim is to address whether certain types of productions utilise similar expressive means to emphasise elements of spatial dramaturgy through the construction of affective atmospheres. In this manner, the final goal is to highlight the hidden potential of incorporation of these specific elements in a precise manner, to magnify through staging all questioning and destabilising of entrenched societal norms, revealing the intricate relationship between spatial dramaturgy and societal critique.

Given the infamous background of the main character Violetta Valéry, the analysis has to be conveyed with feminist theories and concepts closely related to the term gender performativity. In the opera productions being analysed in this research (which are firmly connected to Violetta's identity decomposition and decoding on personal and intrapersonal levels) it is essential to have in mind the quotation of Jürs-Munby from the Introduction to Lehmann's *Postmodern Theatre* where it is stated that "performance has the power to question and destabilise the spectator's construction of identity". These claims will be examined through the breakdown of all elements that serve as the initial trigger, ultimately leading to the formation of spatial narratives - providing fertile ground upon which the audience bases their perceptions.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Individual ideas emerging from dramaturgical and architectural studies focus on how space can shape the narrative and elicit emotional responses from the audience. Therefore, the theoretical base for the analysis of opera through atmospheric narratives will be based on **spatial dramaturgy** and **affective atmospheres** being present through all different stagings of Verdi ´s La Traviata. Both selected terms are purely based on Anderson's definition written in *Emotion, Space and Society:*

"*...atmospheres are singular affective qualities that emanate from but exceed the assembling of bodies. As such, to attend to affective atmospheres is to learn to be affected by the ambiguities of affect/emotion, by that which is determinate and indeterminate, present and absent, singular and vague.*" (Anderson, 2009, p. 77)

Following the main concepts of affective atmospheres defined by Mikel Dufrenne in *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, the atmospheres will be understood through their possibility of performance that "it is through an atmosphere that a represented object will be apprehended and will take on a certain meaning".

For Dufrenne, the "atmosphere" of the aesthetic object elicits a feeling or emotion in a spectator, viewer or listener which "completes" the aesthetic object and "surpasses" it (Dufrenne, 1953). The singular affective quality of an aesthetic object is "open" to being "apprehended" through feelings or emotions (Anderson, 2009).

Of course, not only can we analyse the aesthetic and "affective qualities" of space. Following all the contemporary theatrical tendencies, the question is if the classically established aesthetic criteria of "sublime, tragic, comic and beautiful" are even for the detailed analysis of performativity in the modern era. Probably, the answer is negative, because it is impossible to focus solely on the aesthetic presence of stagings, as Lehmann stated more than twenty years ago:

"...theatre which is embedded in society in multiple ways – from the social character of the production and the public financing to the communal form of reception – exists in the field of real socio-symbolic practice. While the common reduction of the aesthetic to social positions and statements remains empty, inversely all aesthetic interrogation is blind if it does not recognise the reflection of social norms of perception and behaviour in the artistic practice of theatre." (Lehman, 2006, pp. 18-19)

Through the methodology, which will later be explained, the main goal in this research is to underscore how stage space and visual elements become an integral part of the narrative, creating emotional layers that the audience experiences as part of the performance. In this context, each production of *La Traviata* can utilise space to "tell us" different aspects of the narrative through the atmosphere, adding complexity and depth to the well-known plot. Additionally, theories of affective atmospheres, developed by many authors such as Böhme and Deleuze & Guattari, offer a compelling perspective on the role of space as both an emotional and narrative agent. According to these theories, the atmosphere is never merely the result of spatial elements (lighting, scenography, movement) but also something intangible that arises between the performers and the audience. Therefore, each new production of *La Traviata* can be analysed through this lens - examining how it generates distinct atmospheres and how space acts as a mediator of emotions.

In theatre, political engagement does not consist in the topics but in the forms of perception. Yet theatre is an art of the social par excellence. Its analysis, therefore, cannot settle for depoliticisation because its practice is objectively politically co-determined (Lehmann, 2006). Theatre serves as a powerful tool for challenging societal norms, particularly those tied to gender roles and the restrictions placed on women like Violetta, whose identity as a courtesan inherently carries the weight of social judgment and stigma. Through its ability to disrupt established narratives, theatre exposes the rigid constructs that define morality, propriety, and femininity. It unravels the layers of societal critique embedded in such roles, shedding light on the systemic oppression and double standards imposed on women. By creating a space for alternative perspectives, it encourages audiences to question the societal constraints that women navigate, often against their will, and to reconsider the narratives that perpetuate such inequalities. With this in mind, the different productions of *La Traviata* provide unique audience experience through their management of space and atmosphere, creating singular spatial narratives.

3. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Previous research conducted earlier in the same year focused on examining how the staging modalities reflect the interpretation of Violetta as the main character. Therefore, this research aimed to deepen our understanding of how spatial organisation and architecture in theatrical set design emphasises the power of architectural atmosphere in visual storytelling and shapes our character perception (Stefanović, 2024). The central research hypothesis was that regardless of the audience's prior knowledge or musically oriented professional background, well-defined directorial concepts can convey intended interpretations effectively through atmospheric elements. In other words, the prior should lead the audience to a clear perception of character depth and understanding of the societal critique being presented on stage. For this examination, the main character of *La Traviata*, the role of Violetta Valéry, was suitable regarding her role as a marginalised individual easily concocted to social judgment and oppression.

The study employs a case study methodology, focusing on three productions that intentionally deviate from classical interpretations of *La Traviata* to offer modern perspectives on Violetta's character. Again, it is necessary to cite Hans-Thies Lehmann to understand the importance of a contemporary and non-traditional approach to libretto:

"...the majority of spectators, who – to put it crudely – expect from the theatre the illustration of classic texts, may well accept the 'modern' set but subscribe to a comprehensible fable (story), coherent meaning, cultural self-affirmation and touching theatre feelings. It is essential to accept the coexistence of divergent theatre forms and concepts in which no paradigm is dominant." (Lehmann, 2006, p. 19)

This was one of the reasons that productions selected in this work were once by Willy Decker, Robert Carsen and Henning Brockhaus - all of which were primarily based on the diversity of interpretations of Violetta's character in order to highlight specific messages of the libretto through her portrayal and provide new readings of her as a representative of marginalised social strata (Stefanović, 2024). Each of the three selected productions shaped Violetta's character through one emphasised aspect of her persona. Each production's

set design was analysed in terms of geometry, mise-en-scène, and thematic symbolism. These analyses included spatial decomposition, decoding symbolic design choices, and assessing the staging's alignment with thematic objectives. The productions were compared based on recurring themes and elements such as mortality and societal judgment. This framework allowed for a systematic evaluation of the spatial and atmospheric differences across productions.

Later, qualitative data were collected through structured interviews with audience members from various backgrounds, who provided insights into their perceptions of each production's set design and its impact on their interpretation of Violetta's character. The findings indicated that each production's unique staging successfully communicated distinct interpretative nuances of Violetta's character. Interview data revealed that spatial elements and staging choices did evoke varied emotional responses, with audience members reporting feelings of empathy, judgment, or critique in line with each production's design intent. For example, in Decker's production, the symbolic clock reinforced empathy for Violetta's plight, while Carsen's depiction of moral decay elicited critical reflections on societal expectations. The data also demonstrated that audiences interpret symbolic elements consistently, affirming that clear spatial organisation effectively supports directorial intention through spatial narratives. Additionally, participants noted that Violetta's aria, "Sempre libera", served as a pivotal moment for forming their perceptions, suggesting that architectural staging, combined with several spatial and narrative elements, significantly shaped the direction of interpretation. This conclusion leads further to the analysis of distinct elements building these affective atmospheres. Atmospheres will be perceived as "the shared reality of the perceiver and the perceived. It is the reality of the perceived as the sphere of its presence and the reality of the perceiver insofar as he or she, in sensing the atmosphere, is bodily present in a particular way." (Böhme, 2013, pp. 41-42)

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Atmospheric generators

Given the theoretical explanations, throughout the methodological approach, the focus will be on understanding precisely which role these elements play in the overall production of atmosphere. Obviously, the whole is more than its parts, but this is not sufficient. As such, to attend to affective atmospheres is to learn to be affected by the ambiguities of affect/emotion, by that which is determinate and indeterminate, present and absent, singular and vague.

By categorizing productions into traditional and contemporary stagings (Fig. 1), the study relies on analysing specific methodological approaches through which spatial gestures shape the interpretation of atmospheric narratives. The focus is on providing empirical insights into dramaturgical effects, as well as an in-depth analysis of affective atmospheres by examining the impact of aesthetic and interpretative decisions on audience perception and experience. Within the framework of a multiple case study conducted to analyze affective atmospheres in the opera *La Traviata*, the methodology examines the individual impacts of various compositional elements—lighting, colour palette, and spatial elements present on stage.

The approach itself consists of several key steps:

Identification of Atmospheric Generators: The initial phase of analysis emphasizes identifying key stage elements that function as atmospheric generators-lighting, colour palettes, scenery elements and/or props. These elements are examined for their capacity to direct audience focus and elicit targeted emotional effects, positioning them as fundamental contributors to the construction of the stage atmosphere.

Segmentation of Elements into Functional Categories: The visual and spatial elements of the stage are systematically categorized into functional categories to allow precise tracking of the specific contributions of each group to the audience's affective response. Scenery elements were simply written down according to their position in the first plan or backdrop and (if existent) prop listing (Fig. 3).The differentiation of lighting is based on different illumination, such as point light/spotlight, general/total light, and mixed sources, alongside their intensity levels. Colour palettes, for instance, are systematically classified into temperature-based categories (cool, warm, or neutral) to facilitate a nuanced analysis of their influence on the perception of stage dynamics (Fig. 4).

Qualitative Analysis: Later, the representation of individual predefined elements is identified in relation to the traditional and contemporary opera stagings, with the aim of recognizing "established patterns" and solutions for "evoking affective responses in the observer."

	Violetta Valéry	Location	Year of the performance	Type of production		Staging		
1	Stefania Bonfadelli	Teatro Giuseppe Verdi (Busseto)	2002	T		REALISTIC		
2	Patrizia Ciofi	Teatro La Fenice	2001		C	REALISTIC	FUSION	
3	Anna Netrebko	Salzburger Festspiele, Grosses Festspielhaus	2005		C			SYMBOLIC
4	Cinzia Forte	Opéra Royal de Wallonie	2009		C	REALISTIC		
5	Aleksandra Kurzak	Teatr Wielki	2010		C			SYMBOLIC
6	Natalie Dessay	Aix-en-Provence	2011		C			SYMBOLIC
7	Jessica Pratt	Her Majesty's Theatre	2014		C			SYMBOLIC
8	Venera Gimadieva	Glyndebourne Opera House	2014	T			FUSION	
9	Renée Fleming	The Royal Opera London	2015	T		REALISTIC		
10	Marlena Devoe	Clonter Opera Theatre	2016		C	REALISTIC		
11	Ermonela Jaho	Teatro Colón	2017	T		REALISTIC		
12	Emma Matthews	Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour	2017		C			SYMBOLIC
13	Diana Damrau	Metropolitan Opera	2018	T		REALISTIC		
14	Julia Novikova	Volksteater Rostock	2019		C			SYMBOLIC
15	Pretty Yende	Opéra de Paris	2019		C	REALISTIC		
16	Lisette Oropesa	Teatro Real Madrid	2020		C		FUSION	
17	Aida Garifullina	Opera de Monte-Carlo	2023	T		REALISTIC		

(T-traditional vs C-contemporary)

Fig. 1. Listing of Traviata productions being analysed

4.2. Scene analysis

These elements were not analysed throughout the whole opera, but only through Scene 5 in Act 1. That scene is the one in which Violetta Valéry expresses her inner conflicts between the desire for love and/or the need for independence. The reason this scene was selected for analysis stems from the results of a previous study. Interview respondents highlighted this scene as the pivotal moment where the director's approach became most apparent. They described it as a turning point where they understood the context in which Violetta's character would be portrayed. The elements present on stage subtly suggested how their opinions and critiques should be directed. While it cannot be said that the audience was necessarily led to adopt a specific thinking pattern, in productions such as Robert Carsen's, the sheer brutality of the scene unequivocally influenced the initial impressions upon which audience members continued to build their perception of Violetta's character.

The entire scene is divided into several key points based on the interpretation of the libretto. Each of these points carries a specific emotional state dictated by the musical and textual aspects of the work. The manner in which these points are further developed depends on the director and the performers themselves.

The analysed points are as follows, with sections of the text highlighted in different colours, respectively:

SCENE 5:

1
VIOLETTA *(alone)*
How strange! How strange! His words
are burned upon my heart!
Would a real love be a tragedy for me?
What decision should I make?
No man has ever made me fall in love. This is a
joy that I have never known before - loving,
being loved!
And can I turn his offer down,
for the nonsense of my present life?

2
Ah, perhaps he is the one
whom my lonely soul,
loved to imagine in secret!
Though I never knew it,
he came here while I lay sick,
awakening a new fever,
the fever of love,

3
of love which is the very breath
of the universe itself -
Mysterious and noble,
both the pain and the ecstasy of the heart.

4
I'm being so foolish! This is crazy!
A poor woman, alone,
lost in this
crowded desert
also known as Paris.

What can I hope for?

5
What should I do? Revel
in the whirlpool of earthly pleasures.
Revel in joy! Ahh!

Forever free, I must pass
madly from joy to joy.
My life's course shall be
forever in the paths of pleasure.
Whether it be dawn or dusk,
I must always live. Ah!
Freely in the world's freest places,
Always seeking newer joys!

6
(She thinks of Alfredo.)

VIOLETTA
Oh! My love.

7
This is crazy! From joy to joy,
forever free, I must pass
madly from joy to joy.
My life's course shall be
forever in the paths of pleasure.
Whether it be dawn or dusk,
I must always live. Ah!
Freely in the world's freest places,
Always seeking newer joys! *etc.*

Fig. 2. Libretto pivotal points for atmospheric changes

5. RESULTS

The analysis of color palettes across various productions of Verdi's La Traviata reveals two dominant tendencies: warm and opulent tones or neutral and minimalist solutions, reflecting varied directorial visions and sociocultural contexts. Warm palettes—deep reds, golds, purples, and blues—are prominent in traditional venues like Teatro Giuseppe Verdi (2002), Teatro Colón (2017), and Opera de Monte-Carlo (2023). These tones evoke grandeur and align with historical interpretations, emphasizing the opera's emotional intensity. Neutral palettes, with whites, creams, grays, and pastels, dominate minimalist and modern reinterpretations, such as Aix-en-Provence (2011) and Teatro Real Madrid (2020). These choices highlight psychological depth, focusing on the narrative's subtleties. Productions like Teatro La Fenice (2001) and The Royal Opera in London (2015) balance elegance and tradition through soft tones, while venues such as Salzburger Festspiele (2005) and Volksteater Rostock (2019) adopt experimental approaches with stark contrasts or cool tones. Others, like Glyndebourne Opera House (2014) and Her Majesty's Theatre (2014), use vibrant colors or vintage glamour to enhance visual storytelling. The interplay between warm and neutral palettes reflects a balance of tradition and innovation. Warm tones immerse audiences in historical richness, while neutral tones invite introspection and focus. This diversity underscores La Traviata's adaptability to varied artistic interpretations and cultural contexts. The analysis of use of lighting and spatial elements like backdrops or set props will be given in the following tables (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4):

PIVOTAL POINTS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
DÉCOR AND PROPS							
Teatro Giuseppe Verdi (Busseto)	props- pillows, backdrop: living room furniture (blue and golden)						
Teatro La Fenice	props-self portrait, elements: living room furniture, main acting place is her bed				props: banknotes and jewelry	props: selfportrait	props: money, performance is on the bed
Salzburger Festspiele	elements: big ticking clock, red sofa (omnipresent)				props: glass with a bottle of champagne	props:white Camellia flower	x
Opéra Royal de Wallonie	elements: round buffet tables, dolls, food and drinks				props: bottle of champagne	x	props: ceramic doll in red dress
Teatr Wielki	elements: stagle platforms, staircase, box units						
Aix-en-Provence	props: glass	elements: black chairs, bar				props: bottle	x
Her Majesty's Theatre	elements: luxurious furniture, upholstered red chaise longue						
Glyndebourne Opera House	elements: two types of chairs- metal side chairs and softer armchairs						
The Royal Opera London	props: glass of champagne, elements: luxurious gold statues and ottomans						props: veil
Clonter Opera Theatre	backdrop: gold Klimteasque mural motifs, funky furniture, alchocol bottles						
Teatro Colón	elements: warm and golden draperies, luxurious and ornate furniture						
Handa Opera	elements: crystal chandelier			props: glass	x	x	x
Metropolitan Opera	elements: luxurious furniture, props: pillow	elements: luxurious gold end green living room furniture					
Volksteater Rostock	elements: red projection screen in the backdrop					props: small bottle	elements: salon furniture
Opéra de Paris	elements: billboard	elements: public space, bicycle			elements: street food	elements: office	
Teatro Real Madrid	elements: modern minimal furniture, white Camellia flower						
Opera de Monte-Carlo	elements: line of red accent chairs, brick wall, mirror						

Fig. 3. Systematisation of atmospheric generators: Listing of used decor and set props

6. DISCUSSION

Based on these elements and the analysis of data presented in Figures 3 and 4, certain patterns in the use of atmospheric generators can be identified. These patterns demonstrate how the careful integration of scenographic elements, from lighting to props, shapes the audience's perception of Violetta.

All of these stage elements, directly suggest specific aspects of her character that are crucial to each production and they serve as narrative tools, subtly highlighting the emotional and psychological dimensions of her persona.

PIVOTAL POINTS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
LIGHTING (SL- spotlight, TL- total light, BL-backlight)							
Teatro Giuseppe Verdi (Busseto)	SL cold	TL cold		SL warm + BL cold		PL warm	SL + BL cold, then both warm
Teatro La Fenice	SL cold + backdrop point lights warm tones	SL cold + backdrop point lights cold tones	SL warm + backdrop point lights warm tones	TL warm			TL cold, + SL cold additional
Salzburger Festspiele	TL cold				TL warm	TL cold	
Opéra Royal de Wallonie	SL neutral, BL warm tones				SL warm		SL cold
Teatr Wielki	SL cold	SL neutral	SL cold	SL cold, TL cold		SL warm	TL neutral, SL neutral
Aix-en-Provence	TL warm		SL warm			TL neutral, then SL cold	
Her Majesty's Theatre	TL warm						
Glyndebourne Opera House	TL neutral	SL warm	SL cold	//	TL cold		
The Royal Opera London	//				SL cold	SL warm	
Clonter Opera Theatre	TL neutral					TL warm	TL cold
Teatro Colón	//			TL warm		+ cold backlight	+SL cold
Handa Opera	//			TL neutral, SL warm		SL cold	TL cold+ chandelier
Metropolitan Opera	TL neutral warm						
Volksteater Rostock	SL cold	SL cold, BL warm		TL warm			SL warm
Opéra de Paris	BL warm	SL warm	TL cold, SL warm	TL cold			
Teatro Real Madrid	SL cold						
Opera de Monte-Carlo	SL warm	TL neutral	SL warm	BL warm, SL warm			TL warm

Fig. 4. Systematisation of atmospheric generators: Lighting

Lighting, as one of the dominant elements, further emphasizes and directs the audience's thought process, creating focal points that guide their interpretation of key moments in the narrative. The findings indicate that lighting is often employed as a key element to guide the audience's attention and highlight the emotional nuances of the character. In some productions, a focused spotlight on Violetta emphasizes her emotional vulnerability and internal struggles, while in others, total lighting contributes to a more lavish ambience, allowing the audience to perceive Violetta within a broader social context, amplifying the dichotomy between her public and private personas.

The colour palette used in various productions reveals notable differences in the atmosphere. Cool tones are frequently associated with detachment and isolation, warm tones with intimacy and emotional accessibility, and neutral tones serve as a balance, enabling smooth transitions between different emotional phases of Violetta's journey. These choices reflect distinct interpretative approaches to her character, shaping the audience's perception of her persona and emotional state.

By reinforcing emotional nuances and narrative depth, these atmospheric generators ensure that her character is perceived through a multilayered lens, enhancing the dramaturgical impact, Violetta's portrayal, and the overall audience experience. This interplay between visual and emotional cues underscores the transformative potential of theatrical staging in conveying complex character dynamics and societal critiques.

7. CONCLUSION

The findings confirm the existence of certain patterns that directly connect our perception and guide us toward questioning societal norms. While these elements are evident, their role is not immediately discernible. Through affective atmospheres, a subtle influence on the audience is achieved, and with the use of these elements as a narrative apparatus, the story is conveyed clearly through space. This interplay also reinforces the findings from interviews conducted in the previous study, demonstrating that when a directorial concept is clearly articulated—relying heavily on the use of these atmospheric generators—the interpretation and perception of the character in a specific light, with a specific message, becomes unequivocal.

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Biography

Andrija Pavlović a.k.a. Andy Pavlov is a pianist, composer, producer, researcher, innovator and professor born in Belgrade (Yugoslavia). He finished his studies at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater Rostock, Germany and PhD studies based on "Quantum Music" project at the Faculty of Music Arts Belgrade. He is a professor at the Department of Scenic Design, Faculty of Technical Sciences in Novi Sad, Serbia. He has taught and given masterclasses and workshops at the University of Cincinnati, the University of Illinois, Chicago, Goldsmith's University, London, the Hochschule für Musik und Theater Rostock, and NUS Singapore, among others. From 2001 he is engaged in multimedia and conceptual art.

He is the co-founder of the piano duo LP Duo (www.lpduo.com), named one of the 8 best piano duos at the biggest world competition for two pianos, Miami Dranoff Two Piano Competition, in 2008. From 2004, LP Duo won 30 international prizes and performed over 300 concerts in Europe, the USA and Asia at renowned venues including: Carnegie Hall New York, Kennedy Center Washington, Royal Danish Opera and Theater Copenhagen, Concertgebouw Amsterdam and NUS University Singapore. LP Duo released 12 albums and are the co-founders and presenters of the pioneering art & science project "Quantum Music" (www.quantummusic.org).

Together with a group of engineers and quantum physicists, LP Duo invented a new musical instrument - the Duality Portable Hybrid Piano. Andy's albums are released by Universal Music Group, Donemus The Netherlands and Sweet Sensation (www.sweetsensationmusic.com). In 2022, he was Kavli Artist in Residence at TU Delft, the Netherlands where he established art & science dialogues and worked with the scientists on the "Beyond Quantum Music" project.

He is composing music for theater shows, TV, movies, dance choreographies.

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THE LIFE AND ART OF REPETITION – "REPETITION IN MUSIC - REAL AND IMAGINARY SPACES OF SCENE DESIGN"

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Abstract

In this paper, we will explore the concept of repetition in music and its impact on creating invisible, subjectively imaginary spaces in scene design. Repetition serves performers and listeners as a means of subtle transition, a transcendence from the real, material, spatial, everyday world into the emotional, sensitive, and intellectual realm, where subjective-imaginary worlds become places of extended spaces of scene design. Repetition is primarily a consequence of natural laws, as well as the human need to create and organize spaces both around and within themselves. From John Cage's perspective, could repetition in everyday life already be considered an art form in itself?

Music is an art governed by empirically proven physical laws of acoustics which acts as a bridge between the inner (psychic) and outer (material) worlds. The need for repetition is not only the foundation of life, making it tangible, but also the foundation of music as a ritual where "to repeat" serves a higher purpose. A sufficient number of specific repetitions opens the possibility of breaking free from the enchanted cycle of repetition, thus allowing the "liberation", and other forms of experiences.

Thanks to the role of repetition, life and art intertwine and cannot be fully separated. How does music, through its repetitiveness, lead us beyond to imaginary worlds of scene design? Where and how does the everyday life "end" and art begin? And what role does scene design play in that process? In this paper, we will examine the mechanism of repetition that enables this transition, whether in classical, popular, avant-garde or minimal music of the 20th century. Furthermore, we will attempt to expand the existing meaning of scene design to encompass the imaginary, inner spaces (of performer/listener) "produced" by repetitiveness, from which it becomes possible to create new (material) scenographies.

Keywords: repetition, music, time, scene design, performing arts

1. INTRODUCTION

The entire nature, the entire history of the planet and life on it, consists of cycles that regularly repeat, and that is what we see, feel, and know. What we observe and what guides us. Rain, snow, warm, cold, “Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter...and Spring”![1] Repetition is all around us as well as within us. Our body and nervous system, our cells, have their own patterns of behavior, birth, and decay—eternal changes. They have their own metabolic repetition. “Panta Rhei.”[2] Flow and change, repetition, define life. Aliveness. The moment everything stops, it would mean that life itself has ceased. For a human, that would mean death and eternal silence. This is why the emergence of music is not surprising—that wondrous organization of sounds that initially allowed people not to feel alone and later to thank to the Gods. Music has primarily helped people, and continues to help them, to express the inner, invisible world through an abstract yet intensely sensory realm. That is why music has always been considered, even before the current peak of materialistic-rationalistic civilization, the highest form of mathematics[3] that directly influences and flows through our senses, connecting the Body, Spirit, and Soul. Music reminds us of our essential nature and brings us back to our origins, where reason and intuition become one, and the inner and outer experience merge into a symbiosis through sensory perception.

In this paper, we will first examine repetition in music through some historical examples. Then, we will present the idea of “expanding” the concept of scene design into mental and imaginary spaces, ultimately posing the question of whether and where a work of art begins and ends. In other words, does art transcend or blur the boundaries between life and art, and if so, where and how?

2. REPETITION IN MUSIC: EXAMPLES THROUGHOUT HISTORY

In Werner Herzog’s documentary film *Herdsmen of the Sun*,[4] we follow the life of the Wodaabe tribe of the Sahara (fig. 1). This is a nomadic tribe that still, in modern times, lives in a way that illustrates the possibilities of how the life of prehistoric people/tribes looked like, living in the harmony with the laws of nature’s repetition (earth, sun, and the changing of the seasons). However, what interests us here is something else—the way women in this tribe choose men, their future husbands. This involves a musical and theatrical ritual called *Yaake*, a performance under the open sky where men, dressed in costumes and wearing makeup, dance and sing in a highly rhythmic and repetitive manner to attract the attention of women and be chosen. Such a ritual not only contains patterns and repetitions but also features extended performance duration (Yaake is part of the Guérewol festival, which lasts for a week).

Fig.1. *Wodaabe tribe (photo from the Werner Herzog’s movie)*

In Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier*, Prelude No. 2 (Fig. 2), we observe a clear sense of repetition, expressed

1 “Spring, Summer, fall, Winter...and Spring”, the movie by South Korean director Kim Ki-duk: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0374546/

2 “Everything flows”, Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher, late 6th century BC

3 Ancient Greek philosopher Pythagoras believed that the numbers are behind everything in the Universe: https://www.vermontpublic.org/vpr-classical/2015-05-04/timeline-002-pythagoras-and-the-connection-between-music-and-math

4 “Wodaabe – Die Hirten der Sonne”, 1989. https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0098669/

through rhythm, uniform sixteenth notes, and their movement, while each bar follows a harmonic change. This kind of musical architecture and repetition gives Bach’s music a special sense of universality, timelessness, and the ability for the listener to fully, and very fast, ”connect” with the musical piece. Through repetition, the listener seemingly paradoxically “steps out” of the piece itself and embarks on an emotional or imaginary journey (or both simultaneously). It’s as if Bach managed, perhaps more than others, to capture the DNA and very essence of music, whose journey is fundamentally (Spi)Ritual.

Fig. 2. *Well-Tempered Clavier, Prelude no.2 (first two bars of the composition)*

“Bolero” is an orchestral work by Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) from 1928, which is considered perhaps as the first minimal music composition, even though the concept of minimalism in music only emerged later, during the 1960s. This musical work begins with a rhythmic figure played on the snare drum. This rhythm will remain identical until the very end of the composition. Then, the flute initially plays the characteristic melody, inspired by Sufi music melody[5], which is later repeated by other instruments (clarinet, bassoon, oboe, etc.) with almost no or very slight variations, gradually building the piece by expanding the orchestral sound over the next twenty minutes until it reaches its full climax. The result is usually complete exhilaration in the audience. The scene design of “Bolero” was conceived as a ballet performance, with the action taking place in a Spanish tavern, although the composer himself expressed the desire and gave instructions for the piece to be performed outdoors, mostly in front of industrial warehouses, in order to emphasize the mechanization of the world and the new industrial civilization that was under construction at the time. In terms of repetition and the compositional process in music, Ravel was following a path similar to that depicted by the German director Fritz Lang in his silent film *Metropolis* just a year earlier (1927)—futurism and mass production.[6]

The work “Vexations” by Erik Satie (fig. 3) is essentially a single motif, written in 1893-1894, most likely for piano or keyboard instruments. The piece contains one instruction: the motif must be repeated 840 times, which can result in a performance lasting up to fifteen hours. Satie did not publish the work during his lifetime, and it was first printed by the American composer John Cage in 1949. The piece was then premiered in 1963.[7]

The composition “Canto Ostinato” (1976-1979, fig. 4) by Dutch composer Simeon Ten Holt (1923-2012) was written for two or more pianos or keyboard instruments and consists of 106 patterns (small cells). Performers are given the freedom to choose which part of the pattern to play and how many times to repeat it. The work has become a cult piece in the Netherlands, evidenced by sold-out concerts in the largest and most important concert hall in Amsterdam, the Concertgebouw.[8] A documentary film titled “Over Canto”[9] was made about the piece, in which various people testify that listening to “Canto Ostinato” profoundly changed their lives.

5 Sufi music refers to the devotional music of the Sufis, inspired by the works of the Sufi poets like Rumi, Hafiz and others. https://www.barbican.org.uk/s/sufimusic/

6 https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0017136/

7 This is a more recent example where the pianist Igor Levin, performs ,,Vexations” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uu_03mUPgHU

8 For the past twenty years, LP Duo has been performing “Canto Ostinato” in the most unusual scene design settings (standard concert halls, on a boat, in a tram, outdoors, “lying down” concerts, etc.). In last two years, pianists Sonja Loncar and Andrija Pavlovic (a.k.a. Andy Pavlov), together with Dutch pianists Jeroen and Sandra Van Veen, performed four sold-out concerts at the prestigious Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, each time receiving standing ovations from the audience. https://www.concertgebouw.nl/concerten/5282568-canto-ostinato-met-jeroen-en-sandra-van-veen-lp-duo

9 https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2160325/

Fig.3. *Erik Satie - "Vexations" (sheet music)*

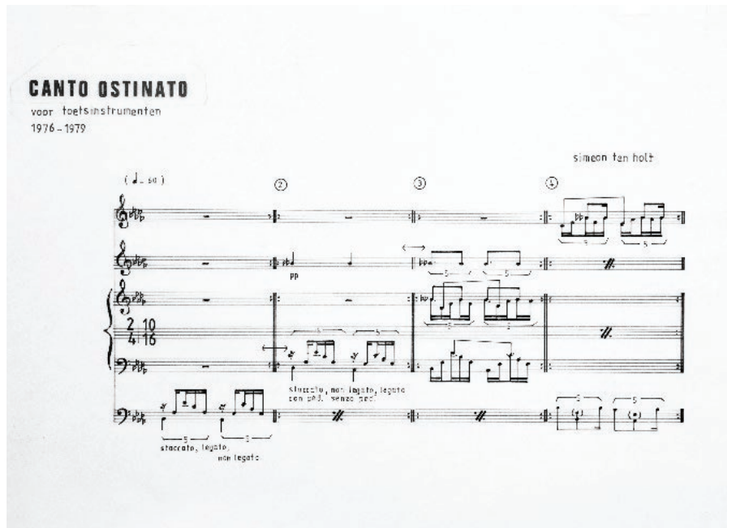

Fig. 3. *Canto Ostinato (first page of the composition)*

In the song "Hey Jude"[10] by The Beatles, something unusual happens for the pop music format, which is typically limited to around three minutes—reflecting the technological spirit of the time, specifically the so-called radio format. Within this format, the music industry "competes" for the attention of its listeners. A typical pop song follows this structure of repetition: introduction, verse, chorus, verse, chorus, "bridge," and a final chorus with an optimal ending: the "outro."

However, in "Hey Jude", after four minutes (the entire song lasts eight minutes!), a repeating vocal section starts with the syllables "na-na-na." This motif lasts for four bars and is repeated for the next four minutes (half of the entire song). In this way, the song builds repetitively and dynamically over time, utilizing the collective, choir-like singing of the audience together with the band members themselves.

10 The single was released in 1968, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_MjCqQoLLA

3. MUSIC, REPETITION, AND THE POSSIBILITY OF EXPANDING THE CONCEPT OF SCENE DESIGN

Music has changed throughout history in response to shifts in society and culture, but it has certainly retained at least two defining characteristics—ritual and repetition. Regardless of the experiments that took place in the 20th century, such as the emergence of twelve-tone technique, serialism, or the "silence" of John Cage, it is undeniable that repetition in music is ubiquitous. It provides the listener with an obvious, deeper, unconscious, and automatic connection through structures made up of repeating musical patterns.

This connection with the musical work—whether through live performances or later through audio and video recordings—is the first and most fundamental benefit of repetition and recurring musical forms (patterns), where the unity between performer and audience is established. Beyond this, there are further, more subtle and intangible connections that occur individually—both in the performer's and the listener's inner worlds: emotional and imaginative.

Repetition in music leads to a shared ritualistic experience, but its impact depends on the focus and attention (listening) of both the performers and the listeners. The quality of listening paradoxically leads the participants of the music ritual to a state of detachment from the very same musical material. This detachment transports them into emotional and imaginative realms, which we can interpret as an expanded concept of scene design—fields where unforeseen experiences, sensations, thoughts, or feelings may arise. In these realms, entire "scenes" can be projected onto the inner plane, or the "mental canvas" of the performer and the listener.

This is the very purpose of the ritual, and repetition helps activate the imagination and "inner projection" through the "time" function of the music. Once music, as a medium, takes the primary focus through listening, the mind is "engaged," which allows other sensations and impressions—sometimes even very old, nearly forgotten memories, thoughts, and emotions—to appear on the mental canvas. These projections create a scene design within the individual's mind.

In fact, the "mental canvas" we speak about is located in the frontal part of our brain (the frontal lobe), and we are most conscious of it when we close our eyes, even slightly. This mental canvas is already a kind of a stage, an empty set where our thoughts are projected, creating various forms of scene design.

From the perspective and experience of the performer, we could compare the process of musical performance to a (long) journey, where the performer acts as the driver, transporting passengers (the audience). During this long drive, the music makes the "landscapes" pass by, and the driver's brain and nervous system slowly "take over" the journey, making it almost automatic (the mind is occupied). Meanwhile, the performer receives new impulses (scenes) projected on their mental canvas.[11]

Something similar happens with the audience (the passengers); however, in this process, there is one key difference: the audience does not perform the piece, but actively participates in its performance by listening. Through listening, they also create new, potential scene designs, which continue to unfold even after the concert ends. These new experiences, ideas, and mental projections can potentially materialize in different areas of life—whether professionally or privately—long after the ritual has concluded.

In this way, repetition in music, paired with its ritualistic and meditative effects, extends the concept of scene design beyond the physical stage to the mental, emotional, and imaginary planes, where each participant—performer and listener alike—co-creates an evolving, dynamic experience.

4. WHERE DOES A MUSICAL (ARTISTIC) WORK BEGIN AND WHERE DOES IT END?

In 1952, pianist David Tudor performed perhaps the most radical composition in the history of music, *4'33"*[12] by composer John Cage. In this composition, the pianist sits at the piano and for four minutes and thirty-

11 "My space, it's time", Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

12 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AWVUp12XPpU

three seconds does not play a single note. During this time, the performer and the audience sit in “silence,” and everything that happens in this time period is considered a unique performance and a new work. The audience and the performer together, again and again, create a new composition, listening to the sounds of the surrounding environment, which are never the same. This radical work opened new perspectives on the question of sound and music. Through this piece, John Cage wanted to show that, every sound, no matter what it is, is sufficient in itself—that every sound is already music. For Cage, sound as it is, “discovered” by listening, is enough and beautiful. It is like a small choreographic miniature that does not need to have any particular meaning but exists as it is.[13] In this way, everyday life becomes a stage where we can find countless solutions for scenography, if we choose to do so—if we choose to observe, or in this case, to listen.

On November 8, 1991, artist Miroslav Mandić, known for his conceptual works, began his artistic project “Ruža lutanja” with the idea of walking around the Earth. The work, or rather the act of walking, started at the grave of poet William Blake in London and lasted for ten years. This project resulted in a literary novel, diary, which represents more conventional form of art. However, the greater attention is drawn to the act of walking itself, a process that is not just spatial but also temporal. Through this act, the artist, in his own words, became a “Citizen of Earth.” By walking an average of twenty kilometers a day, Miroslav Mandić covered the distance of the Earth’s circumference. Through the artist’s diary, landscapes and characters unfold along this unique journey, where life itself becomes art and art becomes life. This artwork continues to gain resonance as time passes.

In the example of “Ruža lutanja” we can observe that an artwork, an action, begins first with the decision (a personal decision, a personal act), followed by its external shaping and communication to the public, and then by existing within the temporal continuum of the work. Over the course of the journey, the work first changes the artist himself and then the audience—those he meets along the way and later all those who hear about the work or read the novel-diary. There is also a completely inexplicable, metaphysical level to this work, which “operates” in its invisibility. It lies in the power of the personal act and decision made by the artist - a ritual to which he unreservedly surrenders his life.

5. PERSONAL EXPERIENCES FROM THE PERFORMER’S PERSPECTIVE

“In June 2024, together with visual artist Sun Mandić, I performed a piece titled *24 Hours*, in which Sun drew while I improvised on the piano during the period of 24 hours. The entire work took place in the studio of Serbian painter Djordje Stanojevic. With almost no preparation, I embarked on what might be the most challenging performance I have ever done, one that I agreed to intuitively after an invitation from artist Sun Mandić, following screening of the film “Ryuichi Sakamoto - Coda”[14] at the “Jugoslovenska kinoteka” in Belgrade, Serbia. The *24 Hours* performance began at 2 PM (June 2, 2018). The first six hours felt like I was playing six concerts, each an hour long. This was roughly the pattern I repeated, and the audience would clap at the end of each hour and take a break. After these six hours, I felt like I had “spent” all my creativity. Some of the audience left, some stayed, and new people arrived. At that point, I would simply place my hands on the piano and let them “draw” a new melody or pattern on their own. The hardest part for me came during the so-called “wolf hour” (the middle of the night, around 3 AM). At that time, I felt like I had hit a wall. My own wall, and I had nowhere to go except to continue placing my hands on the keys and see what my unconscious mind had to say. The most patient members of the audience stayed, some went to sleep, and the freshest ones arrived excitedly around 6 AM the next day. The performance ended at 2 PM the following day (June 3, 2018), in a deeply cathartic mood, for which the audience, who stayed for the entire 24 hours, was largely responsible. An emotional feeling of a great achievement enveloped both me and everyone present. The journey into the unknown had succeeded. The goal had been reached. We had ritualistically embarked on a journey whose act, above all, would be remembered, especially by those who were there. And then, much like in the work “Ruža Lutanja” by Miroslav Mandić, it seemed as though there was an echo, a capsule, an invisibility that

13 “There are two things that don’t have to mean anything, one is music and the other is laughter.” Emmanuel Kant, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcHnL7aS64Y&t=1s

14 https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6578572/

allowed the work to continue living on. The boundaries between life, art, imagination, the external, and the internal had been erased.” — *Excerpt from the Diary of Andrija Pavlović*

“On September 5, 2024, 6:30 AM, together with my wife, Lidija Andonov, I set off by car from Berlin to the little town of Punat on the island of Krk, Croatia. Around 9:30 AM, we passed the bypass around Dresden, then by noon we were in Prague, which is always crowded. Up until Dresden, I’m struggling. I’m extremely sleepy. After Dresden, my mind is “enough occupied” with the driving, as if some inner passion, sweetness, and an unprecedented sense of satisfaction begin to take over me, and images and ideas start to rush onto my mental projection screen. We are heading toward Ceske Budejovice. We are surrounded by hills, fields, and greenery. There is no highway here, so we are moving along the main road, driving much more slowly. We reach Linz (Austria) only around 3:30 PM. Austria is full of tunnels. A molehill. We arrive in Graz at 6:00 PM. Here, we can already feel the scent of the Balkans. In Zagreb, we are at 7:30 PM, and we reach Punat, Krk just a few minutes before 10:00 PM.” — **Second excerpt from the diary of Andrija Pavlović**

6. CONCLUSION

If we examine the previously mentioned works, we can see that they all share a common component—time. The work with time, or the experience of being within a specific period (perseverance), along with the repetition of certain actions, allows the performer and/or observer (the audience) to step out of their comfort zone and “venture” into the unknown. This precisely serves as the starting point for exploring the field of imagination and “mental scenography”, which we can view as an “extension of the scene design concept”.

In the works of John Cage, Miroslav Mandić, Sun Mandić and Andrija Pavlović, we observe that these artistic pieces are pre-determined in their titles, methods of execution, and “path” (clearly made decisions by artists before the work starts), while their results are left to the process itself. The process and the experience, in fact, become the result. In these examples, the life and artistic processes are completely intertwined and almost inseparable.

In contrast to the previously mentioned artistic works, excerpt no. 2 from Andrija Pavlovic’s diary is not an artwork in itself. It is not pre-determined; the author did not make any prior decisions. Instead, there is simply a need for the journey itself, followed by the emergence of presence (focus) and a careful observation of the journey’s process, which is later written in the form of a diary. Thus, within the context of this work, it eventually takes on the form of artistic valorization.Thus, (and now presented within the context of this work), it later takes on the form of artistic valorization.

The attention in this case, even in the seemingly ordinary instance of a long drive, did not arise on its own. It was facilitated by the repetitive action over an extended period of time (15 hours of driving) and the necessity to “endure” this action. The moment the “driver” after hours of restlessness and discomfort, accepts the situation as it is, he somehow becomes “liberated” from that very situation. New processes and sensations within him gradually begin to unfold. That time is no longer “lost time” that one wants to “skip”, reduce or avoid; it transforms into quality time in which imagination, new ideas, or different realizations are set into motion.

In life, we are faced with the sense of the passage of time, as well as the constant chain of repetition (Indian: “samsara”).[15] Listening, seeing and experiencing a particular artwork can help our attention and presence become a valuable daily habit, where we are aware of the stages of the scene design we see around us or those projected onto our inner “mental canvas.”

Contradictorily, attempts to break free from the chain of repetition are only possible if we fully surrender to and dedicate ourselves to that very chain of repetition - when we are present and patient in these processes, and when we observe them with special attention. Only in those moments do life and art become absolutely “ONE”.

“It is clear that the essential thing, both in heaven and on earth, is long-term and unidirectional submission:

15 “Saṃsāra” is a Sanskrit word that means”running around in circles.”

from this, over time, something emerges that makes it worth living on this earth, such as virtue, art, music, dance, reason, spirit, something that transforms, something refined, mad, or divine." — Friedrich Nietzsche (Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*)

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Biography

Darko Sekulić (Novi Sad, 1997) is a Master of Science in Scene Architecture and Technique. He completed his master's academic studies in Scene Architecture and Technique at the Faculty of Technical Sciences defending his thesis titled In Search of New Interactions between Architecture and Theatre – Conceptual Design of the Dance Theatre Češki Magacin. He completed his bachelor's studies in Scene Architecture, Technique, and Design in 2021. During his studies, he was a member of the technical team responsible for implementing extracurricular programs and other events organized by the Sub-Department of Art and Design. He worked as a student demonstrator for the subjects Scene Architecture 1 and 2 during the academic year 2020/21. He participated in the 43rd Belgrade Architecture Salon at the Museum of Applied Arts in the category of competition works. In 2022, he was part of the technical production team for the Scene Design Biennale. Additionally, he was part of the technical production team for the exhibition "Retailoring" at the Museum of Applied Arts. In 2023, he was part of the technical production team for Serbia's performance at the Prague Quadrennial, where the Republic of Serbia won two awards – one for the most imaginative concept of work (student exhibition) and one for community activation (exhibition of countries and regions). Since February 2023, he has been working at the Sub-Department of Art and Design, Department of Architecture and Urban Planning, Faculty of Technical Sciences in Novi Sad as a teaching assistant.

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FROM STAGE TO STRUCTURE: INVESTIGATING THEATRICAL INFLUENCES ON ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN

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Abstract

The scope of this work aims to explore relations between architecture and theatre in the hope of discovering new interactions between these two interdisciplinary fields of research. Let us hypothesize that theatre has historically benefited more than architecture in terms of its overall development. Is this in fact the case? I believe that to even begin thinking about a possible answer to this question one must first define the scope of these phenomena in this contemporary setting. How can we define contemporary architecture and contemporary theatre? If we take Harman's approach, we can begin the research by answering two basic questions: *(1) What an object is made from, whether historically or compositionally, or (2) we can ask what an object does, whether to other objects or to our own minds and senses.* Afterwards repeating the same process for theatre, simultaneously developing our own discursive position. In search for possible answers to these questions this work inspects some philosophical reflections about the relation between politics and art in theatre by Alain Badiou and juxtaposes them with reflections of Reinier de Graaf on the transformation of architecture as a profession. Besides having philosophical and experiential reflections on theatre and architecture as the main research grounds, some theoretical assumptions taken from Graham Harman's method of analyzing architecture through Object-oriented ontology are also used in the comparative analysis of contemporary architecture and theatre practices. Eventually the main objective of this work is to confront ideas deriving from contemporary theatrical and architectural practices, using the Object-oriented ontology method to inquire about possible overlaps between the two professions. Moreover, to inquire how have the sensory qualities of theatre shaped the perception and creation of real qualities in architecture?

Keywords: architecture, scene architecture, theatre, scene, stage, art, politics, sensory qualities, real qualities, object-oriented ontology

1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary society with its many norms and ever-changing roles of culture and politics follows no singular rule. Rather it is ever-changing like the tides of a vast body of water. The theme of the conference is a very powerful statement. In conclusion of his essay Atmosphere as the Subject Matter of Architecture (Böhme, 2017), German philosopher Gernot Böhme1 examined the relationship between architecture and scene design and concluded that "Architecture does not build for the sake of the engaged or detached spectator watching a play, but rather for people who experience, in spaces, the seriousness of life." (Böhme, 2017, p. 135-141). Whilst we can agree that this statement is true, this research paper will try to examine the relationship between architecture and theatre, cross-referencing the works of Alain Badiou2, Reinier De Graaf3 and Graham Harman with the aim of showing the benefits of analyzing and writing about architecture using the very same means Böhme rejects. Let us hypothesize that Life is serious, but on the other hand art as an intrinsic part of human existence is not serene. Because if it were serene then we would be a mere pawn of the ever more encroaching hyper-capitalist society.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As stated in the introduction, this research will refer to the work of three very different practitioners in their own respect. One part of the research will offer a glance at the current state of architecture, while another will let us peer through the grandiose theatre curtains in hopes that it will unveil that architecture and theatre are more alike than most people make them out to be. In doing so this paper will lay out the benefits of using a research methodology called object-oriented ontology (Harman, 2022), pioneered by Graham Harman[4]. Namely object-oriented ontology (OOO) is a contemporary philosophical movement that posits objects as the fundamental units of reality (equivalent with e.g. Chronotope), existing independently of human perception or relations. OOO is a branch of speculative realism that challenges traditional anthropocentric and relational approaches in philosophy. Core principles of OOO are:

- **Equal Ontological Status:** All objects, whether physical, conceptual, natural, or artificial, possess the same ontological significance. This "flat ontology" means that a rock, a tree, a fictional character, and a concept like justice are all considered objects with their own realities.
- **Autonomy of Objects:** Objects exist independently of their interactions and relations. They are not entirely defined by their relationships with other objects or with humans.
- **Withdrawal of Objects:** Objects have an aspect that is always withdrawn from complete access or understanding. No object can be fully known or exhausted by its interactions or representations.
- **Vicarious Causation:** Interactions between objects occur indirectly. Since objects withdraw, they cannot affect each other directly but do so through the mediation of their sensual (perceived) qualities.

Meanwhile Reinier De Graaf will offer us a view of the situation in contemporary architecture as a profession. Namely, his work *Architect, verb* deals with the 30 or so yearlong shift and degradation of the profession. His insights into the ever-changing landscape that is contemporary architecture, almost exclusively directed by the *ebb and flow* of the market, help contextualize this research. In his essay *Architecture without Architects*

1 Gernot Böhme (1937–2022) was a German philosopher renowned for his work in aesthetics, particularly the concept of atmospheres in architecture and environmental design. He studied mathematics, physics, and philosophy, earning his doctorate under the supervision of philosopher Theodor W. Adorno. Böhme served as a professor of philosophy at the Technical University of Darmstadt. His interdisciplinary approach bridged gaps between philosophy, science, and art. He was instrumental in developing a new aesthetics that considers the sensory and emotional experiences of environments.

2 Alain Badiou (born 1937) is a French philosopher, formerly chair of Philosophy at the *École normale supérieure* and founder of the faculty of Philosophy of the *Université de Paris VIII* with Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault and Jean-François Lyotard.

3 Reinier de Graaf (born 1964) is a Dutch architect and writer. He is a partner in the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA) and co-founder of its think tank AMO. He is the author of *Four Walls and a Roof* and the novel *The Masterplan*. He lives in Amsterdam.

4 Graham Harman (born 1968) is an American philosopher renowned for his development of Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO), a branch of speculative realism in contemporary philosophy. His work challenges traditional anthropocentric views by proposing that all objects—whether physical, conceptual, or fictional—exist independently of human perception and possess their own reality and agency. Harman earned his Ph.D. in philosophy from Pennsylvania State University under the supervision of philosopher Alphonso Lingis.

(De Graaf, 2023, p. 191-206) he remains skeptical of the notion of Algocracy and poses two questions: "A tempting form of efficiency perhaps, yet pressing questions remain. In ascribing to algorithms the exceptional insight into problems of living once ascribed to architects, do we really rise above problems for business and prestige? Is the world indeed better off without architects?" (De Graaf, 2023, p. 206). Lastly overlapping the findings from the research about architecture this paper examines the use of Alain Badiou's method of analyzing theatre through defining analytical and discovering dialectical elements of architecture and scene design (Badiou, 2013, chapter XV, p. 25-26). According to Badiou's findings intricate interwoven network of analytical and dialectical elements is needed to explain emerging truths and their influence on how transformation occurs within established structures. The analytical elements provide the necessary framework for understanding the existing state of affairs. In contrast, the dialectical elements introduce dynamism, allowing for the recognition and incorporation of events that disrupt the status quo.

Following the previously laid out methodology this research will present a case study of two seemingly very distinct and unrelated real objects – structures – with a goal of finding a common foundation between the two. One structure could be considered as being solely related to architecture and the other could be considered as being solely related to theatre. However the case study will show that similarities between these two real objects does in fact exist. Furthermore this case study will show that both real objects have the same creation narratives, although sometimes having differing outcomes, ultimately resulting with both being able of being categorized as the same real object that has physical and tangible qualities.

3. CASE STUDY: FROM STRUCTURE TO STAGE AND VICE VERSA

3.1. Out of the Blue / Cirque immergé, 12th CirkoBalkana at the 58th BITEF

„Architecture has its own realm. It has a special physical relationship with life. I do not think of it primarily as either a message or a symbol, but as an envelope and background for life which goes on in and around it, a sensitive container for the rhythm of footsteps on the floor. "

Peter, Zumthor. (Thinking Architecture, 1999)

It's September again, and time for BITEF, specifically the 58th edition of the festival, which defined its program under the slogan "Beauty (won't) save the world." This year, an opportunity arose to visit the festival's accompanying program, which was impossible to ignore or decline. It was an incredibly spectacular underwater circus program by the contemporary circus troupe *Out of the Blue*. This troupe was formed as an idea to combine the bodies and journeys of two men, Sébastian Davis-VanGelder and Frédéri Vernier, two performers whose long-standing desire was to explore the possibilities and limits of the human body underwater. This two-year-long research culminated in the creation of a unique, unusual, and extraordinary stage space—an aquarium (figure 1).

What made it, in the context of BITEF, become scene architecture as an event and scene architecture for an event was the choice of location where the theatrical performance would take place—Belgrade Port, specifically Hall 1, which was selected as the venue for this underwater spectacle. At first glance, when entering the hall before the performance, from the perspective of an ordinary viewer, you must walk a longer path to the area where the performance will take place. Then, it is necessary to settle into the semi-circular audience seating, formed from movable stands, opposite which the aquarium is positioned. To complete the spectacle, it was, of course, essential to provide other theatrical elements—stage lighting and sound. It would be irresponsible to speak of the lighting design for this event as a separate part of the project because the interaction of water with light beams penetrating through the aquarium, in harmony with the monumental scale of the hall space, created a unique and unparalleled atmosphere (figure 2).

Fig. 1. photo of the finished aquarium still in the workshop (source: Out of the Blue website)

Fig. 2. photo of one of the scenes from the performance (source: Out of the Blue Circus Show)

Perhaps not immediately apparent, the planned consequence of certain decisions regarding the formation of the stage-audience space within Hall 1 was that the inner surface of one of the façade walls became a canvas on which an equally thrilling spectacle one could witness the interplay of light and shadow. It is likely that most of the audience did not notice this play, but this detail, at certain moments of the performance, combined with the meticulously planned and designed soundscape, elevated the experience of watching this spectacle to a metaphysical level, prompting the viewer to reflect beyond the boundaries and confines of the theatrical performance itself. The effect produced by the entire creative team of this performance acted on many different levels, and it is evident that it was incredibly powerful, or produced an immeasurable and vastly varied number of experiences. This space functioned and produced effects on the level of the space itself, on the level of atmosphere, on the level of scenes, on a metaphysical and philosophical level, etc. This list of levels of impact on which this event produced an effect is arbitrary and highly subjective. What is important to note is that there are spaces and events whose effects we can identify. Such spaces, the author Slađana Milićević refers to as architectural stage spaces (Milićević, Pešterac, & Babić, In preparation).

When discussing the dramaturgy of the event, the creators of this performance introduce the audience to the possibilities of their bodies. At the very beginning of the performance, Sébastian announces that he will attempt to stay underwater for about 5 minutes in a single breath. He truly accomplished this, while Frédéri animated the audience by occasionally diving to check if everything was fine with Sébastian. Thus, this fantastically physically prepared duo established a time unit of 4 minutes and 38 seconds as a baseline for the time the performers would spend submerged in the aquarium. After some time and several scenes of this truly incredible underwater spectacle, the audience seemed to become a single organism. It was possible to determine when the audience was worried and when they completely forgot that the entire event was happening under incredibly physically demanding conditions for the human body. In a certain sense, this event was both an experiment and a demonstration of the limits of human endurance. At certain moments, incredibly poetic scenes completely immersed the audience in thoughts that were almost metaphysical in nature, while at other moments, parallels could be drawn with the current destruction of physically constructed spaces, as well as spaces that are not immediately visible, spaces made up of various social, cultural, economic, political, and other contexts. Thus, in the truest sense of the word, this spectacle is indeed physical theater—interweaving the mise en scène in a very specific and unusual environment with various other theatrical elements. This is a spectacle that audiences worldwide will remember for a long time as a moment in time that will serve as a turning point between a world in which we would all like to live and a world that is rapidly being destroyed by various wrongdoings and malicious actors.

In this regard, the table (figure 3) below highlights the constitutive elements of the stage architecture and stage design of the performance *Out of the Blue*, grouped according to Badiou's (Badiou, 2013, p. 26) division into analytical and dialectical categories.

OUT OF THE BLUE / *Cirque immergé*	
Analytical (elements) / real object	***Dialectical (at-play) / sensory object***
Choreography (*mise en scène*)	In conjunction with sound, it tells its own story
Light design	The interplay of light and shadows creates a poetic atmosphere in the space where the event itself unfolds
Stage or Scenic space	An aquarium that represents the world around us, with water as a metaphor for the various intertwining events conditioned by the space in which they occur
Dramaturgy of the performance	It carefully guides the audience into reflection, contextualizing and giving meaning to the event
Sound design (Soundscape of the performance)	Since the event lacks dramatic text, sound replaces words and enriches the atmosphere of the event
Physical endurance of the performers	A direct indicator of the potential of human strength

Fig. 3. Tabular presentation of analytical elements of the performance and their dialectical pairs.

3.2. Sayamaike Museum

“Design in architecture must be a unique product representing culture, place, and time.”
Ando, Tadao. (Kenchikuka, 2008)

The Sayamaike Museum of Irrigation and Flood Control History in Osaka, Japan, was designed by the 1995 Pritzker Prize laureate, Tadao Ando. This award recognized his philosophy and innovative approach to architectural design, particularly his skill in blending traditional Japanese architecture with a contemporary minimalist design approach. Ando’s architecture often reflects his tendency to integrate nature and local culture through the precise and exceptionally clean use of concrete and very specific distribution of natural light. Visitors to the museum, though it is not large, often feel a strong sense of historical presence and isolation. Upon entering the museum, the visitor is greeted by a massive section of the old embankment wall (figure 4), having been carefully guided through the space beforehand.

The visitor enters the museum along an extended path that leads them from the lake, through the museum’s inner courtyard along the longitudinal axis of the space, past a large body of water.

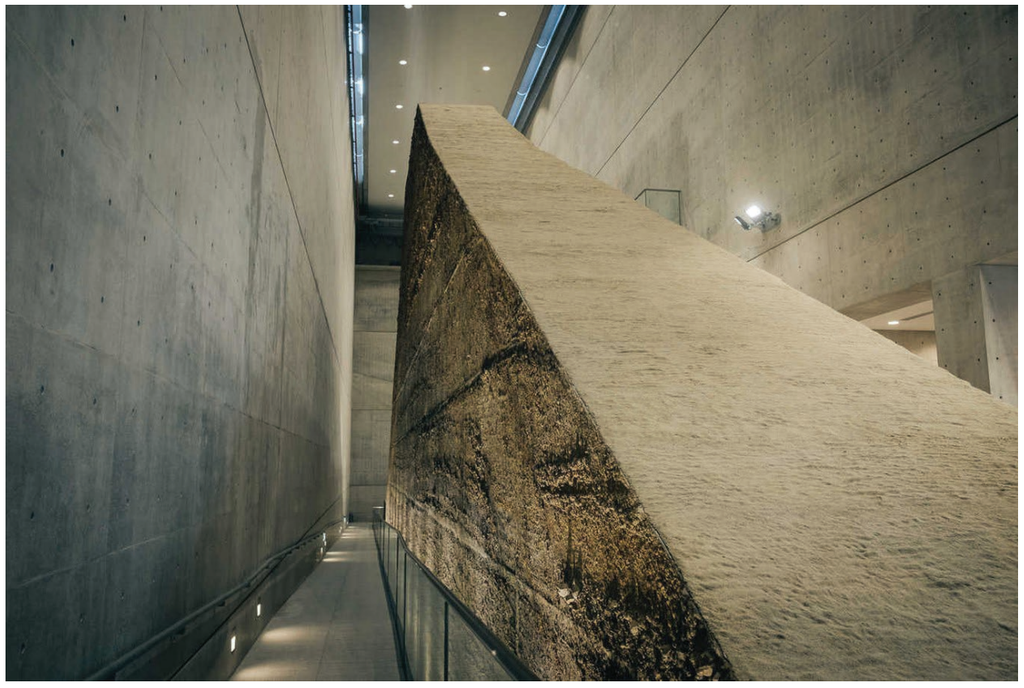

Fig. 4. – segment of the old lake Sayamaike embankment wall (source: ©voyapon.com)

This courtyard is flanked by two monumental walls (figure 5) down which water flows every five minutes, creating a unique atmosphere—a space that is neither entirely natural nor entirely man-made. After this area, the visitor arrives at a circular courtyard, also surrounded by a very high wall that directs their gaze upward. Continuing along a ramp, the visitor reaches the segment of the old embankment wall, feeling incredibly small next to the structure. The height of this embankment dictated the building’s height, creating a symbolic connection between the historic lake and the newly constructed architecture. Throughout, the visitor is guided through a meticulously crafted spatial narrative.

Fig. 5. – photo of the first part of the atrium, water garden (author: Jasmine Sik Chi Chan, July 2016, source: Modern Architecture: A Visual Lexicon)

In Ando’s architecture, there is no need to search for comprehensive definitions of individual elements or architectural components, nor for the methods or principles referenced in the design of this museum. However, it is crucial to recognize, as in previous case studies, the cause-and-effect relationship between individual elements and the impact of the entire architectural experience on the viewer. It is unmistakable that Ando intended for museum visitors not to be passive observers but active participants, feeling the history of the place under their feet. From this perspective, Ando’s architecture makes this museum a kind of stage, shaped by light and shadow.

Ando’s remarkable dedication to finding the perfect geometry of space in the Sayamaike Museum results in varied nuances of shadow, or shadow quality, as described by Jun’ichirō Tanizaki in his essay *In Praise of Shadows*: “When I see an alcove in a beautifully arranged Japanese room, I admire our understanding of the secrets of shadow, and our sensitive use of shadow and light. The beauty of the alcove is not the work of any ingenious device. An empty space is bounded by ordinary wood and walls so that the light drawn into its shape creates dark shadows in the void. There is nothing more. And yet, when we look at the darkness gathering behind the large roof beam, around the flower vase, beneath the shelves, although I know full well that it is only shadow, I am overwhelmed by a feeling that in this little corner of atmosphere, perfect and absolute silence reigns; that here in the darkness, unchanging tranquility has the upper hand” (Tanizaki, 2001, p. 32-33).

It is more than clear that this space is shaped not only by light but also by materials that reflect or absorb it. The material in question is, of course, concrete—raw in some spaces but mostly polished to perfection, whose precise geometry emphasizes the interplay of shadow and light.

The way that the museum space was designed leads us to the possibility of analyzing and applying the principles of constructing similar spaces using selected analytical concepts of the museum’s architecture and their dialectical pairs, which are presented in the table (figure 6) below. This table refers to Badiou’s method of analyzing theatre (Badiou, 2013, p. 26).

Sayamaike Museum	
Analytical (elements) / real object	***Dialectical (at-play) / sensory object***
Raw concrete	Honesty in storytelling through architecture
Segment of the old lake wall	Connection to the past, a metaphor for traveling through time and space
Walking path through the museum (both exterior and interior)	The intentional slowing of visitors' pace, allows the space the opportunity to tell the story of the site's history
Planned use of water as a feature of architecture that creates specific ambiance	Reflection as a metaphor for the passage of time and the sound of water trickling down the walls of the courtyard creates a unique soundscape and contributes to the meditative qualities of the courtyard space
Framing of visitor's views upon the architecture	The intentional guiding of the visitor's gaze, which, in harmony with sound, makes this space not merely a form of communication but allows the visitor to daydream as they wander

Fig. 6. – Tabular presentation of selected analytical elements of the museum's architecture and their dialectical pairs (author: Darko Sekulić)

4. CONCLUSION

It is more than evident that the "age of abundance," or the era of incredibly rapid technological development, cannot keep pace with the development and application of technology in other fields and spheres of human activity. In all areas of life, humanity encounters its greatest obstacle—the oversaturation of information received and processed within a single day. "We want a theater with a certain capacity, not a theater that is incapable" (Badiou, 2013, pp. 74-75). This thought reflects the situation in which architecture on a global level finds itself today—an abundance of space production; however, this space is created for the passive observer who will participate in someone else's life rather than building it for themselves. "Art is not eternal, just as the possession of treasures is not eternal" (Badiou, 2013, p. 13).

This work aimed to showcase the use of object-oriented ontology as a method of analyzing architecture and theatre and the benefits of its use. The case study offers a practical example of how this methodology is supposed to be used in independent research and offers insights into the benefits of employing OOO when writing about architecture. With that in mind, and considering all the previously laid out research, a theatre that will be capable of creating and nurturing an active participant, and not just a mere spectator, needs to approach the ideation and creation of scene architecture, or any architecture for that matter, by establishing a new discourse. A discourse that aims to disrupt the status quo. In doing so, this research shows that life is indeed serious, but so is art! Assuming this statement is true we could agree that the ephemeral nature of theatre and the use of it as a form of media entails that sensory qualities of a play and/or a performance could and do indeed indirectly produce real qualities which architects employ when creating existential space.

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Biography

Romana Bošković Živanović (1981) is an architect. She graduated from the Department of Architecture and Urban Planning of the Faculty of Technical Sciences in Novi Sad (2005) and received her doctorate in scene design from the University of Arts in Belgrade (2010). She works in the field of stage design, as a designer and consultant, and in the centre of her interest are the architecture and technology of the scenic space. She exhibited and showed her artworks at national and international events (BELEF, Mikser, INFANT, BINA, S.U.T.R.A.), and as a technical producer she participated in the BITEF and BELEF festivals. She works also at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade. She led the curatorial team of the Student Section of Serbia at the Prague Quadrennial in 2019. She played basketball for the pioneer, cadet, junior and youth national teams of Yugoslavia. From 2014 to 2018, she was the president of the Commission for Technology of OISTAT, the International Association of Scenographers, Theatre Architects and Technicians. She is a full professor at the Sub-Department for Art and Design, Faculty of Technical Sciences in Novi Sad and the head of the Master's academic studies in Scene Architecture and Technique.

Aleksandra Pešterac (1984) is an architect. She received her doctorate from the Faculty of Technical Sciences at the University of Novi Sad, where she is currently an assistant professor leading courses in the field of scene architecture. Within the Sub-Department of Arts and Design, she is the Scene Design Chair. As an architectural designer, she participated in the development of several projects. She has published papers at international conferences, as well as in national periodicals. She is the co-author of several award-winning projects in the field of architectural design. She is a renowned author and mentor, regularly taking an active role in exhibitions and workshops.

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(UP)BUILDING OF THE NATIONAL THEATRE IN SUBOTICA

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Abstract

Designing and building a theatre is a complex ideological, spiritual and engineering undertaking, which aims to create program, spatial and technological frameworks for performing arts and other cultural content. One of the design approaches is phased design, which in theory represents a good way of realization, especially when it comes to complex typologies, capital investments and public facilities of great importance for an environment. The reconstruction of the National Theatre - Népsínház began in 1992, following a public competition for conceptual design. Due to delays over twenty-five years, the existing design was adapted to a phased implementation with ten defined phases. During the realization of the individual phases, numerous challenges and problems arose, which will certainly affect the planned program conception of the institution and the future life of the Theatre. This paper will analyze the design approach used in the reconstruction. Special attention will be devoted to key topics - the presence and participation of future users of the facility in this long-term process, as well as the (mis)understanding of program, spatial and technological specificities of such a complex typology, by all involved in the reconstruction. All this, among other things, contributed to the fate of the Theatre being uncertain for many years. Whether this house will really come to life and become a true cultural, educational and social centre, or whether that magic will be "swallowed" by the endless adaptation of project and technical documentation to the possibilities and capacities of Contractors, Investors and budgets, as well as changes during construction, remains a question mark.

Keywords: scene architecture, scene technologies, National Theatre in Subotica.

1. INTRODUCTION

Modern theatre buildings increasingly appear as “invisible typologies” — not because their typological structure has lost clarity, but because of systematic support and investment in culture, particularly in the field of cultural infrastructure.[1] The outcome of this socio-economic situation is a modest built stock of this typology – the fact remains that in the past thirty years, not a single new theatre building has been constructed.

This invisibility is also directly linked to the absence of a clear and systematic cultural policy in the Republic of Serbia, and consequently, to the lack of a defined programmatic orientation within cultural institutions. From a sociological perspective, as well as in relation to the cultural needs of a city or town, theatres — as “houses of culture” (Pešterac, Dimitrovska, 2014, pp. 111) of great importance for the community and their immediate surroundings — today reflect a completely different image because of the aforementioned tendencies.

When it comes to conceptualizing and designing theatres, or performance venues in general, there is a clear lack of understanding of this complex typology and the specific requirements it entails. There are many reasons for this situation.

First and foremost, it stems from insufficient knowledge of:

- the programmatic and functional processes related to the production of a theatre performance or other events,
- the specific technical and technological aspects of stage design, and
- the “life” and mode of operation of these institutions — all of which often lead to a generalized approach in theatre design.

On the other hand, inadequate understanding of the (highly specific) design approach of engineers involved in the planning of stage facilities inevitably leads to mistrust from investors, frequent conflicts, and sometimes even resistance from the future users of space. An illustrative example of this is the design and construction process of the National Theatre building in Subotica[2], which is still ongoing.

“Today, the house strives to speak for itself — through its program and inner essence — while the task of design is to explore how we can make that possible” (Dinulović, Konstantinović, Zeković, 2011, p. 133).

With the opening of the National Theatre building in Subotica in 1854, the city gained a cultural landmark that, over the following decades, reflected the political and social transformations of its time. Throughout its development, the institution underwent a series of transformations — from changes in name and structure to the redefinition of its artistic policy — ultimately becoming a model of a multicultural stage directed toward three national communities: Serbian, Hungarian, and Croatian (Dadić Dinulović, Ristovski, Đuričić, 2011, pp. 197). Due to years of decay and lack of maintenance, the building was nearly abandoned, leading to a public anonymous competition in 1992, in which the award was shared by two Belgrade teams — Energoprojekt, led by Zorica Savičić, and Atelje 212, led by Radivoje Dinulović and Milosav Marinović. From 1998 to 2007, the project’s technical documentation was developed, and in 2007, the reconstruction of the Narodno pozorište – Narodno kazalište – Népsínház building in Subotica began — a process that is still ongoing.

Even after thirty years, the reconstruction of this building has not resulted in the citizens of Subotica identifying with the theatre. The reasons for this situation remain unclear, as does the source of the local community’s resistance toward the continuation of the project. Although several initiatives[3] have been organized to affirm that such an institution is both necessary and holds significant potential for the city of Subotica, for the region, and for culture in the broadest sense of the word.

1 According to the research conducted within the scientific project titled “The Technical and Technological Condition and Potentials of Architectural Facilities for Performing Arts in the Republic of Serbia”, which compiled a list of 31 theatres across the country, an analysis of the existing state of all theatre buildings indicated that the construction condition, technical and technological equipment, as well as safety aspects of performance venues, are at a very low level — particularly in smaller urban environments (Dinulović, Konstantinović, Zeković, 2011).

2 The full name of the theatre is “Народно позориште – Narodno kazalište – Népsínház.” The authors of the main design for the reconstruction, adaptation, and extension are Radivoje Dinulović, Zorica Savičić, and Sandra Skenderija, while the chief designer is Radivoje Dinulović.

3 To highlight the importance of the future theatre in the city of Subotica, a few events were organized for several consecutive years within Museum Night, such as “Theatre on the Construction Site”.

Although the reconstruction project has since been brought to completion, its final phase underwent numerous modifications, indicating that the importance of this cultural institution has not received the attention it deserves. The design process for the theatre house in Subotica has become invisible due to frequent institutional changes and political turbulence, which have disrupted the continuity of its realization.

2. *INVISIBLE PROCESSES* – DESIGN AND PREPARATION OF TECHNICAL DOCUMENTATION

In order to construct any building, it is necessary to prepare technical documentation, which, contrary to common belief, does not involve only architecture and structural design. Rather, it comprises a set of projects aimed at establishing the concept of the building, developing the conditions and methods of construction, and defining its maintenance requirements.[4]

For performance architecture, particularly buildings where the program includes the preparation, production, and staging of various events across multiple performance- audience spaces, it is essential that, due to the complexity of functional processes and programmatic requirements, the beginning of this process is based on a clearly, carefully, and unambiguously defined program of the building and a design brief.

The preparation of technical documentation then follows. This “contains an organized set of textual, numerical, and graphical supplements — that is, documents and projects developed to determine the site, functional, technical, and formal characteristics of the building, the methods of construction and execution of works, ensuring compliance with site conditions, applicable regulations, and standards.”[5]

On one hand, there are different types of technical documentation, which imply varying levels of detail and serve different purposes.[6] On the other hand, technical documentation is prepared in sections, according to specific areas or content, with each project assigned a sequential number and obligatorily compiled into volumes. Thus, starting from the conceptual design stage, these are sets of mutually coordinated projects[7] prepared by engineers from various disciplines.[8] All these projects are prepared for the Construction Permit Project (PGD)[9], the Execution Project (PZI)[10], and the As-Built Project (PIO)[11].

4 Rulebook on the content, method and procedure for preparing and controlling technical documentation according to the class and purpose of the structure, Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 96/2023, Article 2.

5 Ibid, Article 3.

6 Ibid, Article 1: Types of technical documentation include: general project (GNP), conceptual design (IDR), preliminary design (IDP), construction permit project (PGD), execution project (PZI), and as-built project (PIO).

7 Ibid, Article 16: ...The preliminary design is a project, or a set of mutually coordinated projects, that defines: the purpose, location, form, capacity, technical, technological, and functional characteristics, and appearance of the building; it describes the works and demonstrates compliance with the basic requirements for the building, depending on the type and class of the building, as well as the works being executed.

8 Ibid, Arcticle 26. The projects, organized by volumes, are as follows: Volume 1 – Architecture; Volume 2 – Structural/Construction Projects; Volume 3 – Hydraulic Installations; Volume 4 – Electrical Power Installations; Volume 5 – Telecommunications and Signaling Installations; Volume 6 – Mechanical Installations; Volume 7 – Stage Technology (7.1 Stage Mechanics System, 7.2 Stage Lighting System, 7.3 Audio and Video); Volume 8 – Traffic and Traffic Signage; Volume 9 – External Landscaping with synchronized plan of installations and connections, landscape architecture, and horticulture; Volume 10 – Preparatory Works (demolition, earthworks, foundation pit securing).

9 Ibid, Article 17. The Construction Permit Project is a set of mutually coordinated projects that define the location and capacity of the building on the site, its functionality in terms of technological and other requirements, spatial design, selection of the structural system, dimensioning of the main structural elements, selection of construction products and required performance in relation to their essential characteristics, as well as installations and equipment selection. This ensures compliance with site conditions and the basic requirements for the building, among other aspects

10 Ibid, Article 18. The Execution Project (PZI) is a set of mutually coordinated projects necessary for the execution of construction, craftsmanship, installation, and other works. It establishes the building’s technical, technological, and operational characteristics, including equipment and installations, methods for quality control and assurance of construction products, technical-technological and organizational solutions for the construction of the building, the investment value of the building, as well as the conditions for its maintenance

11 Ibid, Article 19. The As-Built Project (PIO) is prepared for the purpose of obtaining an occupancy permit, using, and maintaining the building. It represents a set of mutually coordinated projects showing all details of the completed building necessary to determine its suitability for use

For the reconstruction of the National Theatre in Subotica, the technical documentation was prepared in accordance with applicable laws and regulations, which chronologically included:

	Project title	Documentation lead	contracted	completed
1.	Conceptual architectural and structural design with installation and stage technology projects for the adaptation, reconstruction, and extension of the *Narodno pozorište – Narodno kazalište – Népsínház* building in Subotica	YUSTAT-Pro, Yugoslav Centre for Performing Arts and Technology, Belgrade	1998.	2003.
2.	Main architectural and structural design with installation and stage technology projects for the adaptation, reconstruction, and extension of the *Narodno pozorište – Narodno kazalište – Népsínház* building in Subotica	YUSTAT-Pro	2003.	2006.
3.	Conceptual interior design project for the old part of the *Narodno pozorište – Narodno kazalište – Népsínház* building in Subotica	Portart, Belgrade; Inter-municipal Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments, Subotica	2008.	2009.
4.	Conceptual and main interior design project for the new part of the *Narodno pozorište – Narodno kazalište – Népsínház*building in Subotica	Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad, Department of Architecture and Urbanism, Novi Sad; Portart, Belgrade	2011.	2015.
5.	Execution project for the façades of the *Narodno pozorište – Narodno kazalište – Népsínház* building in Subotica	Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad, Department of Architecture and Urbanism, Novi Sad	2008.	2009.
6.	Main design project for the external landscaping around the *Narodno pozorište – Narodno kazalište – Népsínház* building in Subotica	Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad, Department of Architecture and Urbanism, Novi Sad	2011.	2014.
7.	Amendments to the main architectural and structural design with installation and stage technology projects for the adaptation, reconstruction, and extension of the *Narodno pozorište – Narodno kazalište – Népsínház* building in Subotica	Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad, Department of Architecture and Urbanism; SCen – Centre for Stage Design, Architecture and Technology, Novi Sad	2011.	2014.
8.	Amendments to the technical documentation for the *Narodno pozorište – Narodno kazalište – Népsínház* building – PZI Phase Execution Project	Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad, Department of Architecture and Urbanism; SCen – Centre for Stage Design, Architecture and Technology, Novi Sad; Portart, Belgrade; North Engineering, Subotica	jun 2017.	o k t o b a r 2017.

From this, several conclusions can be drawn:

- The history of designing and constructing the *Narodno pozorište – Narodno kazalište – Népszínház* building in Subotica began in the 1990s, and more than thirty years have passed since then.
- The building was designed as a complete entity, and the Construction Permit was obtained in 2007, which means that eighteen years have passed during which numerous modifications occurred.
- In 2014, the Amendments and Supplements to the Main Architectural and Structural Design with Installation and Stage Technology Projects were prepared to respond to the Investor's request to reduce construction costs. Based on this, a new Construction Permit was issued, allowing for phased execution of the works; however, it did not provide for phased technical acceptance of parts of the building or for issuing a permit for the use of portions of the building in this context.

3. *INVISIBLE ASPECTS* – PHASED APPROACH TO DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

One approach to designing a building is phased design, i.e., phased construction, which in theory represents an effective path for realization, particularly in the case of complex typologies, large-scale investments, and public buildings of great significance to a community. In our context, the determining factor for such a decision is primarily economic. Phased construction allows financing to be realized in "smaller portions," which is suitable for public investments and multiple funding sources. In such cases, the technical documentation is prepared in stages or phases, as a set of coordinated projects, in accordance with the dynamics of construction and execution of works.

The Execution Project (PZI) for the National Theatre in Subotica, at the Investor's request, was divided into phases, and the deadline for the preparation of these projects — the most complex in terms of detail and additionally phased — was extremely short: three months. Specifically, for the phased PZI project, this meant that each individual project had to be prepared in five required phases, coordinated with one another. This literally increased the number of coordinated projects from sixteen to approximately seventy (some projects, such as structural design, were completed in their entirety).

Although, in theory, such an approach to design and construction should represent good practice in specific situations this was not the case. The participants in this otherwise complex construction process — further complicated by the phased approach — included representatives of the Investor (i.e., financiers — the City of Subotica, the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, and the Republic of Serbia), the Contractors (who changed for each individual phase), and the Supervisory Authority (which also changed depending on the phase). For certain phases, the building designers were formally present as part of the Design Supervision.

During the design process, and later during the execution of works, various problematic aspects of the phased approach were observed:

- Changes to applicable and binding legislation, which had to be applied.
- Investment values, which fluctuated over time due to deviations from the planned construction schedule, building technologies, or the availability of components and equipment on the market.
- Financing, i.e., the funds provided by the Investor, which deviated from the planned values for individual phases, causing the scope, type, and volume of work to change "on the fly" within extremely short periods for tender documentation preparation, relative to the available budget and the value of public procurement for a given phase.
- Compliance with applicable regulations, standards, and norms, also in relation to an extended time period.
- Execution technologies, as planned in the design versus those available to the Contractors (with Contractors changing for each phase).
- Legislation governing public procurement and the criteria for selecting Contractors.
- Lack of understanding of the programmatic, spatial, and technological specificities of such a public building by all participants in the construction process.
- Unprofessionalism, negligence, and lack of knowledge of Contractors in certain phases, resulting in

numerous construction errors, largely tolerated by the Investor and Supervisory Authority, mainly due to political pressures.

4. CONCLUSION OR *INVISIBLE PEOPLE* – (UP)BUILDING OF THE THEATRE

During the process of constructing the theatre, which unfolded against the backdrop of all the aforementioned problematic aspects of engineering, legal, and financial nature, as well as many other contexts — social, political, ideological, media-related, cultural, and immaterial — a theme emerged that may be of the greatest significance for the reconstruction of the National Theatre in Subotica, as well as for the design of performance architecture in general. This concerns the presence and participation of the future users of the building in this long-term process, primarily the institution's staff, but also the audience and visitors — the citizens of Subotica.

It is evident that the future users of the theatre space did not participate in this process. Why this was the case, and who bears responsibility, remains unknown. The design program for the reconstruction of the National Theatre building was prepared in 1998 by a broad expert group formed within the theatre, involving "more than thirty leading specialists in theatre, various technologies, architecture and urbanism, as well as in heritage protection, production, and cultural policy — from Subotica, Novi Sad, Belgrade, Europe, and the World" (Dinulović, 2008, pp. 3) After this, the project existed independently of the theatre institution. Within the theatre, as well as in the local community, no one recognized the project as "their own" or actively advocated for it.

It turns out that the fate of a cultural building is not determined solely by the usual aspects of building — the design approach, the quality of the project, and the concrete operational processes related to the physical space, including works, budget, and contractors. One could say that building as a physical and technical process pertains to the material dimension of creation, and it is undeniable that the National Theatre in Subotica has been physically built over the past decades.

However, what was missing is the *(up)building* in a symbolic, social, and cultural sense — a process that involves not only the physical raising of the building but also the creation of the identity and values that the building embodies. *(Up)building*, understood as the spiritual, cultural, institutional, and political dimension of building, implies the idea of the theatre within the community and the relationship to culture — a process that should begin before *building*, proceed in parallel with it, and continue long after the *building* is completed (Figure 1).

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Fig. 1. "(up)building of the theatre"

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Biography

Bojan Stojković has completed his undergraduate and master studies at the Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad, where he is currently a PhD candidate. He has been working as a teaching assistant at the Department of Architecture and Urbanism since 2016, taking part in courses: Architectural Design, Architectural Technologies - Design Process and Architecture of Exhibition and Events. He is one of the founders and a board member of architecture, culture and art associations Ephemera Collective and Baza - platform for spatial praxis, both based in Novi Sad, Serbia. In the field of professional and artistic production, he co-authored a number of architectural and artistic projects shown at the international exhibitions and festivals with selection committees. His main interests are spatial design and spatial experiments in different kinds of media.

Miljana Zeković, PhD, is a professor of Architecture. Over the years, she has been teaching Architectural Design, Ephemeral Architecture and Architecture of Exhibitions and Events at the undergraduate level, as well as a series of courses in Creative Research at the MA and PhD levels at the Faculty of Technical Sciences at the University of Novi Sad and the University of Arts in Belgrade. Her research interests lie in spatial design and practices, spatial phenomenology, transdisciplinary curatorial practices, and experiments in the domain of architecture and related disciplines. She is an experienced leader of interdisciplinary site-specific workshops and has worked in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, the UK, the Czech Republic, Finland, China, Taiwan and the Philippines.

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TEMPORAL UTILISATION OF ABANDONED STRUCTURES: URBAN ACTIVATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract

In the last decades, a series of economic, political, and social crises and changes have resulted in a significant number of unfinished and abandoned buildings and structures. These structures frequently spark discussions and speculations about the broader implications that caused their appearance and environmental impact. Therefore, this paper aims to underscore the significance of the temporary use of abandoned buildings and its positive impact on the built and unbuilt environment. These buildings often remain excluded from active urban life, altering the urban matrix and settlement structure. Given they are usually located on the periphery of settlements, they inevitably affect the undisturbed natural environment and landscape. With their primary function unrealised, these structures offer opportunities for future reinterpretation and utilisation. Contemporary strategies and methods for temporary use of abandoned buildings offer new and alternative solutions to activate urban spaces and engage local communities through diverse programs. This case study employed a comparative analysis of contemporary architectural practices addressing the temporary use of abandoned buildings. This paper offers three primary approaches that consider the issue. The first approach implies a passive stance towards the building, focusing on the aestheticisation of the structure and its relations with the surrounding environment rather than introducing new temporary uses. The second and third approaches include introducing a temporary utilitarian function and suggesting an active engagement with the building. In the second approach, the designed utilitarian function is eventually executed after its temporary use. In contrast, in the third approach, the ultimate function is altered by the influence of temporary use. The analysed examples lead to the conclusion that such structures' spatial and visual qualities provide a basis for considering abandoned buildings as essential platforms for new social, cultural, and artistic programs and engagement.

Keywords: temporary use, revitalisation, utilisation, unfinished structures, abandoned buildings, meanwhile space

1. INTRODUCTION

The impacts of various economic, political, and social crises and transformations in recent years have resulted in numerous unfinished and abandoned buildings and structures. Such buildings are often the subject of debate and speculation, both regarding their impact on the immediate environment and the various circumstances that led to their existence. These structures are often excluded from active urban life, leading to certain changes in the urban fabric and settlement structure. Frequently situated on the peripheral parts of towns, they inevitably affect the undisturbed natural environment and landscape. Such structures are products of complex causal mechanisms and processes reflective of the characteristic economic, political, social, administrative, and other influences of the time in which they were built. The lack of financial resources, along with complex ownership issues often leads to the neglect of unfinished and abandoned buildings for extended periods, without any attempts to improve or change their condition (Cole et al., 2021) we aim to analyse the state of abandoned properties in Slovak municipalities and present possible solutions for this issue. In the theoretical part, we define abandonment and the tools for abandonment based on the current literature review. Building on this framework, the paper analyses the towns and villages of selected Slovak region, that being Banská Bystrica self-governing region. To map abandoned properties located in a selected region, as well as to identify emotional value of these building and the instruments needed for their reconstruction or removal, a questionnaire was sent to the mayors of all municipalities of over 1,000 inhabitants in the region of Banská Bystrica – a total of 115 municipalities in 2019. This concentrated research on one region enabled us to have a closer look at the status of abandoned structures in municipalities in a typical area of Central and Eastern Europe. We compare the issue of abandonment in the commuter zone (the two largest cities in the regions and their surrounding**.** The primary factors contributing to the increasing deterioration of neglected buildings or public spaces are economic and demographic changes influenced by the effects of abandonment in urban areas where this phenomenon has been present for an extended period (Balco et al., 2018). They stand as a testament to the circumstances and conditions that led to their abandonment, which along with their physical appearance, significantly contributes to their negative perception. The primary reason for this perception, however, lies in the negative impact these spaces have on the surrounding environment, which can manifest in various ways, such as decreased property values, reduced or virtually non-existent interest in investments for new amenities and programmes, increased utility and maintenance costs, higher rates of vandalism and crime, a decline in ecological and sanitary conditions, as well as an overall deterioration in the living conditions and quality of life for the local community (Cohen, 2001). In terms of negative impact on both the immediate and broader surroundings, it is important to understand that even the most ambitious urban development and revitalisation projects, aimed at improving living conditions and attracting more residents, can fail if the issues of vacant and abandoned buildings are not properly addressed (Accordino & Johnson, 2000).

2. THE POTENTIAL OF THE CURRENT STATE OF ABANDONMENT

Unfinished buildings and structures are those whose construction began but, for the reasons mentioned earlier, was never completed. In some cases, the state of incompletion is only temporary, after which the construction process is completed, resulting in the successful realization of the building's intended utilitarian purpose. However, this is often not the case, and the state of incompletion of initiated physical structures remains almost permanent. Unlike unfinished buildings, abandoned buildings once served their utilitarian function, after which their use ceased. Although unfinished and abandoned buildings differ in whether their use was realised at some point in time, what unites and connects them is their current state of abandonment. This condition is evidently linked to the absence of the architectural object's utilitarian function. This absence opens up space for new discussions that could generate potential for their future reinterpretation and use.

2.1 Spatial-Temporal Potential

Considering their current state of abandonment, the events and circumstances that led to this condition, as well as the uncertainty of their future, it can be concluded that these buildings exist in a state of temporary typological, programmatic, and functional uncertainty (Stamenović, 2016)—'trapped' in the moment between their previous and future use (De Smet, 2016)certains sites de (re**.** This state of utilitarian uncertainty, over time,

could redefine these buildings and establish them as a distinct hypothetical, spatial-temporal architectural category: *interim space in the interim period*. If, within the context of this discussion, the utilitarian function of a particular space is obvious, it can be considered a clearly defined space, easily designated for a specific purpose based on that function. However, if this is not the case, such spaces can be categorised as *interim spaces*, those that temporarily exist between previous and future functions. If such spaces can be defined as *interim spaces*, then the concept of the *'interim period'* would undoubtedly refer to the period in which a building lacks a clearly defined and realised utilitarian function. Accordingly, the *interim period* can be viewed as a temporal 'window' in which new spatial potential for temporary use could be generated. *Interim spaces* in the *interim period* can be considered valuable spatial-temporal resources, whose potential could encourage their temporary, or even permanent use, which in no way needs to be conditioned by their previous typological, programmatic, and functional characteristics.

2.2 Ambiental Potential

When observing a building, it is often evident whether it is abandoned, with signs such as collapsed roofs, broken windows, overgrown vegetation, trash, and graffiti serving as clear indicators of neglect (Cole et al., 2021). Prolonged disuse and neglect lead abandoned and unfinished buildings to undergo a gradual and lasting transformation of their physical structure, resulting in the emergence of new environmental values and potential uses. Exposed architectural elements—crafted from materials like concrete, brick, steel, glass, and more—take on a unique aesthetic as they decay over time. Combined with wild vegetation, these elements form distinct spatial and visual compositions, offering a raw, unrefined beauty that redefines the character and potential of these spaces (Arboleda, 2017). The introduction of new colors and textures in architectural elements emphasizes the concept of layering visual components, resulting in dynamic, scenic images that become an integral value of architectural space. The potential of such buildings lies in the unique characteristics derived from their current state, which can contribute to the creation of new meanings. By shifting from a passive architectural entity to an active one that fosters interaction and dialogue with users, the performative aspect of architectural space is realized. This performative quality emerges in specific contexts of use or reinterpretation, whether in a social or artistic setting (Žugić, 2017). In the realm of liminal phenomena—marginal and transitional spaces between dimensions of reality—an abstract spatial category is formed within the observer's mind when engaging with a work of art. This recognition of spatial and temporal relationships relies on the distinctive environmental characteristics of the space, which can be manipulated to facilitate an immersive experience with art or events. Alongside these ambient features, ephemeral architectural solutions play a crucial role in forming liminal spaces. These temporary structures provide a physical framework that supports the emergence of this unique spatial category (Zeković, 2015). Buildings with such attributes possess exceptional environmental and spatial qualities, setting them apart from conventional structures and public spaces. Abandoned buildings, in particular, can offer a metaphysical atmosphere, making them ideal venues for performing arts, installations, and exhibitions. Their spatial potential also makes them suitable for developing socially beneficial programs and activities (Di Prete, 2021). In the context of temporary use, these features become particularly valuable for practitioners in art, culture, and spatial design. Such spaces serve as platforms for experimenting with alternative practices, inspiring innovative approaches, and advancing both theoretical and practical work (Crippa, 2021).

3. POTENTIAL OF TEMPORARY USE

Temporary use primarily refers to the reactivation and revitalization of buildings and spaces that have been in a state of abandonment for an extended period. In recent years, the practice of temporarily reactivating abandoned buildings has increased, driven by various global economic, political, and social crises and changes. Considering all its positive aspects, which include engaging the local community, creatively using existing spatial resources, and stimulating the development of the surrounding built and unbuilt environment, temporary use can be seen as a highly sustainable way of utilizing space (Martelloni, & Porceddu, 2024). Although temporary use is primarily considered and applied within a limited time frame, it can also, in some cases, serve as a tool for finding a permanent solution to the problem of abandoned buildings. These 'remnants' of urban space, often perceived as a negative phenomenon, can, due to their spatial-temporal and environmental potential, represent an exceptional form of renewable spatial resource that does not

require the additional occupation of free public areas, whether as a permanent or temporary solution (Crespi, 2021). The degree of abandonment of these buildings largely determines the possibilities for implementing a temporary programme. Very often, such buildings do not meet the basic safety, sanitary, and technical standards required for the implementation of a public programme. For this reason, alongside the primary spatial framework, it is essential to conceptualise secondary, ephemeral spatial elements and structures. When implementing spatial solutions and experiments related to the temporary use of unfinished and abandoned spaces, it is crucial to carefully consider the ephemeral architectural means and their impact on the surrounding environment. The success of the design largely determines the effectiveness of efforts to reintegrate such buildings into the existing urban fabric of the settlement. For the potential reactivation and use of abandoned buildings to be successfully carried out and made available to future users, it is essential to consider all key elements of the site and the programme. Whether it involves a permanent solution or some form of temporary use, it is also crucial to involve the local community in the decision-making process regarding the design. Reactivating such buildings undoubtedly requires the thorough and comprehensive development of all relevant strategies and methods for temporary use, which would, to the greatest extent, enable the realization of their full potential, as well as the preservation of the memory and character of the location they occupy (Crespi et al., 2017). Besides addressing the issue of abandonment at the level of the building itself, temporary use can also serve as a very useful and important tool for examining and developing strategies to improve specific areas of the neighbourhood. Depending on the situation, these buildings can be temporarily programmed according to the needs of both the immediate and broader context. Contemporary strategies and methods for their temporary use, can, through the exploration of various programmatic contents, offer new and alternative solutions for the activation and revitalization of not only unfinished and abandoned buildings, but also the wider urban area.

4. CASE STUDY

An analysis of relevant examples from contemporary architectural practice that explore the temporary use of abandoned buildings in various ways, reveals three most common approaches, which will be discussed further in the text. The first approach involves a passive stance and primarily focuses on the aesthetic enhancement of the building and its ambiental qualities. In this approach, the ambiance of the primary spatial framework of the abandoned building is focal and is considered the starting point for the realization of a spatial installation. Through its contextualization and reinterpretation via various media, the building itself is often presented as a kind of architectural *readymade* art piece (Arboleda, 2017). This consideration heavily relies on the idea and principles of *readymade* art, according to which any object can become an artwork depending on how its context and mode of observation are altered (Goldsmith, 1983). The second and third approaches involve the introduction of a temporary utilitarian function and advocate for an active relationship with the object. They differ in that, in the second approach, the designed utilitarian function is ultimately realised after the temporary use, while in the third approach, the final utilitarian function of the object is altered as a result of the temporary use. By analysing relevant examples of the mentioned approaches, this paper aims to highlight the diverse possibilities for the temporary use of abandoned buildings and their positive impact on the immediate built and unbuilt environment, emphasizing that their spatial and environmental qualities can serve as the foundation for their consideration as renewable spatial resources and platforms for new alternative, social, and cultural-artistic content and activities.

4.1 Case 1: *Super Limbo*

Super Limbo (“Sharjah Architecture Triennale,” 2023) exemplifies the first of the aforementioned approaches to the temporary use of abandoned buildings and represents an ephemeral spatial installation created within one of the largest unfinished buildings in the United Arab Emirates—*Sharjah Mall*. As part of the programme for the second edition of the *Sharjah Architecture Triennale* in 2023, spatial installation is created by a group of architects and designers named *Limbo Acra,* in response to the Triennale’s theme: *‘The Beauty of Impermanence: An Architecture of Adaptability’*.

Made of recycled woven textile strips connected to the existing architectural elements at different spatial levels, the *Super Limbo* installation attempts to establish a dialogue with this unfinished building, aiming to

reshape its narrative and highlight its currently underutilised spatial potential (Architekturtriennale Sharjah, 2023). Emphasizing the significance and potential of the temporary use of this unfinished and abandoned building, *Super Limbo* invites visitors to interact, encouraging them to develop and enhance their individual spatial experience through the collaboration of unique ambiental qualities and ephemeral spatial elements. This approach is significant because it shows that even brief temporary actions can highlight the qualities, possibilities, and potentials of unfinished and abandoned buildings, thereby changing their often negative perception, and encouraging a more positive stance toward them in the future.

Fig. 1. Super Limbo spatial installation (“Limbo Accra Turns Half-Built Sharjah Mall into a ‘Symbol of Potential,’” 2023)

4.2 Case 2: *Le Tri Postal*

Le Tri Postal (Dejemeppe, 2020) belongs to the second approach to the temporary use of abandoned buildings, which involves introducing a temporary utilitarian function that concludes after a certain period, followed by the revitalization and reconstruction of the original designed function of the building. This example involves the temporary use of the former central administrative building of a distribution centre in Brussels, which ceased operation in 1997 due to a change in ownership of the building. While awaiting revitalization and the reestablishment of its original function, the building remained abandoned for more than twenty years, until an initiative from the local community emerged for its temporary use.

Fig. 2. Le Tri Postal workshop (“Le tri postal,” 2022)

After a certain period, the local authorities decided to support this initiative, enabling social organizations to use the ground floor of the building within a clearly defined and limited period. From November 2019 to April 2022, under the management of the local association Communa (“Le tri postal,” 2022), various socially beneficial public services and spaces were temporarily activated within this building, including a multifunctional hall for hosting diverse public events, a bicycle repair workshop, an incubator for the development of socially responsible projects and assistance for vulnerable groups, as well as several art studios and workshops. This example clearly demonstrates that such an approach to temporary use, even within a limited time frame, can serve as an important and useful spatio-temporal resource, made available to meet the needs of the local community, while awaiting a more permanent, long-term solution.

4.3 Case 3: *Peckham Levels*

Peckham Levels (“Peckham Levels,” 2019) belongs within the third approach to the temporary use of abandoned buildings, involving the introduction of a temporary function, which alters the final function. This building was originally constructed in the 1980s in London’s Peckham neighbourhood as a supermarket, which also included a covered public parking garage spanning seven levels. In the 1990s, the supermarket closed and a new function—a multiplex cinema—was introduced into the existing space. This led to a significant decrease in the need for the parking garage, leaving the majority of the garage area abandoned. Due to prolonged neglect and abandonment, there was an inevitable rise in vandalism and crime, which had a negative impact on the surrounding area of the building. In response to this condition, at the initiative of a group of citizens called *Bold Tendencies* (“History of Bold Tendencies,” n.d.), the abandoned garage began to be occasionally used for various public social and cultural events. Due to the significant success of the activities organised by *Bold Tendencies*, the local authorities decided to repurpose the garage, for which an architectural competition was organised. Involving the local community in creating a new spatial plan for the area and launching an architectural competition helped ensure the success of the repurposing project and its long-term use. This defined the permanent social and cultural function of the abandoned garage.

With the implementation of the winning design by the architectural studio *Turner Works*, the interior of the old abandoned garage was completely reconstructed in 2015, reflecting the spirit of the place and the aesthetics of the existing state of the building. The seven levels of the garage, including the roof, were repurposed into new areas for public social, cultural, and commercial activities. This approach to temporary use particularly relies on the active participation of the local community, which can significantly impact the success and sustainability of a temporary solution. In other words, if the temporary use of an unfinished or abandoned building is deeply rooted in the needs, habits, and activities of the local context, it can easily be transformed

Fig. 3. Peckham Levels interior corridor (“Peckham Levels,” 2019)

5. DISCUSSION

The analysed examples demonstrate successful implementation of temporary uses for unfinished structures, highlighting the three most common approaches to their utilization identified through this research. The selected examples represent each of the three approaches discussed in the study. They were chosen for their effectiveness in temporarily repurposing abandoned structures, demonstrating a positive environmental impact and transforming the perception of these spaces. The first example, *Super Limbo*, adopts a passive approach to the building in terms of introducing a specific utilitarian function. It primarily focuses on short-term activities that mainly rely on the ambiental qualities of the space. This case is significant because it highlights the potential for changing the perception of this phenomenon and encourages future research and analysis. The second example, *Le Tri Postal*, involves active engagement in introducing a specific utilitarian function that can last for a longer, albeit limited, period of time. The significance of this example is in demonstration of the possibility of the temporary usage of the building in state of abandonment, prior to its planned final reconstruction. *Le Tri Postal* highlights the significance of abandoned buildings as a unique spatial-temporal resource that can be of a great value to the local community, even within a limited timeframe. The third example, *Peckham Levels*, also involves the active use of a building for a longer, indefinite period of time. Unlike the previous examples, *Peckham Levels* demonstrates an additional potential of temporary use to explore and permanently reshape the future function of an abandoned building, driven by the needs and activities of its immediate environment. All the previously analysed approaches highlight the diversity of possibilities for temporary use and its potential to reveal, explore, and reshape the narratives associated with the phenomenon of unfinished and abandoned buildings.

6. CONCLUSION

The lack of utilitarian function and abandonment of a building should not necessarily be viewed as negative phenomena. On the contrary, if we could shift our perspective and adopt a positive stance toward abandoned buildings, these spaces could reveal potential for spatial experiments and explorations that conventional

public buildings cannot accommodate. Whether as a temporary or permanent solution to the issues of unfinished or abandoned buildings, strategies and methods of temporary use can serve as a useful tool for exploring all the potential programmatic possibilities of a building or a space. Considering all the relevant examples of contemporary architectural practice and the approaches they adopt, it could be concluded that successfully implemented projects of temporary use and the repurposing of unfinished and abandoned buildings and structures clearly demonstrate the potential of these renewable spatial resources and their ability to reshape, stimulate, and improve the social and urban development of an area (Di Prete, 2020). Such temporary spatial interventions have the ability to activate and connect various members of the local community by introducing new public spaces and programmes, turning unfinished structures and abandoned buildings into unique social hubs. Promoting the issue of temporary use encourages alternative practices in the fields of art, culture, and spatial design, while fostering the development of new approaches and concepts in theory, research, and practical work. The various approaches to the temporary use of abandoned structures, along with their positive impact on the immediate surroundings, clearly show their potential. These spaces and their ambiental qualities can serve as starting points for reimagining them as renewable resources and platforms for new social and cultural activities.

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Biography

Radmila Đurašinović is an architect and PhD student at the Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad. During her master's studies in Contemporary Theories and Technologies in Architecture, she developed an interest in architectural research. Her primary field of research is contemporary design strategies, including the re-evaluation of architectural strategies of the second half of the 20th century in relation to current urban issues. She has taken part in several international scientific conferences and published her work in both scientific journals and monographs. In addition to her research, she maintains a connection with practice, participating in both national and international competitions and exhibitions in architecture and design.

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THE CREATIVE POTENTIAL OF INDETERMINATE URBAN SPACE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE FLOATING PROJECT

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Abstract

Just as the intrinsic qualities of a site are integral to the development and success of performance in environmental or site-specific theatre, the qualities of urban spaces are integral to their appropriation and creative use by citizens. This paper draws attention to a particular spatial condition—indeterminacy, and indeterminate spaces in the city—which, having lost their initial function, temporarily find themselves outside conventional regulatory frameworks, thereby remaining open to new interpretations and uses. This paper aims not to locate or define indeterminate spaces in the city as a means of their regulation nor to prescribe their possible uses, for this can prove counterproductive, but instead to highlight these spaces as intrinsic to the production of the city, especially in relation to the pressing current issues of limited urban and diminishing public spaces, and the focus on the sustainability of cities through reuse. Case studies of architectural and user interventions in indeterminate urban spaces that recognise and instrumentalise the existing qualities of the space while introducing new dimensions, can be fruitful in answering the question of how architecture may act in these spaces without degrading their evocative potential. An analysis of raumlabor's[1] Floating ~~University~~ project demonstrates such an approach, and provides a contribution to discourse on the potential of indeterminate space in regard to the contemporary urban issues.

Keywords: indeterminacy, indeterminate space, reuse, sustainable city, raumlabor, spatial agency of indeterminate space in regard to the contemporary urban issues.

1 raumlabor (name styled lowercase) is an experimental architectural practice based in Berlin, Germany.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ignasi de Solà-Morales Rubió writes of a phenomenon that has placed a different perspective on a particular kind of space in the city since the 1970s—the *"empty, abandoned space in which a series of occurrences have taken place"*. To these spaces "*internal to the city, yet external to its everyday use*", he applies the term 'terrain vague'[1]—strange places that exist "*outside the city's effective circuits and productive structures*", whose evocative potential lies precisely in "*the relationship between the absence of use, of activity, and the sense of freedom*" (de Solà-Morales Rubió, 1995, pp. 119-120).

Gil Doron draws attention to the paradoxicality of attempts to make sense of and define these spaces in the city—mainly industrial ruins and vacant plots, but also, for example, the undersides of bridges—by both governmental agencies and urban theorists through terms like 'vacant' or 'derelict' land used in the UK's classification of land use, 'brown fields' and 'TOADS' defined by the US government, or concepts like the 'border vacuum' coined by Jane Jacobs. The list of terms is extensive, and the differing criteria and heavy reliance on aesthetic judgement in delineating such spaces, Doron argues, only creates further ambiguity within the subject of spaces whose existence relies on their "*disappearance from the map of the discourse*" (Doron, 2007, p.12). These myriad attempts to determine and manage these spaces using terms that suggest their emptiness or unproductiveness, can be seen as unproductive in itself, as the multifaceted and unique qualities of indeterminate urban space that *"cannot be found in, and are often actively excluded from, other urban spaces, including the formal public space"* (Doron, 2007, p. 15) have both been underscored in architectural and urban theory, and are increasingly instrumentalised in practice, as will be explored in this paper. Therefore, the terminology we use throughout this paper—indeterminate urban space—purposely implies nothing of its ownership or (un)desirability, but refers only to its state of flux,[2] leaving any attributions to the determination of the reader and potential user.

Regarding the degree of freedom offered by urban spaces, Frank and Stevens define the idea of 'looseness', noting that spaces become 'loose' through the unfolding of "activities not originally intended for those locations" (Franck & Stevens, 2007, p. 2). The possibilities for looseness depend to a certain degree on design, with certain types or physical qualities of places offering greater freedom than others, but ultimately, they depend on human agency, reflected in the recognition of the space's potential, and the creativity and determination of the user (Franck & Stevens, 2007, p. 11). Like public spaces, which are often loose by design—as open, unprogrammed areas permitting users to pursue a variety of activities—the looseness of indeterminate urban spaces lies in their programmeless state. However, their perceived looseness can also be attributed to their status outside regulatory frameworks, sometimes resulting in the unfolding of transgressive practices in such spaces (Franck, 2013, p. 154; Sheridan, 2007, p. 103). As grounds for activities both permissive and transgressive, indeterminate urban spaces perhaps provide the greatest degree of freedom in the city.

Besides works in the field of urban theory recognising the power of indeterminate urban spaces in stimulating creative user action, thus contributing to the vitality of cities and facilitating processes of place-making, the evocative potential of indeterminacy is being increasingly recognised in the field of architecture. Strategies incorporating elements of indeterminacy in designed spaces, be it on a programmatic, formal, or aesthetic level, are used to facilitate the (re)production of use and meaning with the aim of extending the lifespan of architectural structures in an era of increasing uncertainty (Đurašinović, 2022; Đurašinović & Zeković, 2023). The commodification of urban space under capitalist production has endangered loose spaces and the freedom of choice that they nurture, and as a result, shone a light on their invaluable contribution to the vitality of city life (Sorkin, 1992). According to Till (2014), human agency is only further stimulated by conditions of perceived scarcity. Thus, with scarcity as motivator and looseness as facilitator, indeterminate urban spaces have become centres of creative activity in contemporary urban contexts (Cupers & Miessen, 2002), which, in effect, opens up new roles for architects as agents working within spatial structures.

1 de Solà-Morales (1995, p. 119) turns to French in his attempt to capture the essence of terrain vague: the French *terrain*, more urban and less precisely defined than its comparable English counterparts, and *vague* with its tripartite origin combining notions of movement, vacancy, and indeterminacy into a single word.

2 Following Yago Conde's (2000) definition of indeterminacy as a "*certain state of suspension of the precise meaning of the object, resulting from the re-questioning of the limits in which this is inscribed*".

The way in which urban spaces like former industrial sites or spaces left over from urban transformation processes are (re)used, plays a vital role in defining the future of these spaces. Case studies of architectural and user interventions in these indeterminate urban spaces, which emphasize the existing qualities of the space while introducing new dimensions into the consideration of this topic, can be fruitful in answering the question of how architecture may intervene in such spaces without, as de Solà-Morales (1995, p. 123) warns, dissolving "*the uncontaminated magic of the obsolete in the realism of efficacy*". One such project by Berlin-based experimental architectural practice raumlabor illustrates this strategy, centred around a sensitive approach to the instrumentalization of the unique spatial qualities found in the rainwater retention pool of the former Tempelhof Airport in 2018.

2. THE CASE OF THE FLOATING ~~UNIVERSITY~~

The site of the Floating ~~University~~[3] is located just off the Tempelhofer Feld, former airfield-turned-park, and served as a rainwater retention basin for the Tempelhof airfield for the better part of a century. After the closure of the airport in 2008 and attempts to build on the site of the Tempelhofer Feld were halted by a referendum in 2014, the subsequent transformation of the airfield into a public park and revitalisation of the Tempelhof airport building into a creative incubator,[4] provided a new context for the reconsideration of the basin as a space for creative experimentation open to the public. In 2018, Berlin-based experimental architectural practice raumlabor re-activated the site as a "*laboratory for collective, experimental learning, knowledge transfer and the formation of trans-disciplinary networks to challenge routines and habits of urban practices – the Floating ~~University~~ Berlin*" (raumlabor, 2018). For six months, the site became an offshore campus composed of interconnected educational and social spaces hosting lectures, workshops, concerts etc. (see Fig. 1).

Following the success of the pilot project, it transformed into an association, Floating ~~University~~ e.V., continuing its original mission with a host of programmes in the years to follow. In 2021, raumlabor was the recipient of the Golden Lion for the best participant in the 17th International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia for "*an inspiring collaborative approach that argues for participation, regeneration and collective responsibility*" showcased through their installation *Instances of Urban Practice* featuring the Floating ~~University~~ (La Biennale di Venezia, 2021). The project is exemplary in both its approach to the reactivation of indeterminate urban spaces and its contribution to the establishment of a new architectural practice under/embracing uncertainty, the analysis of which can help identify the particularity of such an approach.

3 The original project titled the 'Floating University' was renamed as Floating ~~University~~, or Floating e.V. in 2019, in line with the Berlin Higher Education Act, which prohibits the use of the word 'university' outside of its formal institutional context.

4 More information on the Tempelhof project can be found on the official project website: https://www.thf-berlin.de/en/

Fig. 1. Floating University Berlin 2018 (Stumm, 2018)

1.1. Spatial Qualities as Conceptual Driver

The indeterminacy of the site, set in the wider context of the urban transformation of the former airport grounds in the last decade, allowed for the establishment of the Floating University, with the specific qualities found on site informing the architecture on both a structural and programmatic level.

Since its formation in the 1930s, the basin has gradually taken on a diverse range of flora and fauna, creating something of a Third Landscape—a refuge for diversity in a previously exploited site, as defined by Gilles Clément. In regard to human action on these sites, Clément (2004) ideally recommends none, since only "*the neglect of the Third Landscape by the institution guarantees the maintenance and deployment of diversity,*" in contrast to polluting practices from the surrounding anthropized territory, which reduce this diversity. Instead, a positive influence on these spaces can be achieved through non-polluting practices by non-institutional users who become a part of the evolving system (Clément, p. 17, 30). Third landscapes in cities can be considered indeterminate urban spaces, wherein a loss of function allows for the flourishing of an entire ecosystem. Additionally, as spaces of freedom, they are a *"part of our living space that is left to the unconscious. Depths where events gather and manifest themselves in an apparently undecided manner"* (Clément, p. 31)—a spontaneously evolving environment perpetuating the indeterminacy that befell it.

That the intent behind Floating was a conscious attempt at creating a coexistence with the life that had developed on site is clear firstly from a visual analysis of the structure. The use of a lightweight, ephemeral structure indicates the intent of temporary appropriation of a space where nature has taken over, as opposed to its permanent colonisation. The activities of the Floating ~~University~~ also adapt to the natural conditions on site, taking place in the months with the highest precipitation when the basin is full, and bringing life to the idea of a floating campus. Additionally, the programmes on campus draw inspiration from the unique spatial qualities of its surroundings—the annual 10-day Climate Care festival focuses on environmental topics like rewilding, hybrid urban infrastructures; Open Soil Days analyse and discuss the soil on site, as well as look for

ways to increase the biodiversity surrounding the basin; movement practices shaped by encounters between choreographers, practitioners and the site take place on a regular basis.[5]

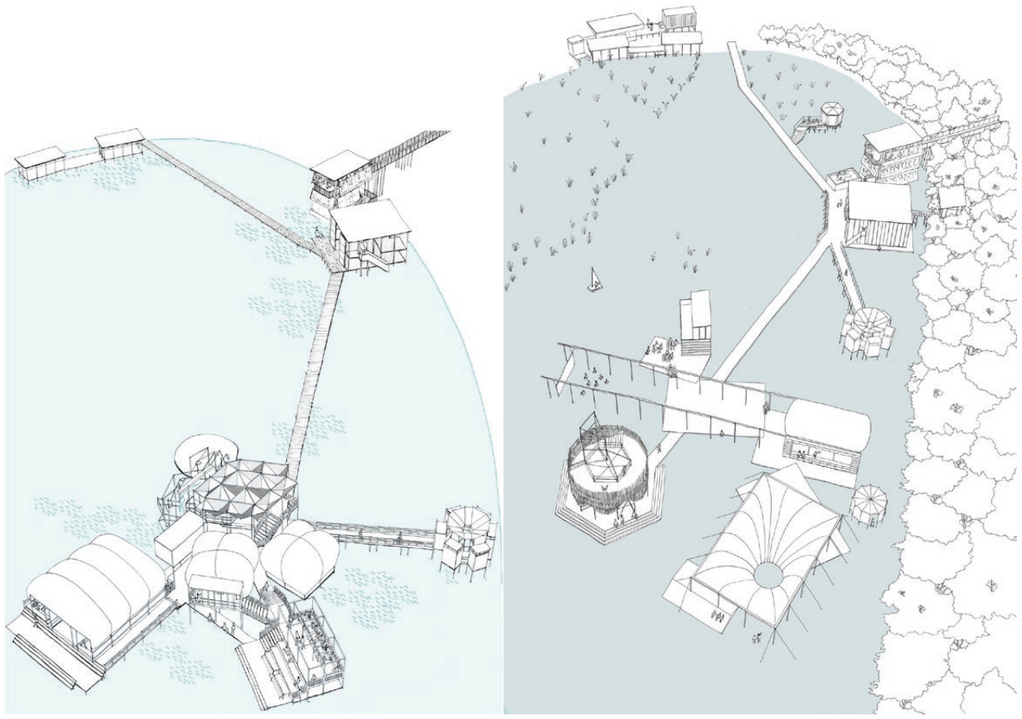
1.2. Towards a New Architectural Practice

In a published conversation between members of the Floating ~~University~~, the spontaneity with which the campus came into existence and continues to operate in, becomes clear. Described as an ex-titution, "*a condenser of common aspiration or desires*", Floating embraces the uncertain as a space where various actors assemble around a common goal and allow things to happen in symbiosis with the conditions on site (Karjevsky, 2019). In varying the intensity of the programmes (more or less activities occurring in parallel) and prioritising open ways of working (using the programmatic structure as a framework that could be built up or modified in the moment), created a platform for active participation, heightened interactions, and novel outcomes. The intentional absence of rulebooks and manuals, and instead reliance on oral transmittance in Floating operations, also contributes to the constant evolution of protocols and formats (Karjevsky).

The idea of Floating as an interconnected and open-ended system of events and encounters, implies an analogous approach to the design of the campus. A group form composed of individual elements linked by a pathway—each element varying in size, form and programme, but sharing a common approach in its construction and materiality—solidifies the Floating concept in space. The original 2018 design by the raumlabor team was brought to life through a collaborative building process involving various experts, students and teachers, and is constantly evolving according to the changing needs of the programme (see Fig. 2). For example, the tight spatial arrangement of the 2018 version of Floating was loosened in the following versions in line with the requirements of the COVID-19 pandemic (Kafka, 2022). A "space task force" was assembled to maintain, modify and improve the architecture based on input from association members (Floating e.V., n.d.), a process facilitated by the easily modifiable and reusable scaffolding.

In the mission "*to imagine and create different forms of living*" (raumlabor, n.d.) demonstrated by both the programme and architecture of Floating, raumlabor assumes a more involved and flexible role than is conventional. Rooted firmly in an understanding of architecture as a collective practice and process rather than finished product, raumlabor's practice expands the traditional role of the architect as to that of "*initiator, negotiator, space-creator, mediator and caretaker*," (raumlabor, 2021) and falls under a new form of praxis outlined by Awan et al. (2011) as "spatial agency". The role of the architect as *initiator* and *space-creator* is rooted in a belief in architecture's capacity to shape and transform its surroundings, while the negotiating and mediating roles of the architect stem from the inclusion of various forms of knowledge in the continual production of space integral to spatial agency (Awan et al., p. 32). Finally, a view of architecture as an ongoing process expands the role of the architect beyond the traditional boundaries of the completion of the design, into the operational activities of a building, as *caretaker*. Raumlabor's involvement in the Floating project demonstrates each of these pillars of spatial agency, from initiating the creation of an off-shore campus on the site of the basin, to the design of this site-specific project realised within a wider network of collaborators, and involvement in the maintenance and modification of the spatial structures through time, in accordance with the changing needs of the programme.

5 For more details on programmes past and present: https://floating-berlin.org/programmes/



(a) (b)

Fig. 2. (a) overview drawing of Floating in 2018 showing a tight spatial arrangement (Astrup-Chauvaux, 2018); (b) overview drawing of Floating in 2021 with a more dispersed layout (Kuschnig, 2021)

3. CONCLUSION

The view of indeterminacy as more than merely a condition of space, but rather a quality to be preserved and nurtured in a context of scarcity and diminishing public space, entails a particular way of doing architecture. In the case of the Floating project, a possible architectural approach rooted in the core principles of spatial agency, one that takes into consideration the found qualities of the site and maintains, if not increases, its value is found. Through an indeterminate approach to the design of both programme and structure, raumlabor inserts the Floating ~~University~~ into the context of the evolving ecological diversity of the site without degrading its status as a space of freedom. In this case, the programme is site-specific, simultaneously borrowing from the flourishing wildlife and giving back through actions to increase the biodiversity of the site, thus contributing to its evolution. The indeterminacy of the site is recognised and instrumentalised through the idea of the Floating ~~University~~ as an extitution, a place for participation and experimentation, while the ephemeral and changeable structure of the campus only further supports the idea of the basin as a space of evolution. Finally, this project illustrates the expanded boundaries of a new practice necessary for dealing with complex issues like meaningful public participation, urban sustainability and design under uncertainty.

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Biography

Petar Mitrović (1998) holds a Master's degree in architecture and is a PhD student employed as a Research Intern at the Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad. From 2018 to 2021, he served as a Demonstrator and from 2021 to 2023, he worked as a Teaching Associate in architectural design courses. He received the Special Award in 2020 and the Award in 2022 at the Novi Sad Architecture Salon. Additionally, he is a collaborator on the project "Novi Sad – Modern City," which won the Grand Prix award at the Novi Sad Architecture Salon in 2022. He participated in the research team of the international professional-artistic project SPA:RE – Public Spaces ReClaimed (2022-2024), funded by the European Commission's Creative Europe program. His creative expression extends beyond conventional practice, as evidenced by his two solo exhibitions: "Adaptation of the Terra Museum Complex in Kikinda" (2021) and "Deconstruction of the Urban Artifact: Three Castles" (2023), both published in the same year. He is a member of the Society of Architects of Novi Sad and NK ICOM Serbia.

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HYBRIDIZATION OF SPATIAL NARRATIVE: WORKSHOP AS A RESEARCH METHOD FOR TRACING THE INVISIBLE

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Abstract

The 2023 student workshop "Hybridization of Spatial Narrative" in Novi Sad explored narrative as a transformative tool in architectural design, serving as a pivotal part of an ongoing research process. Drawing inspiration from the 1906 urban plan of Bočar, which depicted three castles and a central garden (now partly lost to history), the workshop invited architecture students to reimagine these forgotten spaces through storytelling. Organized in collaboration with the Society of Architects of Novi Sad and SKICA, the workshop comprised two tasks: an individual exercise where students crafted imaginary spaces through digital collages based on fictional narratives, and a group exercise designing pavilions intended for community use.

As part of this research approach, the workshop guided students in uncovering hidden layers of meaning within architectural spaces: reconnecting with historical memory and identity, enriching emotional and cultural resonance through narrative-based design while highlighting the community needs. These exercises led participants to reinterpret architecture as a symbolic connector, bridging the real and imagined and underscoring the role of architecture in reflecting aspirations, social dynamics, and cultural values. This research demonstrates how narrative-driven design can reveal latent layers within architectural contexts, providing an innovative and meaningful direction for education and practice.

Keywords: spatial narrative, design as research method, student workshop

1. WORKSHOP AS PART OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Architectural education faces the challenge of balancing technical expertise with the cultivation of creative and critical thinking. Orhan emphasizes that students should acquire relevant competencies through a formal-informal integrated education process, essential for their professional development (2017). This approach aligns with Pallasmaa's assertion that education should train and support skills of imagination and empathy, which are often repressed by dominant cultural values that discourage fantasy and sensory engagement (1992). Workshops, as suggested by Orhan, provide an environment where students can work independently, confidently, and flexibly, complementing traditional architectural design studies (2017).

Workshops are also recognized as spaces that promote innovation, addressing projects that require creative solutions beyond the scope of traditional teaching or professional practices (Gerosa & Iannilli, 2018). This setting allows for the exploration of "architectural research as an original investigation that generates knowledge and insights based on the unique methods and tools of the discipline" (Menezes de Sequeira, Meeres, et al. 2012). Moreover, the integration of narrative techniques in workshops can transform the understanding of the relationship between fiction and architecture. By evaluating narrative elements such as "plot, structure, and time, students can engage in a design process that invites re-evaluation and reinterpretation" (Eflatun, 2021).

The diversity of methods in architectural design, reflects the discipline's complexity and the need for an understanding of the conditions and implications of these various approaches (Silberberger, Kurath, et al. 2021). Workshops serve as a medium where students externalize their subjective experiences of texts, being mindful of how translation affects the nuance of the content (Letkemann, 2021). In this context, "knowledge is produced not only through experimental practice and the design process but also through the material and textual outcomes of these activities" (Nilsson, 2013).

Given that workshop, that is the case study of this paper, involves the reading of texts and the creation of their visual representations, interpretation plays a central role. As Umberto Eco highlights, texts function as signs and their interpretation becomes an inferential process of selecting among possible alternatives (Cezan, 1999). This interpretive process is crucial in architectural education, especially when bridging the gap between textual narratives and visual design. When discussing the usage of fictional texts, "even the magical and mystical are ultimately the part of that sense-making experience that the architect invents with their buildings" (Breitschumid, 2018).

The workshop also highlighted the role of tacit knowledge in architectural design. As Chard describes, is inherently unreliable and cannot be taught as a fixed sequence of instructions, unlike the methods used in mathematics or the sciences (2017). Instead, it is a form of tacit knowledge, as defined by Polanyi, which encompasses insights that are difficult to articulate but crucial to the design process (1966). This understanding reinforces the value of workshops as spaces where architectural education can transcend conventional methodologies, encouraging students to engage deeply with the complexities and uncertainties of design.

2. METHODOLOGY OF A WORKSHOP

2.1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The workshop draws inspiration from the unique 1906 urban plan of Bočar, a village in the Banat region of Vojvodina in northern Serbia. This historical plan envisioned three castles surrounding a central garden, creating a striking focal point for the village that served in the workshop as a distinct foundation for exploring spatial narratives. However, contemporary observations revealed the existence of only two castles, raising questions about the third castle's actual existence. This mysterious absence invited an exploration into the role of narrative in both historical documentation and architectural imagination. The Hertelendy family's castle complex in Bočar, representative of the luxurious residential architecture characteristic of Vojvodina, served as a poignant case study. This region, rich in historical architecture, presented a fertile ground for investigating the hidden stories embedded in these structures. *The imaginary urban artifact* of this complex, comprising three castles and an interstitial garden, vividly captures the intertwined layers of past and present. Conceptualized as a space that integrates the full scope of its context, it encompasses both factual history and archaeological illusion, with origins theorized either as an antecedent structure or as a synthesis of pre-existing spaces (Mitrović, 2023a; 2023b). This juxtaposition of old and new, illustrated in Fig. 1, underscores the dynamic interplay between (potentially fictionalized) history and modernity within the urban fabric.

Fig. 1. The original 1906 urban plan, shown in black, and the contemporary 2023 layout, shown in grey, depict three castles: Imaginary Castle (A), Hertelendy-Bayer Castle (B), and Hertelendy-Bajić Castle (C)

2.2. ABOUT THE WORKSHOP

Spatial Narrative Hybridization: Three Stories for Three Castles was an intensive workshop designed for architecture students, held on May 13-14, 2023, in Novi Sad. This workshop aimed to bridge theoretical knowledge and practical application, offering participants a unique opportunity to engage with architectural narratives through a series of structured lectures and hands-on design tasks. The focus was on the intersection of text and architecture, exploring how narrative functions could be effectively integrated into the architectural design process.

The primary aim of the workshop was to enable participants to engage critically with architectural spaces by uncovering and interpreting the narratives concealed within them and "through the *delayering method*, we navigate the visible, potential, and hidden layers of a site" (Zeković, Konstantinović, et al. 2015), reimagining it as an *imaginary urban artifact* that reflects both factual history and latent narratives, enhancing artistic interpretation. This approach encouraged participants to incorporate narrative insights into the design process, thus enriching their architectural practice and fostering creativity and innovation. The workshop emphasized the importance of continuous education beyond the traditional university curriculum, advocating for the development of skills essential for professional competency in architecture.

The workshop was open to all architecture students in Serbia, with a limited number of participants to ensure a focused and interactive learning environment. Those interested in participating were encouraged to secure their place by registering through the provided online form.

This educational initiative was organized in collaboration with SKICA (Student Creative and Research Center of Architecture) and the Society of Architects of Novi Sad. These partnerships highlighted the workshop's commitment to fostering a collaborative and interdisciplinary approach to architectural education, further enriching the learning experience for all participants.

2.3. WORKSHOP EXERCISES

2.3.1. *Methodology of the first exercise*

Participants in the workshop were each assigned a text, crafted specifically around the three stories concerning the three castles in Bočar, each written by a different author. This task required students to engage in a process of spatial interpretation, where they identified elements within the narrative that inspired them to conceptualize a spatial ambiance. To guide this exploration, the narratives provided to the students were

carefully crafted by young writers, students from Belgrade University, who integrated relevant historical facts into the fictional stories. This blending of fiction and history served to anchor the imaginary spaces in a context that was both relatable and thought-provoking, allowing students to engage deeply with the material and to reflect on the role of narrative in architectural design.

The objective was to establish a direct and meaningful relationship between the written text and architectural space, thereby exploring how narrative can serve as a catalyst for architectural design. The outcomes of the exercises were to be represented visually, utilizing digital techniques with which the students were already familiar, such as digital collage, ambient imagery, 3D modeling, and other related methods. The choice of representation techniques was intentional, aimed at encouraging students to select the method that best communicated the essence of the imaginary spaces they had conceptualized.

The task encouraged students to adopt a highly creative approach, urging them to transcend conventional spatial limitations and consider the broader implications of narrative on spatial design. This exercise was not merely about replicating physical space but rather about investigating the potential of narrative to evoke imaginary spaces. These spaces, although fictional, they were to be imbued with emotional resonance, defined by their spatial feelings, and characterized by the ambiance they create. The exercise emphasized the importance of understanding how narrative influences the perception and experience of space, particularly in terms of how emotions and human interactions can be shaped by the architectural environment.

2.3.2. ***Results of the first exercise***

The representation of results was a critical component of the workshop, serving as both a culmination of the design process and a means of communicating the complex interplay between narrative and architecture. By presenting their work visually, in a digital format within template of 20x20 cm, students articulated their design ideas clearly and compellingly. These eleven created visuals were directly extracted from the fictional stories, illustrating how narrative elements were translated into spatial concepts. This approach not only demonstrated the students' technical skills but also highlighted their ability to think critically and creatively about how narrative can inform and enhance architectural practice. The visual representations thus became a powerful tool for showcasing the integration of storytelling into architectural design.

2.3.3. ***Methodology of the second exercise***

In the second phase of the workshop, participants were organized into teams of three, with each team working with three different stories. This task required them to collaborate on the design of a pavilion structure situated on a designated green space (80 x 30 meters), where once was a part of the garden that lay between the three castles. The design challenge was to create a pavilion inspired by the three different imaginary spaces that emerged from the first task, effectively translating narrative-driven concepts into a tangible architectural The pavilion design process necessitated a critical examination of how different narrative spaces could be harmonized within a single structure, reflecting the diverse themes and atmospheres evoked by the stories. This task was not only an exercise in design creativity but also in narrative integration, where students had to consider how the abstract elements of storytelling could be spatially represented. space.

The proposed program for the pavilion structures was diverse, offering various possibilities that ranged from recreational and cultural spaces to educational and memorial functions. For example, students designed an open playground that resonates with the playful aspects of one story, while another part of the pavilion could serve as a cultural park featuring an outdoor cinema, dance stage, or amphitheater, aligning with the cultural narratives of another story. Alternatively, the pavilion could function as a memorial park, a space for relaxation and meditation in nature, or even as an event space that encapsulates the communal spirit of the narratives. Additional possibilities included designing an art gallery or a settlement museum that would display historical artifacts or works inspired by the fictional narratives. Educational spaces were also considered, such as outdoor classrooms for elementary school students or facilities dedicated to teaching children about agriculture and animals, thereby connecting the pavilion's design to the local context and community needs.

Overall, the second task was designed to challenge participants to think critically about the intersection of narrative and architecture, pushing them to explore how storytelling can inform and enhance the design process. By synthesizing different narrative spaces into a cohesive architectural form, students were able to develop a deeper understanding of how architecture can serve as a medium for narrative expression, creating

spaces that are not only functional but also rich in meaning and context.

Fig. 2. Visuals of the students' works from the first exercise, exploring the potential of spatial narratives to translate and trace given text into imaginary spaces[1]

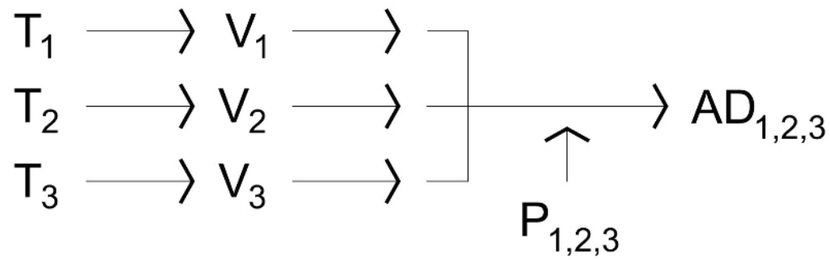

Fig. 3. Three distinct texts (T1, T2, T3) served as the foundation for generating three corresponding visuals (V1, V2, V3). By integrating these narratives through their visual representations and introducing architectural programs (P1, P2, P3), the process culminated in the development of three architectural designs (AD1, AD2, AD3)

2.3.4. ***Results of the second exercise***

In the second exercise, students were organized into teams and tasked with creating pavilion designs based on three different narratives from the first exercise. Each team had three different fictional stories from the first exercise and had selected one architectural program from a given list and integrated meaningful elements from the chosen narratives into their pavilion designs.

Each pavilion design reflected a unique interpretation of the narratives, demonstrating the students' ability to synthesize storytelling with architectural program into a meaningful space. The final projects illustrated how different stories could inform and shape the architectural environment, showcasing a diverse range of creative approaches to integrating narrative into architectural design.

1 Students (from left to right), first row: Mila Divljak, Boško Ristić, Vedrana Kasalica; second row: Jovana Dugonjić, Dušica Piperski, Jovana Gavrlilović

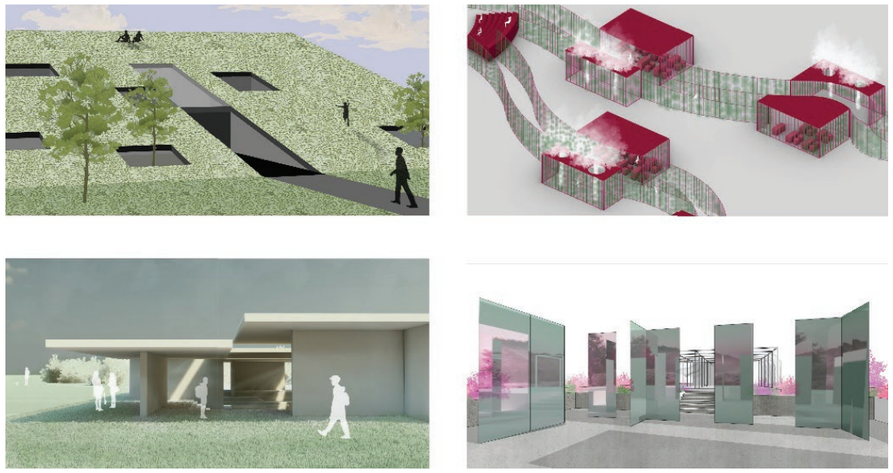

Fig. 4. Projects resulting from the second exercise, demonstrating how merging three given texts and visuals from the first exercise within a defined architectural program can lead to cohesive architectural designs[2]

3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the “Hybridization of Spatial Narrative” student workshop illustrates how design can function as a methodological approach that generates new knowledge and meaning. By uniquely blending fictional narrative with historical reference, the workshop goes beyond conventional methodologies, using Bočar’s lost heritage - it’s imagined third castle and historical garden - as a foundation for speculative design. This approach encourages participants to explore the intricate relationship between stories and spaces, leading to the creation of architectural forms that reinterpret cultural and historical contexts and address community aspirations within hypothetical spaces.

Positioned within the field of design as a research method, this narrative-driven approach highlights design as a means of inquiry and discovery, uncovering hidden cultural meanings and heritage values within architectural contexts. By integrating narrative theory with architectural practice, the workshop demonstrates that design is not merely a tool for creating physical structures but also a method for investigating architecture’s role in shaping collective memory and cultural identity. Aligned with the principles of design research, this approach produces academic and pedagogic contributions with innovative applications for architectural education. To enhance rigor while preserving its narrative focus, future iterations could incorporate structured feedback mechanisms, such as participant surveys or thematic analysis, adding scientific validation to this qualitative methodology.

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Collaborators on the student workshop: Dr. Višnja Žugić, *at the time, an Assistant Professor; currently, an Associate Professor at the Department of Architecture and Urbanism, Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad.;* Anja Čanji, *a student of General Literature and Literary Theory at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade.;* Milena Anđelić and Jelena Damjanović, *both students at the Department of Architecture and Urbanism, Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad, and members of the Student Creative and Research Center for Architecture, Novi Sad (SKICA).*

Writers of the fictional stories about the three castles: Anja Čanji,Milica Đorđević,Viktor Tanasković, *students of General Literature and Literary Theory at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade.*

Participants of the student workshop: Boško Ristić, Dunja Pavlica, Dušica Piperski, Elena Ogrizović, Iskra Srnka, Jovana Dugonjić, Jovana Gavrilović, Mila Divljak, Milica Janjić, Nikola Radanović, Nikolina Divić, and Vedrana Kasalica, all u*ndergraduate students at the Department of Architecture and Urbanism, and the Department of Scenic Architecture, Technique, and Design at the Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad.*

2 Groups of students (from left to right), first row: Milica Janjić, Jovana Gavrlilović, Vedrana Kasalica; Dunja Pavlica, Mila Divljak; second row: Boško Ristić, Jovana Dugonjić, Dušica Piperski; Elena Ogrizović, Nikolina Divić, Nikola Radanović

3 This paper’s abstract was published in the *Book of Abstracts* prior to the International Scientific and Professional Conference «*Life is Serious; Art Serene*: Architectural-Scenic Research,” which took place from October 23 to 25, 2024. Subsequently, the full paper was written and published in the *Book of Proceedings* in 2025.

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Biography

Petar Mitrović (1998) holds a Master's degree in architecture and is a PhD student employed as a Research Intern at the Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad. From 2018 to 2021, he served as a Demonstrator and from 2021 to 2023, he worked as a Teaching Associate in architectural design courses. He received the Special Award in 2020 and the Award in 2022 at the Novi Sad Architecture Salon. Additionally, he is a collaborator on the project "Novi Sad – Modern City," which won the Grand Prix award at the Novi Sad Architecture Salon in 2022. He participated in the research team of the international professional-artistic project SPA:RE – Public Spaces ReClaimed (2022-2024), funded by the European Commission's Creative Europe program. His creative expression extends beyond conventional practice, as evidenced by his two solo exhibitions: "Adaptation of the Terra Museum Complex in Kikinda" (2021) and "Deconstruction of the Urban Artifact: Three Castles" (2023), both published in the same year. He is a member of the Society of Architects of Novi Sad and NK ICOM Serbia.

Dragana Kocić (1989) is an architect. She completed undergraduate academic studies of the first level and master academic studies of the second level at the study program Architecture at the Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture - University of Niš. In 2013, she won a prize at 21st International planners' exhibition in Serbia for Conceptual urban design of scientific and technological park in Niš. Also, she won two first prizes ''Museum Night'' for interior design.

Since October 2014, Dragana has been a student of Doctoral Academic Studies (PhD studies) at the Faculty of Technical Sciences - University of Novi Sad. In 2015, she received a scholarship from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development for the development of scientific research staff. Since 2018, she has been working as a scientific researcher at the Faculty of Technical Sciences in Novi Sad.

Up to the present day, she has been actively involved in teaching at the Faculty of Technical Sciences, and has participated in numerous projects, among which the project "Novi Sad – Modern City" stands out. She collaborated on this project, which won the Grand Prix award at the Novi Sad Architecture Salon in 2022. She is a member of the Society of Architects of Novi Sad. The field of her interest in scientific work is the study of the condition and phenomena in Yugoslav architecture.

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SUPERIMPOSITION OF SPATIAL AND IDEOLOGICAL VALUES: THE DIACHRONIC METANARRATIVE OF BLOCK 13 SEGMENT IN NEW BELGRADE

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Abstract

This paper examines the intricate interplay of spatial and ideological values in segment of Block 13 of New Belgrade, employing a diachronic approach, reconstruction methodology, memory architecture, and comparative analysis. The study focuses on two unbuilt projects and a concrete basement repurposed as a landfill and shelter for the less fortunate. Through diachronic analysis, it reveals a metanarrative that integrates historical layers, highlighting both unrealized and emerging narratives within this urban context. Central to this investigation is the Museum of Revolution, an ambitious yet incomplete architectural project from the Yugoslav era. Today, this site represents three intertwined narratives: the original authoritative vision to project power and ideology through the museum, the current reality of the homeless community inhabiting the concrete basement and the future prospect of a new Philharmonic building following an architectural competition. The diachronic metanarrative is presented as an autonomous, coherent, and self-reflective narrative structure, capturing the synthesis of these narratives over time. By examining the spatial and ideological superimpositions within the segment of Block 13, the paper underscores the multi-layered and interconnected relationships between physical space and ideological expression. This interdisciplinary analysis, which combines architectural history, urban studies, and cultural analysis positions this context as a microcosm of broader trends and transformations in cities characterized by modernist architecture. The findings reveal insights into the dynamic and often hidden narratives that shape urban environments.

Keywords: metanarrative, spatial and ideological values, New Belgrade, Museum of Revolution

1. DIACHRONIC METANARRATIVE

The Block 13 segment in New Belgrade presents a compelling case for examining the superimposition of spatial and ideological values over time. This paper explores the diachronic metanarrative of this segment, tracing its evolution from the unbuilt Museum of Revolution, through its current role as a shelter for the homeless, to its envisioned future as a Philharmonic building. Unlike a universal or ideological paradigm, a diachronic metanarrative is a coherent, self-reflective, and self-contained narrative structure that integrates diverse spatial narratives within the unique, site-specific context of a particular place, tracing their evolution over time. Metanarrative of Block 13 segment weaves together the unrealized ideological aspirations of the past, the improvised, layered realities of the present, and the imagined complexities cultural and political aspirations of the future (Fig. 1), revealing the ongoing transformation of this site and its meaning.

Lefebvre's model of perceived, conceived, and lived space shows how spatial values are shaped by social and political forces (1974), offering a basis for understanding the transformation of selected location. Initially a monumental symbol of state ideology, it has since become a haven for marginalized communities and is now evolving into a cultural landmark. Foucault's concept of heterotopias, which captures the coexistence of conflicting meanings and roles (1984), frames this segment of Block 13 as a space of otherness, highlighting tensions between its historical ideals and present realities.

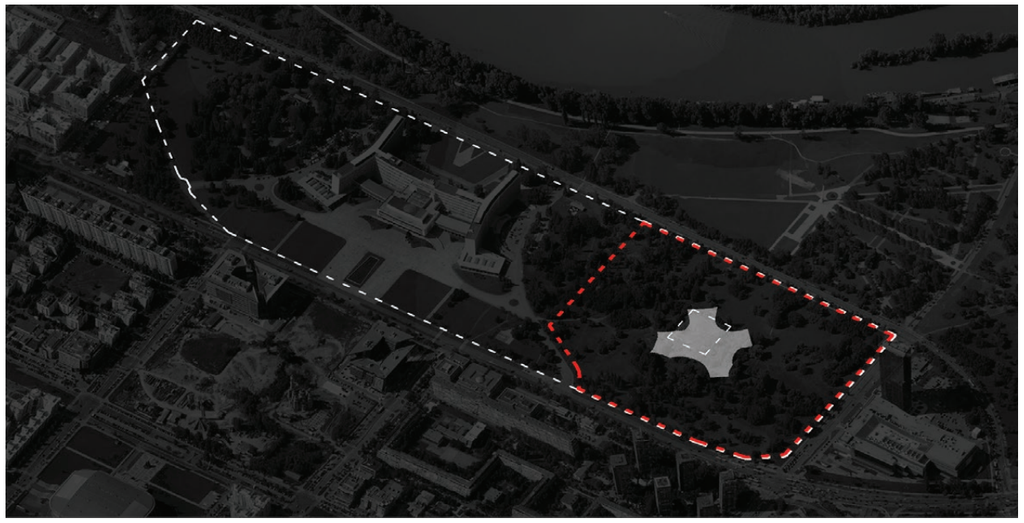

Fig. 1. In Block 13 in New Belgrade (outlined in white) is the analyzed segment (outlined in red). This segment includes the existing concrete basement structure (inside segment, white lines) and the footprint of the planned Philharmonic building (inside segment, white area).

In Mitrović's previous research he has developed the concept of the "imaginary urban artifact" which pertains to spaces that integrate the entirety of a given context, encompassing both historical realities and their illusory dimensions (2023). This concept is based on two main theories: (1) the notion that such a space may never have existed in a tangible form but remains deeply connected to a specific location, and (2) the notion that the new meta-space evolves as a comprehensive synthesis of preceding spatial forms, experiences, and historical events.

In the context of selected segment of Block 13 in New Belgrade, the idea of the imaginary urban artifact can be observed through its evolving narrative. The first theory regarding spaces that never physically existed but are tightly related to a real place parallels the segment's transformation. Although the museum was never built, its conceptual framework has left a lasting imprint on the segment's identity and significance. Its conceptual and ideological aspirations remain deeply connected to the historical and political context of the city.

The second theory is formed through the synthesis of preceding spatial events is exemplified by this place as it currently functions as a shelter for the homeless and presents future potential as a Philharmonic building.

This segment reflects a confluence of various historical and architectural layers, merging past ideologies, current socio-political realities, and future aspirations into a single, evolving entity. Integrating ephemeral spatial moments into a new architectural form, this space embodies the dynamic interplay of past, present, and future narratives, presenting a unique case of an imaginary urban artifact that continually transforms and redefines its role within the urban fabric of New Belgrade.

Višnja Žugić expands on this by describing architecture not as a passive backdrop but as a performative text. Rather than a static form, architecture here becomes an agent of meaning production, continually transforming and responding to its socio-political environment (2017). In the Block 13 segment, architecture doesn't merely represent the unrealized visions of the past but actively shapes the experiences and interactions of its current occupants.

By applying these theoretical lenses to the Block 13 segment, this paper underscores the site's role as an active producer of meaning in its ephemeral liminality continuously redefining its function and ideological significance over time. This dynamic interplay between space, users, and external influences exemplifies the performative and transformative qualities of architecture, highlighting how the spatial narrative that evolves through confrontation, correlation, and framing (Žugić, 2017, pp.62-63).

By synthesizing these theoretical perspectives, this paper offers a comprehensive diachronic metanarrative, this paper explores how analyzed site functions as a dynamic and evolving entity, where spatial and ideological values are superimposed and negotiated, revealing broader trends in urban transformation and societal change.

Further in the research, we will examine two unrealized projects and an abandoned museum's basement repurposed as a landfill and shelter. The site now embodies three (dystopian/utopian) spatial narratives: the original ideological vision of museum, its current use as a shelter, and a future Philharmonic building.

2. SPATIAL AND IDEOLOGICAL VALUES OF THE PAST

The Museum of the Revolution of the Peoples and Nationalities of Yugoslavia (later in text shortened as Museum of Revolution or MRNNJ from original *Muzej Revolucije Naroda i Narodnosti Jugoslavije*) was established by a decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, made during a ceremonial session on April 19, 1959, to mark the 40th anniversary of the Communist Party. The museum was founded "to inform the public about the developmental path, aspirations, and struggle of the working class of Yugoslavia, to preserve the memory of great events and prominent figures of Yugoslav revolutionary history, and especially to educate new generations in the spirit of the revolutionary heritage of the Yugoslav peoples" (Richter, Šakota, n.d., pp.6).

Museums dedicated to contemporary history, at that time, "were generally limited to a chronological period from the 1970s to the present day. These museums aimed to present this theme in various forms" (Kojović, 1989). Among the most significant and high-quality exhibits were the permanent exhibitions in revolutionary museums, historical museums, sections in regional, local, and city museums, as well as memorial museums.

The present Museum of Yugoslavia has its name changed twenty years after the Museum of the History of Yugoslavia was established in 1996 through the merger and subsequent dissolution of two institutions: the Josip Broz Tito Memorial Center and the Museum of the Revolution of the Peoples and Nationalities of Yugoslavia. Up until the end of 2016, was known as the Museum of the History of Yugoslavia. The collections from these two institutions served as the foundation for the new museum, which, by political decision, was intended to "shelve" Yugoslavia through musealization, in line with the perception of museums as repositories for "old and unnecessary things." Despite this, the collections, histories, documentation, and staff of the two institutions became the basis for a twenty-year search for ways to preserve the legacy of Yugoslavia.

An open Yugoslav competition for the Museum of the Revolution building was announced on April 16, 1961. The competition brief outlined the museum's primary task to "present the developmental path of the struggle of the working people of Yugoslavia for their overall progress", providing basic information about the character and physiognomy of the museum and defining the construction program for its construction. As Kojović

points, “revolutionary museums were among all existing museums the most directly and complexly linked to the contemporary development of socialist society and its future” (1986).

The facility was planned for Block 13 in New Belgrade, then a park area between the Federal Executive Council building and the building of the socio-political organizations of Yugoslavia (now the Palace of Serbia and Ušće Tower 1, respectively). The construction of the museum would have complemented the existing Museum of Contemporary Art and the Congress Center “Sava” (now Sava Center) (Richter, Šakota, n.d., pp.12). Although Block 13 today is not within the previously protected zone from the state, “it undoubtedly belongs to the Central Zone of New Belgrade and should be considered in a broader spatial context” (Anđelković, 2018).

A significant aspect of the architectural concept was the expression of form, as Richter defined the unbuilt museum as having a distinctive architectural-sculptural expression due to its slanted roof surfaces - it was intended to function as a monument, reflecting its destined purpose (Richter, Šakota, n.d., pp.8). The fifth façade could be read as “an ironic intervention that relativizes the absolute value of the “cold object” of modernism, a purist cube raised on columns” (Blagojević, 2007, pp.228). This vision aligned with what has been described as the “mainstream spectacle”, which relied heavily on “the usage of ideological symbols, and glorification of the state and the party”, closely tied to the established political system (Kocić, Konstantinović, 2023).

The building’s impressiveness is also evident in its dimensions. The museum was to cover approximately 15,200 square meters, with about 7,200 allocated for the museum’s permanent exhibition and around 800 for occasional thematic exhibitions (Richter, Šakota, n.d., pp.8).

The project also included a budget of 222,300,000 YUD (approx. today’s 105.4 million EUR), which was to be secured from the federal budget in installments over four years. Construction was scheduled to begin in the fall of 1978, with an opening planned for 1981, marking the 40th anniversary of the uprising of the peoples and nationalities of Yugoslavia.

Work on site surveying at Ušće began in 1963 as part of preparations for the realization of the new building of the Museum of the Revolution of the Peoples and Nationalities of Yugoslavia, designed by architect Vjenceslav Richter from Zagreb. By the order of the chief of the Institute, on September 6, 1978, the project received approval for the first phase of construction despite not meeting all technical conditions for issuing a construction permit. In the spring of the following year, after the completion of the foundation and the underground level of the building, construction work was temporarily halted, and by the end of 1980, it was completely suspended. Documents from that period cite incomplete technical documentation and a series of irregularities in its preparation as the reasons for this failure (Milinković, 2012, pp.145).

The foundations of the unfinished Museum of the Revolution at Ušće in Belgrade, according to Vjenceslav Richter’s project accepted in 1962, might lead one to think that the Museum of the Revolution never existed. During the 1990s, with the onset of wars and the breakup of Yugoslavia, a process of historical revisionism began, viewing the legacy of socialist Yugoslavia as an unnecessary burden. Objects preserved in the MRNNJ were seen as mere items without interpretation, research, or presentation.

As conditions evolved both physically and ideologically during the development of Richter’s project, the fundamental assumptions underlying the museum’s design also shifted. Originally conceived to reflect and support the ideological ambitions of the Yugoslav state, the museum’s grand design became increasingly obsolete as the political climate changed and the state eventually dissolved. The project’s construction stalled, leaving the museum incomplete. This unfinished state came to symbolize not only the collapse of the original ideological vision but also the broader ideological disintegration of the period. As Milinković states, “Richter’s architectural critique, marked by its ephemeral and transitional nature, thus mirrors the broader changes in socio-political realities, reflecting a shift from ambitious ideological aspirations to the stark realities of an incomplete and evolving architectural legacy” (2012, pp.158).

The socio-political environment in which these structures were conceived has drastically transformed, leading to a reinterpretation of their purpose and significance. As Jankov (2024) points out, “the architecture of Yugoslav modernism now exists within a new social reality, and the meanings once attached to these buildings have adapted or even dissolved over time.” This underscores the paper’s exploration of how the ideological void left by socialism has altered the spatial narratives of buildings.

3. JUNKSPACE TRAPPED IN TRANSITION

The basement of the present Block 13 segment exemplifies what Koolhaas refers to as “junkspace”, where the original design intentions have been overshadowed by a chaotic, fragmented environment (2002) now serving primarily functional, survival-driven purposes. Once tied to a grander architectural vision, this space has devolved into an improvised shelter, reflecting on its loss of spatial and aesthetic integrity. This transformation is evident in the unfinished building, which has been informally repurposed as a shelter for homeless people—a use it was never officially designed for. As its original purpose dissolved, the space became purely pragmatic, reduced to fulfilling basic survival needs. This shift reveals a narrative of social neglect: what was once envisioned as a monument to power now stands as a symbol of the state’s failure to address homelessness and social inequality. The ideological void left by socialism remains unfilled, leaving behind a fragmented, improvised spatial reality.

One of the reasons this space operates as a dynamic site in both architecture and art can be explained also through what Miljana Zeković defines as “liminal space”, which this concept refers to the transitional and in-between nature of certain spaces, which become particularly evident through artistic and social events (2015). In the case of Block 13 segment, this liminal condition is embodied in the repurposing of the Museum of Revolution’s unfinished basement into a shelter for the homeless and its potential transformation into a Philharmonic building. According to Zeković, liminal spaces are fields of potentiality, where architectural frameworks, events, and observers converge to create an evolving dynamic. This place exemplifies this fluidity, with its meaning and purpose constantly shifting in response to social and ideological changes.

In the film “Museum of Revolution” directed by Srđan Kečo, the story in the shadow of a business district of Ušće shopping mall, the unfinished Museum’s basement housed a hidden life of thirty residents - scrap collectors left to navigate their invisibility on the social margins. Solidarity and the abolition of segregation could be seen as potential foundations for revolution from below. Kečo discusses his film explaining that, after years of acquaintance, they developed relationships with people living in the museum’s basement. The lives of the film’s protagonists ultimately became as significant a part of the history of that space as what it was originally intended to represent.

Later, particularly after the fall of socialism in the 1990s, parts of New Belgrade, especially the central business district, did undergo significant privatization and commercial development, which led to some forms of economic and social stratification. In recent decades, certain areas of New Belgrade have seen significant investments and become desirable business and residential zones, while other parts have remained less developed, reflecting a more modern kind of urban transformation that could be seen as akin to gentrification.

Many other contemporary artists like Marko Lulić and Saša Tkačenko reimagine the museum’s ideological and spatial implications of this unbuilt museum, breathing new life into its legacy and inspiring reflection on the role of museums today. Notably, Serbia’s 2014 Venice Biennale project titled “14-14” encapsulates a century of architectural memory, underscoring the ongoing dialogue between art and architecture.

By exploring these unrealized visions, contemporary architects and artists contribute to a deeper understanding of how architecture reflects and influences the evolving narratives of society. In this conclusion, the study of the unbuilt Museum of the Revolution through a chronological metanarrative lens underscores its relevance in contemporary architectural discourse. It reveals how historical projects, even those that never materialized, continue to resonate and inform current practices.

4. REIMAGINING THE BLOCK 13 SEGMENT: NEW COMPETITION

Shifting from present to future, The Philharmonic building represents a transition to a new kind of spatial ideological narrative, a cultural prestige and urban renewal - this project can be seen as also projecting state power. The new structure embodies aspirations toward global recognition and cultural sophistication, representing a future-oriented vision of the city’s place in the world but it is also one of the most expensive projects that will ever happen in Belgrade in the possible future. The maximum fee for the complete project, from the conceptual design to the execution phase, is estimated at around 10 million euros, while the total cost of the project, including construction, is estimated at 120 million euros (Gradnja, 2020).

In 2016, the City of Belgrade announced a conceptual architectural and urban planning competition for a portion of Block 13, designating the site for a new concert hall. In January 2017, architects Dragan Marčetić and Milan Maksimović, along with their team, won the competition for the design of this area, where the concert hall was to be constructed. The competition was organized by the Directorate in collaboration with the Association of Serbian Architects, with the jury led by then-chief city urban planner Milutin Folić. However, the competition was later annulled.

The designs from the 2017 competition were only used for the creation of the Detailed Regulatory Plan (PDR), and a new international competition for the concert hall was announced. This plan for Block 13 was completed in 2017 and 2018.

In 2018, an architectural and urban planning competition was launched for the complete project of the future Belgrade Philharmonic building at Ušće. At the request of the Government of Serbia, the new competition was organized in 2021 under the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), with representatives from the government and the City of Belgrade present. The designs from past competition were only used for the PDR.

After a thorough and transparent selection process, in which numerous design proposals were submitted, the architectural studio Amanda Levete Architects (AL_A) from London was chosen as the winner of the international competition for the conceptual design of the future Belgrade Philharmonic concert hall. Today, the AL_A team works on the preparation of technical documentation, which is divided into three phases, in accordance with the Construction and Planning Law of the Republic of Serbia.

The Belgrade Philharmonic Concert Hall is a major cultural investment for Serbia, located at the confluence of two rivers near the Palace of Serbia. It reflects Belgrade's vision for a greener and more harmonious future, balancing nature and urban life. The hall features four key spaces: a large concert hall, recital hall, creative center, and podium, each celebrating different musical genres (Levete, 2024).

The new building is not referencing, nor looking back at its past. New transformations read as contradictions and liberate buildings from all their inherent connotations. As Olgiati and Breitschmit state, "you have to radically realign yourself with everything a building is about because references have either vanished or are recognized as invalid and architecture is no less the embodiment of society than buildings were in the past when they were the bearers of common social ideals" (2018, pp.13;100). Adding to this Gawlikowska also points that "architecture does not have the ability to erase all its previous meaning completely; it remains a witness to all its history, and gathers symbolic meaning derived from the events, which it has been facing" (2013, pp.59)

The final interpretant is not final in a chronological sense. According to Caesar "the semiosis dies at every moment but at every moment is reborn" (1999, pp.112). In relation to the proposed Philharmonic building in Block 13, the construction of the new edifice does not signify the erasure of the unrealized Museum of the Revolution. The museum will persist as part of the realm of paper architecture, art, and the narratives of the marginalized communities that once inhabited the site. The architectural history of this place will not diminish the museum's status as an "imaginary urban artifact", as it remains closely intertwined with the political context of Socialist Yugoslavia.

5. EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE ALL AT ONCE: BLOCK 13 SEGMENT METANARRATIVE

"That it was one thing to see the past occupying the present, but the true test of prescience was to see the past in the future. Things persisted in not being what they seemed."

- Frank Herbert, Dune (1965)

Comparison of Spatial and Ideological Layers of Block 13 Segment, as shown in table below (Fig.2), provides a detailed comparative analysis of the spatial and ideological dimensions of the past, present, and future narrative layers of analyzed location. By exploring these layers, it reveals the intricate and dynamic relationships between architecture, society, and politics that have shaped and continue to shape, the evolving narrative of this space. The past layer reflects the grand, unfulfilled vision of the Museum of the Revolution, symbolizing a period of ideological certainty and state-driven architectural ambition. The present layer, on the other hand,

illustrates a breakdown of that vision, where the unfinished structure has been repurposed for pragmatic use, thus reflecting broader societal neglect and the collapse of ideological cohesion. And finally, third layer depicting possible future and its spatial narratives.

	Past	Present	Future
Spatial Purpose	Formal monument under socialism	Improvised shelter for marginalized individuals	Future Philharmonic Concert Hall
Ideological Function	Represented socialist ideals	Symbolizes neglect and ideological disintegration	Aims to represent culture, progress and new political power
Use of Space	Never realized as intended	Repurposed informally for refugee	Intended as a cultural landmark
Architectural Integrity	Unfinished, unmaintained	Chaotic, fragmented, *junkspace*	Harmony between nature and architecture
Social Narrative	Power and control in cultural institution	Marginalization and survival	Rebirth, cultural evolution, gentrification
Impact on the Public	Represents fallen ideological values	Forgotten, ignored, overlooked	Possibly celebrated as a symbol of renewal and new political agenda
Symbolism	Socialist power and ideology	Failure of social and political systems	Hope and cultural renaissance
Inner-place dialogue	Preserving fragmented spatial memory	Liminal state between decay and reuse	Erasing past and present

Fig. 2. Comparison of Spatial and Ideological Layers of Block 13 Segment

This analysis present's a chronological metanarrative that layers the past, present, and future of analyzed location into one comprehensive spatial analysis. By doing so, it reveals the unfolding spatial and ideological transformations in one cohesive framework. This metanarrative captures not only realized spatial aspects of one's place but also incorporates two unrealized architectural projects - the Museum of the Revolution and the Philharmonic Concert Hall which, together with the present, form a fragmented yet continuous narrative.

The juxtaposition of these three layers shows how each temporal dimension interacts within the same physical space, producing a complex dialogue between what was envisioned, what currently exists, and what may emerge. The unbuilt and unfinished past and future projects, along with the present's pragmatic use, all intersect within this place, highlighting the significance of viewing them as parts of a single entity – as metanarrative. This layered approach offers a critical lens for understanding how architecture functions not merely as a static artifact but as a dynamic field where ideological, social, and political forces converge over time.

By presenting these layers within one another, we can grasp the broader implications of architectural projects that remain unbuilt, unfinished, or repurposed. It also underscores the importance of preserving the memory of the past while critically engaging with it to better inform the future, acknowledging that these three spatial states are all integral to the same site's narrative. This layering of spaces creates a rich tapestry of spatial meanings that are vital for comprehending the ongoing transformation of this place.

Looking toward the future, plans for the Philharmonic Hall represent an effort to reimagine the space, with a focus on cultural regeneration and new symbolic meanings tied to contemporary aspirations. This comparison of layers not only highlights how physical spaces evolve over time but also how their meanings are continuously reinterpreted in response to changing political, social, and cultural realities. Through this analysis, the table underscores the ongoing dialogue between past ideologies, present realities, and future possibilities.

6. CONCLUSION

Understanding all three layers past, present, and future, as shown in the Comparison of Spatial and Ideological Layers of Block 13 Segment (Fig. 2), is crucial for gaining a comprehensive perspective on the space's architectural, social, and ideological significance. By examining these layers together, we can trace the evolution of this place from its initial ideological aspirations to its current improvised reality and its

projected future as a new cultural landmark. This layered analysis allows us to see how the meanings and functions of the space have shifted over time, reflecting broader societal changes.

Also, the internal valorization of these layers is essential because it helps us critically engage with the space's historical context, recognize its current socio-spatial importance, and evaluate its potential future impact. Without understanding these interconnected dimensions, we risk losing the deeper narratives embedded in this place, narratives that are not only spatial but also reflective of changing political and social landscapes. Therefore, recognizing and valorizing all three layers as chronological metanarrative ensures that we appreciate the full complexity of this space and its evolving role in the urban fabric of New Belgrade.

It is crucial to remember and critically engage with the past when analyzing the present and future. Erasing the historical context entirely would mean losing valuable insights into how the space has evolved and how its past has shaped its current and future roles. By preserving and reflecting on the historical layer, we can better understand the ideological and architectural intentions that originally informed the space and how these have changed over time.

Maintaining a memory of past times allows us to critically assess the transformations that have occurred and to acknowledge the complex interplay between historical intentions and contemporary realities. This critical understanding not only honors the historical significance of Block 13 segment but also informs its future development, ensuring that the space's full narrative is appreciated and that its past continues to contribute to its evolving identity.

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Life is Serious;
ART SERENE

Biography

Dr. Marko Lazić, an Assistant Professor at the Department of Architecture and Urbanism within the Faculty of Technical Sciences at the University of Novi Sad, has made significant contributions to the field. Born in 1985, he successfully obtained his PhD degree in 2017. His prolific research output includes over 20 scientific papers, spanning diverse areas such as Building Information Modelling (BIM), Architectural Simulations, and Virtual Reality.

Dr. Ana Perišić, an Associate Professor at the Department of Fundamental Sciences, Engineering Animation, within the Faculty of Technical Sciences at the University of Novi Sad. She has been working and teaching for over a decade in the field of Video Game Design and Computer Graphics. She obtained her PhD in the field of Applied Computer Graphics and Simulations in Architecture in 2016. Prolific in the field of Human-Computer Interaction design, Applied Computer Graphics in Education and Virtual Simulations.

DFA Jelena Janev (b. 1972), an Associate Professor at the Sub-department of Art and Design, Department of Architecture and Urbanism, Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad. She earned her BFA (1998) and MFA in sculpture (2004) from the Academy of Art in Novi Sad, and DFA in Scene Design (2021), in the Scene Design Program at the Department of Architecture and Urbanism, Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad. She works in visual arts, primarily sculpture, art installation and scene design. She had 15 solo shows and more than thirty group shows in Serbia and internationally (USA, Germany, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro). She has received the Annual Award for Sculpture from the Academy of Art (1997) and the award for sculpture from the Novi Sad October Salon (1997). She participated in a number of international art symposia. Her artworks are in the permanent collections of the Museum of Contemporary Art of Vojvodina, Museum Terra and the New Mexico Highlands University (USA). Janev has published critical essays in Scena, theatre arts review, and presented work at international conferences.

DFA Igor Kekeljević, is an Associate professor at the Department of Fundamental Sciences within the Faculty of Technical Sciences at the University of Novi Sad. Born in 1979, he successfully obtained his Doctorate in digital art at the University of Arts in Belgrade in 2016. Realized numerous commercial projects in the areas of illustration, graphic design, web design, interface design, video games, 3D graphics, and animations. Computer graphics has been actively involved since 2002. Employed as an associate professor at the Faculty of Engineering Science in Novi Sad, Animation in Engineering.

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SPATIAL AND AESTHETIC ASSESSMENT: EVALUATING NOVI SAD'S CENTRAL AREA AS A LOCATION FOR ISOMETRIC VIDEO GAME

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Abstract

The isometric perspective in video games boasts a rich historical lineage, having significantly influenced numerous enduring genres. These genres include action RPGs, MOBAs (Multiplayer Online Battle Arenas), and strategy games, among others. Despite its longevity, the isometric view remains relevant even in contemporary indie titles. In this paper, we analyzed the merits and drawbacks associated with isometric games. We delve into their characteristic elements, emphasizing both functional and aesthetic aspects. Our investigation encompasses a diverse array of titles, categorized by genre and development year. These carefully selected examples serve as a foundation for evaluating the suitability of Novi Sad's central area as a potential location for an isometric video game. Every city has its story built by architects for centuries, but the video game environment and scene design can evolve them to a new level, less serious, more playful and serene by being open to new interpretations. To practically apply our findings, we explore the creation of a game segment within the Unity 3D engine, accompanied by illustrative visuals. The results of our analysis provide valuable insights for game developers considering isometric design within an urban context.

Keywords: video game design, isometric projection, architectural heritage in video games, Novi sad central area, video game analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

There is a specific relationship between the built environment and its experience through the medium of video games. In these virtual realms, users perceive, participate, and create new impressions. Unlike physical spaces, where our perception is anchored to our bodies, video game spaces offer a distinct detachment. Maurice Merleau-Ponty posited that the body is central to spatial conceptions (Merleau-Ponty, 1964), while Jeff Malpas argued that space, conceptually, is tied to inhabiting and using it (Malpas, 1999). In contrast, cyberspace diverges significantly. Lars Qvortrup suggests it should be perceived not just as a mirror of the real world but as a repository of all spatial experiences, illustrating how we perceive and interact with objects in space (Qvortrup, 2002). Here, the emphasis is on experiences and spectacle.

This virtual space starkly contrasts with real life, where objects require deliberate intention and craftsmanship, often taking considerable time to complete—especially in urban environments. Cyberspaces, however, lack these constraints, prioritizing entertainment and immersive experiences. Gernot Böhme, examining the relationship between architecture and scene design, stated “Life is serious; art serene” (Böhme, 2002), a notion that can also be applied to video game spaces. These virtual environments can be manipulated and distorted to enhance user experiences intensively.

Unlike real spaces, which must serve strict functional roles, video game spaces are free from such boundaries. The creators of these virtual environments shape how players perceive and interact with them; a trait common across nearly all game genres. This is particularly evident in isometric games, the focus of this research, where the observation perspective is elevated, providing a bird’s-eye view of city streets, distinct from our usual urban experience.

In the first part of this study, we will analyze selected isometric games based on their characteristics, chosen from over 200 titles. The second part will establish criteria for evaluating the influence and appeal of these games. The third part will present examples within specific locations in Novi Sad. The final section will interpret the results and draw conclusions.

2. ISOMETRIC VIDEO GAMES THROUGH HISTORY

The representation of space in video games has evolved significantly since their inception. Initially, the most popular perspectives were side view, top-down, or with the illusion of perspective. The isometric view, a method to present three-dimensional objects, quickly gained recognition for its ability to create navigable environments without demanding excessive resources.

Today, this rendering technique has largely been replaced in major games by first-person perspective (FPS) or third-person perspective (TPS) with a fixed camera above the player. Despite this shift, the influence of isometric games persists, with many modern titles retaining this style.

The sheer volume of isometric video games is substantial, especially considering its past popularity. For example, the number of games released annually on the Steam platform alone has exceeded 10,000 (Clement, 2024), with a portion belonging to the isometric subgenre under study. The first commercial isometric games emerged in the early 1980s (Kent, 2001) and continue to be released up to the present day.

While scientific research on isometric games is limited, we will explore those that have significantly influenced game development, particularly in the 1990s. Paduan (2001) provides an intriguing historical perspective, highlighting games from the early stages of development. Felczak (2023) examines isometric games through the lens of the spirituality of place, noting the structural cohesion and functionalization of sacred spaces within various games. A select few of these games will be analyzed in greater detail.

2.1. Selection of games

Between 1981 and 2024, numerous isometric video game titles have emerged. This analysis focuses on 20 exemplary games chosen for their influence and portrayal of urban environments and architecture. Figure 1 showcases screenshots from these standout games, highlighting key examples of isometric video game history. The subsequent chapters will provide detailed explanations of the selection criteria and the games themselves.

Fig. 1. Screenshots from video games included in the analysis: a) Zaxxon, b) Knights Lore, c) Glider Rider, d) The Last Ninja, e) Final Zone, f) Desert Strike, g) SimCity 2000, h) Xcom: Enemy Unknown, i) Cesar II, j) Super Mario RPG, k) Diablo, l) Anno 1602, m) Robin Hood: The Legend of Sherwood, n) Eschalon: Book I, o) Project Zomboid, q) Shadow Tactics: Blades of the Shogun, r) They are billions, s) Disco Elysium, t) Hades II.

2.1.1. Zaxxon, SEGA, 1981

The first internationally released isometric game, Zaxxon, followed the release of Treasure Island in Japan. This scrolling shooter featured an aircraft navigating through enemy targets, getting its name from the axonometric projection - Z-axxon. It was a commercial success, climbing the charts and receiving several awards. At the 1984 Arkie Awards, the dedicated console version won Stand-Alone Game of the Year. The game showcased military facilities and bases, with graphics that were state-of-the-art at the time.

2.1.2. *Knights Lore, Ultimate Play the Game, 1984*

Knight Lore is another historically significant game, belonging to the action-adventure genre. Players collected objects within a castle, and the game was lauded for its graphics upon release, winning Game of the Year honors. The game environments were primarily interior spaces with few architectural elements of the castle, and the scale of the character in relation to the space was close to reality.

2.1.3. Glider Rider, Binary Design, 1986

Similar to Knight Lore in genre, Glider Rider focused on the architectural elements of buildings, though it did not receive awards for innovation. The player character, driving a motorcycle, appeared relatively small on the screen, with sizes not proportionate to surrounding objects like trees, buildings, and tanks.

2.1.4. *The Last Ninja, System 3, 1987*

The Last Ninja was one of the most successful games for the Commodore 64, blending action-adventure elements with advanced graphics. The main character occupied significant screen space, moving through both indoor and outdoor environments, showcasing recognizable Japanese architectural elements.

2.1.5. *Final Zone, Wolf Team, 1990*

A scrolling shooter game, Final Zone featured a mecha unit controlled by the player. While it didn't have a notable impact on game development, its collapsing city environment was interesting. Buildings were uniformly brick with flat roofs, and the city streets were regular but with too-large distances between buildings. The main character, a robot, was significantly larger than a human, providing a unique visual perspective of the cityscape.

2.1.6. *Desert Strike, Electronic Arts, 1992*

Desert Strike: Return to the Gulf was a shoot'em up game inspired by the Gulf War and one of the most successful games released by Electronic Arts. The player controlled a helicopter with real-sized surrounding objects and people. The buildings had simple characteristics, and the street network was always regular, with the helicopter's movement keeping the character in focus.

2.1.7. *SimCity 2000, Maxis, 1993*

SimCity 2000 marked the beginning of one of the most successful game franchises, The Sims. This city-building simulation game adopted the isometric style, depicting buildings faithfully without a central character. The street network was regular and accessible in four directions for better visibility.

2.1.8. *Xcom: Enemy Unknown, Mythos Games, 1994*

Xcom is a science fiction strategy game that inspired numerous sequels. It featured operational missions with multiple characters, some set in cities. Buildings could be entered, displaying interiors instead of outer walls. The characters were scaled to be visible alongside the height of floors and trees.

2.1.9. *Cesar II, Impressions Games, 1995*

A city-building game set in the Roman Empire, Caesar II featured diverse architecture with detailed elements, though buildings of the same type were often repeated. It provided a rich portrayal of Roman urban planning and architecture.

2.1.10. *Super Mario RPG, Square, 1996*

Super Mario RPG was a classic role-playing game (RPG) that significantly influenced similar games. Although the isometric view was not common on the Nintendo platform, this game was highly popular. The objects were fictitious but detailed, and the character was stylized with primary colors, ensuring full visibility in various situations.

2.1.11. *Diablo, Blizzard North, 1997*

Diablo is an action role-playing video game renowned for its use of isometric projection. Still considered one of the most influential games ever released, it features not only extensive dungeon crawling but also segments set in rural settlements. The architecture is basic and uniform across all buildings. In its sequels, real cities are introduced. The main character remains centrally positioned on the screen, ensuring constant visibility.

2.1.12. *Anno 1602, Max Design, 1998*

Anno 1602 is a key entry in the successful city-building franchise. The game features highly detailed buildings, although with a repetitive design similar to previous games. Non-player characters (NPCs) are depicted much larger in scale compared to the buildings, creating an interesting visual dynamic.

2.1.13. *Robin Hood: The Legend of Sherwood, Spellbound Entertainment, 2002*

One of the last major isometric games made by big studios, Robin Hood: The Legend of Sherwood is a stealth-based real-time tactics game, drawing heavily on earlier releases like Commandos and Desperados. Set in medieval England, the game features stylized, highly detailed architecture. The irregular street network posed

challenges for character display, resolved by showing the player's silhouette in a primary color when behind buildings.

2.1.14. *Eschalon: Book I, Basilisk Games, 2007*

Eschalon: Book I is a turn-based role-playing video game, part of the indie game movement that gained traction in the early 2000s. Despite its limited graphical detail compared to earlier titles, it received positive reviews. The game emphasizes internal spaces over external architecture, focusing on gameplay-essential elements.

2.1.15. *Project Zomboid, The Indie Stone, 2013*

Still in development and popular within indie circles, Project Zomboid is a zombie open-world RPG survival game. Architectural objects vary but lack intricate detail. The player character is small relative to the screen, though zoomable, and buildings are scaled to match the player, who remains centered on the screen.

2.1.16. *Shadowrun: Hong Kong, Harebrained Schemes, 2015*

Funded through Kickstarter, Shadowrun: Hong Kong is a turn-based tactical RPG set in a future fictional world. It uses isometric projection with characters animated from all angles, unlike the 4 or 8 fixed angles typical of earlier games. The stylized representation of Hong Kong includes relatively few buildings.

2.1.17. *Shadow Tactics: Blades of the Shogun, Daedalic Entertainment, 2016*

Shadow Tactics: Blades of the Shogun is a stealth-oriented real-time tactics game set in feudal Japan, featuring detailed, time-appropriate, and stylistically expressive objects. The game uses 3D objects within an isometric view, allowing environment rotation for multi-angled detail viewing, though objects are oriented towards two axes.

2.1.18. *They are billions, Numantian Games, 2017*

They Are Billions is a steampunk real-time strategy survival game, demonstrating the enduring success of traditional isometric style in modern gaming. Following the popularity of franchises like Starcraft and Warcraft, it features numerous player-controlled units, larger in scale than surrounding objects.

2.1.19. *Disco Elysium, ZA/UM, 2019*

Disco Elysium, another standout indie game, is a non-traditional RPG with a serious narrative and scene composition, not intended for younger audiences. It received critical acclaim and numerous awards for its distinctive style and storytelling. The architecture is in scale, focusing on personal rather than urban perspectives, crucial to the game's experience.

2.1.20. *Hades II, Supergiant Games, early access 2024*

Hades II, one of the most anticipated indie games of 2024, follows the success of its predecessor, Hades I, which sold over 50 million copies. Despite lacking significant external architectural representation, its popularity underscores the enduring appeal of the isometric video game genre.

2.2. Analysis of the selected video games

The selected games were analyzed based on several criteria affecting visibility, aesthetic value, and optimization. Transparency was prioritized, ensuring player characters are consistently visible, with sub-criteria focusing on the player's height relative to the screen, their position, and the height of other objects. Aesthetic values were assessed by the complexity and variety of building designs. Optimization included technical requirements for PCs or consoles and the game's overall stylization. This comprehensive analysis provides insight into how each game excels in these areas.

GAME:	player height/ screen height	player position	player height in	buildings complexity,	variability of	orientations of	hardware requirements	game stylization
Zaxxon	7%	not restricted	no	very low	no		low	16 colors
Knights Lore	16%	not restricted	yes	very low	no		low	monochrome
Glider Rider	9%	not restricted	no	very low	no		low	monochrome
The Last Ninja	19%	not restricted	yes	low	no		low	16 colors, shadows
Final Zone	24%	center	no	very low	no		low	gray-brown palette
Desert Strike	17%	not restricted	yes	low	no		low	yellow-brown palette
SimCity 2000	no	no	yes	low	no		low	cartoony style
Xcom	7-13%	multiple	no	low	no		low	no specific style
Cesar II	no	no	no		no		low	cartoony style
Super Mario RPG	14%	near center	no		no		low	cartoony style, black shadows
Diablo	11%	center	yes		no		low	dark palette with shadows
Anno 1602	7%	multiple	no		no		low	realistic palette
Robin Hood	7%	multiple	yes	high	yes	no	low	realistic, desaturated
Eschalon	7%	center	yes	low	yes		low	no specific style
Project Zomboid	5-9%	center	yes	low	yes	no	medium	no specific style
Shadowrun: HK	17%	not restricted	yes		no		low	dark, soft color palette
Shadow Tactics	5-10%	not restricted	yes	high	yes		high	realistic, soft palette
They are billions	3-11%	multiple	no	low	no		medium	cartoony style
Disco Elysium	25%	not restricted	yes	high	yes	no	medium	pastel colors
Hades II	10%	center	yes	high	yes		high	dark environment, light elements

Fig. 2. Isometric video game analysis based on 8 different criteria.

The following conclusions can be drawn from Fig. 2:

- The size of the player in relation to the height of the screen in games is from 3% to 25%, with an average of about 14%.
- The player's position is not restricted in 7, and the position is placed in the center or near the center in 6 cases. However, if you look at the release time of the games, most of the ones that are not restricted were released in the 1980s. Relatively modern tendencies show a tendency towards central positions for the main character.
- In 60% of the analyzed games, the character's height is proportional to the buildings and objects in the game. In cases where this is not applied, the character is always larger in order to be more pronounced. When it comes to cases of displaying work with an urban entity, it is more common to use a larger character.
- The architectural details of objects in games increase in proportion to the year of release with a few exceptions. The newer the game, the higher the expectation of detail.
- The variability of buildings is present in only about 30% of cases. These cases are all present in games that are newer generations.
- Only in 10% of cases, the orientation of the space in two orthogonal directions is not present. This was done for simpler crafting, understanding of space and movement in the game.
- Games that have higher hardware requirements are those where variability and the spread of buildings in multiple directions appear.
- Game styling was initially hardware dependent, but starting with SimCity 2000 in the list, the most common tendency is to render games in a cartoony style. With higher hardware performance, games with a realistic display also appeared, but only about 15% of them.

3. APPLICATION OF THE RESULTS

Based on the analysis results, the following inputs were integrated into the game creation system to accurately represent the central area of Novi Sad:

- Character size ratio to screen height is 14%.
- The character will occupy the center of the screen.
- The character will be proportional to the objects around him in the game or will be taller so that the urban whole can be observed, or. so as not to be cut off.
- Objects will be displayed with more details.
- Buildings don't have to have a lot of variability, but there must be a building with a known character.
- Orientation of objects is exclusively in 2 directions, except in the case of objects with character.

The game employs a cartoony stylization with realistic elements. Based on defined criteria, Zmaj Jovina Street in Novi Sad, extending from the Church of the Name of Mary (the Cathedral) to the Bishop's Palace, was selected due to its notable architecture. This prominent street, with most structures dating from the 19th or early 20th century, features two culturally significant freestanding buildings at its ends.

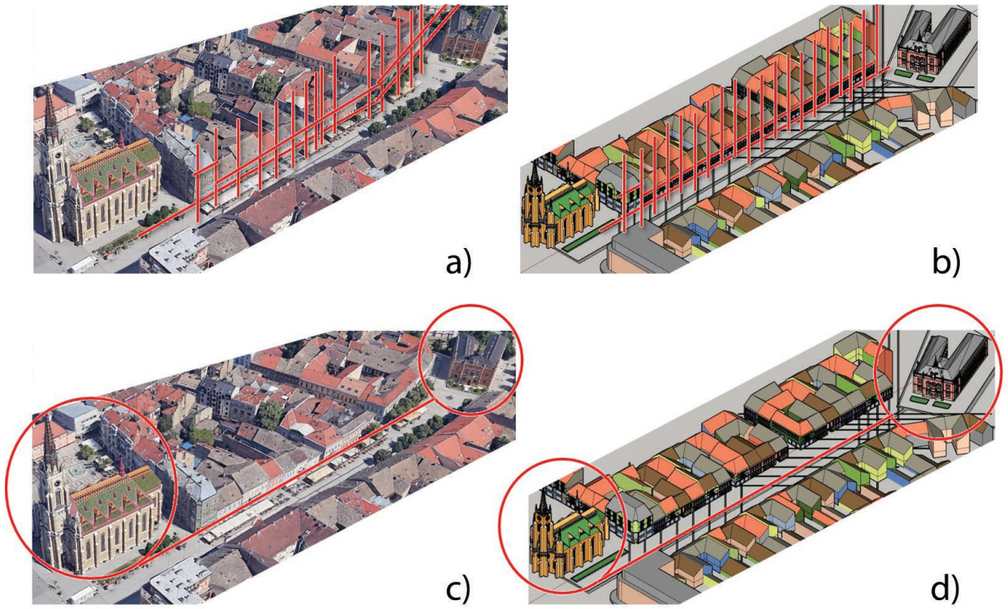

Fig. 3. Evaluation and adaptation of Zmaj Jovina street from reality to video game: a) distance between houses are relatively even; b) distance is made even for simplification; c) two main point buildings are connected with a street that is wider at the end; d) street direction is simplified in virtual world.

In Fig. 3 c) can be seen the relationship between the two main objects and the variation of the street width. In the game (Fig. 3d), the street has been simplified to make it easier to navigate for the players. The orientation of all buildings is uniform, except for the building of the Bishop's Palace. The details of the buildings at the beginning and end of the street had to be done carefully. Both buildings are characteristic for their colors and architectural details. Every major part of the building is carefully modeled so that it can be recognized. On the other hand, the complete modeling of all parts was not approached in order to fit the objects with the buildings located in between, which are repeated. In Fig. 4 it can be seen that the windows on the right are modeled so that not all details are visible. The software used for the work was Autodesk 3ds Max, Trimble Sketchup, Adobe Photoshop and the game engine Unity 3D to create the game. After the 3d modeling and rendering of all the objects, the production of independent images of the objects of urban furniture and greenery, which is characteristic of parts of the street, was started. Objects are rendered independently and are placed with

collisions enabled so players have to go around them rather than go through them. Street lighting, benches, trees, bushes, coffee tables and chairs, etc. have been added to the buildings. (Fig. 4) After all, a character was added that passes through the space and it is visible on the left side in Fig. 4. Collision attributes have been added to the character so that he cannot pass through objects. Collision has been added as a separate image for the buildings as well to make the passage through the level complete.

In Figure 3c, the relationship between the two main objects and the variation in street width can be observed. For simplification and clarity in the game (Figure 3d), the street design was streamlined. All buildings, except for the Bishop's Palace, are oriented uniformly. The details of buildings at the beginning and end of the street required meticulous modeling to ensure their recognition by players. These buildings are distinct in color and architectural details, with every significant part carefully modeled for identification. However, full modeling was avoided to maintain consistency with the repetitive buildings in between. As seen in Figure 4, windows on the right are modeled to hide certain details.

The software utilized for this project included Autodesk 3ds Max, Trimble SketchUp, Adobe Photoshop, and the Unity 3D game engine. After 3D modeling and rendering all objects, independent images of urban furniture and greenery typical of the street were created. These objects, including street lighting, benches, trees, bushes, coffee tables, and chairs, were rendered separately and positioned with collision detection enabled, ensuring players navigate around them rather than passing through.

Fig. 4. Start point of the finished result from the game engine; environment is 3d rendered, character is added to the left, and greenery and urban furniture was displaced.

Upon completion, the character exhibits multidirectional movement capabilities, navigating various obstacles along the street. At this stage, interactions, user interface (UI), and objectives have not been implemented; these elements are intended for future development.

4. CONCLUSION

There are several conclusions that can be made. First, video games, as an emergent medium, provide novel representations of spatial environments, predominantly emphasizing event-driven narratives. Second, isometric video games offer a unique perspective for the depiction of urban environments, though historical examples within this genre are limited, the extant instances hold significant value. Third, Zmaj Jovina street represents good place for isometric type game, because of its orientation, prominence of buildings on its start and end, and uniformity of buildings in the middle. Lastly, observing an unfamiliar city through a video game

can be misleading; however, it presents an opportunity to form a connection with the virtual representation, potentially fostering a sense of familiarity upon encountering the actual location.

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Biography

DFA Jelena Janev (b. 1972), an Associate Professor at the Sub-department of Art and Design, Department of Architecture and Urbanism, Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad. She earned her BFA (1998) and MFA in sculpture (2004) from the Academy of Art in Novi Sad, and DFA in Scene Design (2021), in the Scene Design Program at the Department of Architecture and Urbanism, Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad. She works in visual arts, primarily sculpture, art installation and scene design. She had 15 solo shows and more than thirty group shows in Serbia and internationally (USA, Germany, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro). She has received the Annual Award for Sculpture from the Academy of Art (1997) and the award for sculpture from the Novi Sad October Salon (1997). She participated in a number of international art symposia. Her artworks are in the permanent collections of the Museum of Contemporary Art of Vojvodina, Museum Terra and the New Mexico Highlands University (USA). Janev has published critical essays in Scena, theatre arts review, and presented work at international conferences.

Dr. Tatjana Babić (1970) is an architect and an associate professor at the Faculty of Technical Sciences in Novi Sad. She graduated from the Faculty of Architecture in Belgrade, and obtained her master's and doctoral degrees at the Faculty of Technical Sciences in Novi Sad. She is engaged in researching contemporary architectural practices, with an emphasis on exploring the potential of the creative educational process aimed at connecting people and creating a community of active citizens. During the teaching process, she designed and led a number of research projects involving more than 100 students. Together with colleagues, she organized several projects aimed at professionals and the general public. The results of these studies were presented at several representative professional exhibitions.

Dr. Ana Perišić, an Associate Professor at the Department of Fundamental Sciences, Engineering Animation, within the Faculty of Technical Sciences at the University of Novi Sad. She has been working and teaching for over a decade in the field of Video Game Design and Computer Graphics. She obtained her PhD in the field of Applied Computer Graphics and Simulations in Architecture in 2016. Prolific in the field of Human-Computer Interaction design, Applied Computer Graphics in Education and Virtual Simulations.

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THE APPLICATION OF EDUCATIONAL TECHNIQUES IN THE FIELD OF SCENE DESIGN IN CREATING COMMON SPACES

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Abstract

There is an urgent need to develop a sense of community and a responsibility towards using public and common spaces, in a country where the institutions responsible for preserving them have collapsed and/or become corrupt. We designed four experiments, carried out in a communal space in Mošorin — the venue of The LALA Earthland Festival — to explore ways of empowering an existing community and building confidence and knowledge in using the shared space in creative and engaging ways. To achieve this, we used art installations and means of scene design.

Our process involved several steps: connecting with the community of space users and building trust; educating participants about their rights and responsibilities related to the space by showing how to use it with respect and creativity; revealing new and unexpected potentials of a familiar space through art, architecture and scene design. The ultimate outcome was that people began to use the space again, including its previously unused areas, as scenic and performative environments and continued to explore its potential further.

The entire project, with all its phases and nuances, was then presented in virtual space as a way to broaden the conversation about tools and strategies applicable to other towns and other shared spaces.

Keywords: public space, community space, scene design, art installation, web- design, graphics

1. INTRODUCTION

When work on this article began, there was a strong sense of urgency to foster a sense of community and a responsible attitude toward the use of public and shared spaces. Serbia was—and still is—a country with weakened and corrupt institutions responsible for protecting these spaces. There was a fear that greed and a lack of expertise—caused by corruption and decades of negative selection in hiring within state urban-planning institutions—would irreversibly damage the very fabric of the city, undermining its potential to support a community of free, conscious citizens aware of their right to the city.

The four experiments described in the article, as well as the web platform developed to present them, were designed to cultivate that awareness.

Then a catastrophe struck: a corruption-driven tragedy took the lives of sixteen people when the canopy of the recently reconstructed railway station collapsed in Novi Sad[1], the very city where the conference was held and where the authors of this article live and work. This event forced the public in Serbia to confront the painful and dangerous reality of neglecting public space, civic responsibility, and citizens' rights in relation to those spaces, as well as the urgent need for vigilant oversight to prevent abuse.

In this context, our efforts to build a community committed to creative and responsible engagement with shared space through artistic projects acquired new urgency and significance.

We designed four experiments[2] carried out in the communal space in Mošorin, the venue of the LALA Earthland Festival[3], to explore ways of empowering an existing community and strengthening its confidence and knowledge in using shared space—the festival grounds—in creative and engaging ways. To achieve this, we employed artistic and scene-design methodology.

The process unfolded through several key steps: establishing a relationship with the community already using the space and building trust; fostering awareness of the rights and responsibilities associated with communal space by demonstrating respectful and imaginative forms of engagement; and revealing previously unrecognized potentials within a familiar environment through artistic, architectural, and scenic interventions. The ultimate outcome was that community members began to use previously neglected parts of the space for performative and scenic purposes, continuing to explore its possibilities independently.

Fig. 1. The courtyard of the Center for Earth Architecture during the LALA Earthland Festival, 2020, as participants gather to learn about the experiment's goals and discuss the creative journey ahead.

1 Srdjan Cvijić, "After a year of student-led protests, the cracks in Serbia's government have turned into fissures", *Guardian*, October 29, 2025, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/oct/29/serbia-student-protests-anniversary

2 Authors of the project: Tatjana Babić, Jelena Janev; Place of implementation: Center for Earth Architecture, Svetozara Miletića 113, Mošorin; Time of realization: during four editions of, LALA Earthland Festival 2020 and 2021, https://zemljanarhitektura.com; Multimedia presentation and Web design: https://sites.google.com/view/mikrokosmosinterakcija/home?authuser=5; Author: Ana Perišić

3 The LALA Earthland Festival and the Center for Earth Architecture were founded by architect Dragana Kojičić, who purchased a house in Mošorin and initiated a program of earth-building workshops and an international festival of earthen architecture, thereby beginning a transformation in the mentality and cultural life of the small town.
https://zemljanarhitektura.com/

The entirety of the project, with all its phases and nuances, was subsequently documented and presented in a virtual Web-space as a means to broaden dialogue about methods and strategies that may be replicated in other communities and applied to other shared or public spaces.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Art has a unique capacity to convey truth. While science articulates the truth of a given historical moment through empirical evidence and experimentation, and religion asserts truth through doctrine, art alone is able to communicate personal truth and deep meaning in a way that allows those who encounter it to feel as though they have lived the experience themselves. We engage with art on emotional and subconscious levels; it produces change from within, fostering a sense of inner transformation, as if we have matured emotionally through our own lived experience.

The point of departure for the four experiments lay in the conviction that scene design possesses subversive potential capable of challenging entrenched social and political apathy, and that active participation in creative processes can serve as a catalyst for meaningful change.

We may understand contemporary living environments as stages composed of shared spaces for artistic expression and various forms of spectacle. In this context, the term artistic does not refer solely to professional artistic production by individuals or groups; rather, it encompasses the broader human impulse to articulate personal viewpoints through public space. In this way, artistic activism becomes a form of spectacle, and those present in a particular moment and place become its audience.[4]

Scene design can be understood as a deliberately constructed audio-visual articulation of space, grounded in practices of presentation and in the formation of spatial relationships between performer and observer. In this sense, it exceeds the conventional definition of stage design associated solely with theatrical or dramatic environments. Rather, scene design operates within broader social, economic, and political conditions, shaping and reflecting collective experience.[5] Through the intentional structuring of spatial perception and interaction, scene design contributes to the production of memory and meaning in place. It fosters an embodied relationship to lived space, enabling participants to experience and reimagine it as a poetic place—one imbued with emotional resonance, symbolic value, and lived significance.[6]

3. FOUR EXPERIMENTS USING EDUCATIONAL AND ARTISTIC PRACTICES OF SCENE DESIGN TO FOSTER CREATIVE AND RESPONSIBLE ENGAGEMENT WITH COMMON AND PUBLIC SPACE

The research project "Four Experiments Using Educational and Artistic Practices of Scene Design to Foster Creative and Responsible Engagement with Common and Public Space" was conceived and initiated by architect Tatjana Babić and sculptor Jelena Janev. Its premise was that shared space can be generated and strengthened through creative artistic processes, particularly when employing ecological and locally sourced materials. The project aimed to examine how an engaged individual—prepared to initiate change and explore the latent potentials of space—can influence the formation of a community whose members would cultivate a creative and responsible relationship to their shared environment.

The experiments were carried out at the Center for Earthen Architecture in Mošorin during four editions of the

4 Aleksandra Pešterac, "BREAKING THE IMAGE OF URBAN SPACE", 1st International Scientific Conference in the cycle „What is scene design?" SCENE DESIGN – BETWEEN PROFESSION, ART AND IDEOLOGY, Department of Architecture and Urbanism, Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad, 2012, page 140

5 Slađana Milićević, "SUBVERSIVE POTENTIAL OF SCENE DESIGN - A CRITICAL ANALYSIS", 1st International Scientific Conference in the cycle „What is scene design?" SCENE DESIGN – BETWEEN PROFESSION, ART AND IDEOLOGY, Department of Architecture and Urbanism, Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad, 2012, page 127

6 "Poetic place influence is a manner in which space causes a man to have an experience. This phenomenon is introduced in order to explain the essence and nature of architectural space, as well as the manner in which the space produces this effect. The main problem and research subject of the work is cause and effect between physical space and place, grounded on a dialogue process which enables a man to experience certain 'poetic state'," Aleksandra Pešterac, "Transformation of space to place: Continuity and changes of poetic place influence", (PhD disertation, Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad, 2017), page 3

LALA Earthland Festival in 2020 and 2021. Each experiment had a distinct thematic focus and emphasized a different aspect of scene design, while the methodological approach remained consistent. Designed as open, participatory events, the experiments unfolded over several hours and concluded with a collective walk through the site, followed by discussion and reflection on the interactive or performative installations created during the process.

3.1. EXPERIMENT 1: Distancing — The Need for Closeness, Interactive art installation[7]

“Distancing: the Need for Closeness” was the first spatial experiment, realized in July 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, immediately following a period of complete isolation. The tension of that moment—marked by simultaneous fear of contagion and longing for physical proximity—served as the conceptual foundation for the experiment.

Participants included both returning visitors familiar with the Center and its workshops, as well as new and curious festival attendees eager to explore and experiment. Within a limited time frame, participants were invited to create their own temporary shelters using materials found in the Center’s yard. They were also encouraged to consider whether and how to invite others into their constructed spaces and to reflect on the need to establish connections with neighboring shelters.

By choosing a location in the yard, determining bodily orientation, and selecting materials and forms of expression, each participant produced a personal interpretation of the themes of distancing and connection. Through this initial spatial experiment, the yard was re-introduced as a shared environment, and a sense of trust began to emerge among participants. This process sparked curiosity for subsequent projects and laid the foundation for the formation of a creative and engaged community.

Fig. 2. Outcomes of the first experiment: individual shelters and spatial arrangements created by participants.

3.2. EXPERIMENT 2: The Evening Scene — The Warmth of Togetherness

Interactive spatial art installation[8]

“The Evening Scene: The Warmth of Togetherness” was the second experiment, realized two months after the first, during the LALA Earthland Festival in September 2020. The outdoor space previously “claimed”

7 Event: LALA Earthland Festival 2020; Venue: Center for Earthen Architecture, Mošorin; Date: July 5, 2020

8 Event: LALA Earthland Festival 2020; Venue: Center for Earthen Architecture, Mošorin; Date: September 9, 2020

and explored during daylight became the site of this new artistic inquiry, now investigated under twilight and nighttime conditions.

Participants were presented with a new challenge: how to transform an already familiar environment into a nocturnal scene. Using natural materials, objects found in the yard, and a variety of light sources, they selected and shaped different areas of the space, creating intimate scenic environments.

With the setting sun, these individual light installations collectively generated an unexpectedly poetic, almost theatrical atmosphere. During the final walk through the site, the familiar space appeared transformed into a magical environment of lights and shadows, revealing its performative and atmospheric potential and introducing participants to a new dimension of the yard’s scenic and experiential possibilities.

Fig. 2. Detail of the second experiment showing individual light-based spatial interventions.

3.3.EXPERIMENT 3: Search for the Sea, Performative spatial art installation[9]

In the third experiment, participants investigated the performative potential of the yard of the Center for Earthen Architecture. Most participants had already taken part in the earlier experiments, meaning that a sense of community and shared familiarity had begun to form. This time, they were invited to create costumes in which they would move through the space, using burlap bags, string, thread, found natural materials, and various light elements.

Through this creative process, participants discovered the yard as a space for embodied expression. The act of crafting costumes and inhabiting them through movement revealed the site’s capacity to function as a stage. This discovery organically led to the formation of a spontaneous festival procession, prompting collective movement and dance and further strengthening the emergent creative community.

9 Event: LALA Earthland Festival 2020; Venue: Center for Earthen Architecture, Mošorin; Date: October 10, 2020

Fig. 3. The procession.

3.4. EXPERIMENT 4: Frame, Interactive spatial art installation[10]

The final experiment in this series took place one year after the first, in July 2021. By this stage, participants were already familiar with both the site and the creative methodology developed through the previous experiments. The task set before them was twofold: first, to identify a personally meaningful location within the courtyard of the Center for Earthen Architecture—a place of preference or emotional resonance—and second, to mark and frame this chosen spot using cardboard frames or objects found on site, thereby composing a scenic image that carried individual significance.

Fig. 4. Participants with their “framed” stories.

10 Venue: Center for Earthen Architecture, Mošorin; Event: LALA Earthland Festival 2021; Date: July 15, 2021

This interactive installation process strengthened the emerging community through acts of sharing personal reflections. Participants discussed why they had selected their particular locations and recalled memories associated with earlier gatherings in the yard that informed those choices. As a result, a new layer of spatial memory was inscribed into the site, deepening both the participants’ sense of place and their collective bond. The experiment reinforced the courtyard not only as a physical environment but as a shared emotional and experiential landscape, shaped by lived moments and communal history.

4. MULTIMEDIA PRESENTATION - Website 4 OGLEDA O PROSTORU ZAJEDNIŠTVA (4 COMMUNITY SPACE EXPERIMENTS)11

A multimedia presentation, designed by Ana Perišić, was selected as the medium for demonstrating the individual phases of the project and providing an overview of its developmental trajectory. Employing 3D models of the courtyard of the Center for Earth Architecture—combined with lines, dots, and color-coded spatial markers—the maps depict event locations, gathering and socializing zones, areas of solitude, circulation pathways, and points repeatedly selected by participants for artistic interventions. Distinct visual signs highlight spaces often chosen for performative actions, light-based installations, and scenic compositions.

The presentation integrates video and photographic documentation, juxtaposing experiences of installations from identical spatial vantage points across different experiments, and contrasting day and night conditions within the same intervention. This comparative approach also captures and illustrates the change in the character of the venue through time, and thus the outcomes of the entire creative process.

The purple markers represent the positions of art installations and interactions created during the first experiment “Distancing: The Need for Closeness”. These are the locations to which the participants gravitated and recognized the spatial environment as stimulating for mutual communication. Experiencing the venue in an unexpected ways through the experiment, even the owners of the Center were inspired to use the yard in a new and creative way in the future.

The orange path illustrates the fluid arrangement of “oases”, points where new light art installations were created during the second event, “The Evening Scene: The Warmth of Togetherness”. The yard was transformed into different environments during the day and at night, emphasizing the dual nature of light installation. The map shows the connectedness and disconnectedness between personal and social, external and internal, a creative process and its visual representation.

The yellow paths represent the movement of the group of participants during the third experiment, “Search for the Sea”. In this way, the dynamic aspect of the performative art installations was marked.

Turquoise markers represent the positions of art installations and interactions created during the fourth experiment, “Frame”.

Across the four experiments, certain spatial ambiences emerged as recurrent sites of creative potential. These key zones—identified through repeated participant engagement—demonstrated particular resonance in terms of their utilitarian, scenic, and performative quality. The 3D model of the venue shows these areas schematically, emphasizing the spatial and relational dynamics that were revealed through creative processes.

11 https://sites.google.com/view/mikrokosmosinterakcija/home?authuser=0

Fig. 5. Screenshot of one of the website pages.

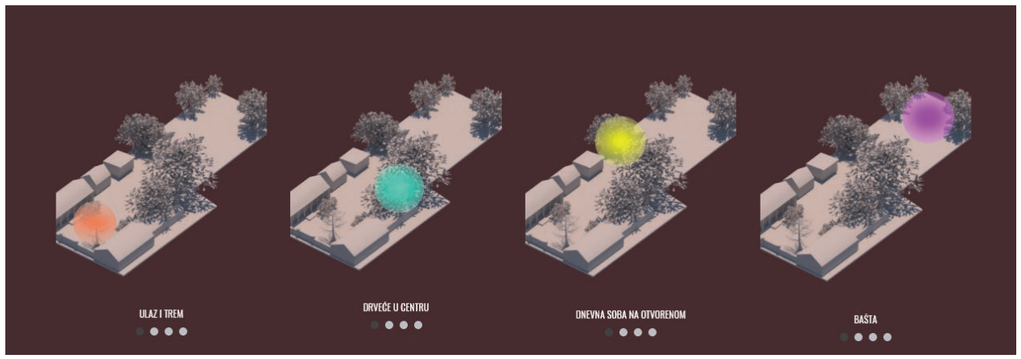

Fig. 6. Screenshot of one of the website pages.

5. OUTCOMES

The Center for Earth Architecture is a relatively small venue located in Mošorin, a rural town geographically and culturally distant from mainstream contemporary activist movements. Yet, LALA Earthland Festival has stirred up the local atmosphere and introduced new ideas by presenting a program that promotes freedom of expression and ecological approaches to architecture, while opening its gates to creative people and "out-of-the-box" ideas. Our experiments were part of that journey

Through the four experiments in scene design, we demonstrated that a creative, participatory process can transform the way people perceive public and common spaces, fostering a sense of responsibility and a deeper understanding of their social, spatial, and emotional potential. The project confirmed that such artistic engagement not only redefines spatial perception but also cultivates strong community bonds through shared authorship and collective experience. A significant outcome of this research is the accompanying multimedia presentation, conceived as a tool for disseminating the methodology and inspiring similar initiatives in other contexts and locations.

Fig. 7. The community.

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Biography

Dragana Kojičić is an independent architect specialised in earth architecture at CRAterre (France) and a PhD student at Scene architecture in Novi Sad. She organises workshops, festivals and other events that promote the use of earth in architecture and beyond for various target groups in Serbia and in the region. She is a certified ECVET trainer and a president of KFZ, an umbrella organisation for ECVET Earth Building in Serbia. She is a co-founder of itinerant Regio Earth festival between Serbia, Hungary and Romania and a founder of LALA Earthland local festival.

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EARTH AS AN ANDRAGOGICAL TOOL FOR CREATING SPACES AND EVENTS

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Abstract

I have been organizing and leading earth-building workshops for 15 years. The initial goal was to remind people of this wonderful architectural heritage that should be protected as well as to try to reintroduce earth as a modern material.

However, what I have noticed happening during the workshops goes beyond just the technical aspect of building with earth. I often witness the transformation of people who, at first, are very hesitant to get dirty, but then, with complete enjoyment, continue to work and build.

In recent years, I have used earth as a tool for working with various communities for all kinds of creative experiments – from more intimate events in the village of Mošorin, through open workshops in the Almaš quarter in Novi Sad, to numerous events in many other places in Serbia and abroad – earth brings both some universal interpretations and some very specific ones for certain people, communities, and spaces.

The serenity of working with the simplest material leads to a transformation that we witness on both an individual and collective level, proving that art can have a much greater and more profound impact than we can even imagine on our seemingly serious lives.

Keywords: earth, meanings, events, people, workshops

1. INTRODUCTION

I have been organizing and leading workshops for building with (raw) earth for past 15 years. The initial goal was to remind people how houses used to be built and maintained in Serbia, to protect part of this wonderful architectural heritage, and to reintroduce earth as a modern material, even if only in small amounts or in specific aspects of construction (finishes, decorative plasters, stoves, etc.).

In recent years, I used earth as a tool for establishing contact and working with various communities. It provides an excellent platform for all kinds of creative experiments – through various workshops and more intimate events in the village of Mošorin, open workshops and exhibitions in the Almaš quarter in Novi Sad, numerous events in many other places in Serbia and the region, to the residencies abroad – earth brings both some universal interpretations and some very specific ones for certain people, communities, and spaces.

What does work with the earth brings to people? Can the earth be a tool in community work, can it contribute to its improvement, etc.?

2. METHODOLOGIES

I never thought of the way I work as a methodology. And it wasn't just one approach, but many attempts to find a way to function and live from what I do and what inspires me.

Certainly, my work relies on the CRAterre methodology. Craterre is an international centre for earth construction at the National School of Architecture in Grenoble, France, where I completed a two-year Post-Master DSA Terre program from 2008 to 2010. To a large extent, everything I do is based on what I learned there – from a very concrete scientifically supported approach, through the practical experiences to a breadth that allows me to understand the similarities and differences between techniques, the specifics, and variations each place has. Based on the areas we studied, I created an online course that I teach every winter, but I also use the knowledge gained as a foundation for the workshops I conduct.

A major discovery for me while writing this paper was also that my methods are not pedagogical, as I mainly work with adults, and the methods are therefore – andragogical (Leš & Fabijanić, 2011). What I have noticed, in contrast to working in formal educational settings, are certain "advantages" I have: I work with motivated individuals with diverse life experiences who are eager to learn, and aim to solve a specific problem through that learning (restore an old house, build a new one, etc.).

Also, I work in non-formal education, which lies between formal and informal: it happens out of school, it's usually supportive, structured and usually prearranged. It's voluntary, may be guide- or teacher-led and learning is usually not evaluated and typically non-sequential. It's conscious and holistic, role of the group is very important and its valuing mistakes– earth as a material is an excellent tool for it, as every mistake can be easily corrected, and a lot is learned from it.

Nevertheless, into part of our non-formal training we have introduced ECVET. ECVET is European credit system for vocational education and training, one of EU instruments that help individuals to transfer, recognize and accumulate their outcomes and to obtain a qualification, very often through transnational mobility.

ECVET Earth building[1] is a matrix of units of learning outcomes that are conceived for construction, renovation and decoration with (raw) earth, developed over 15 years of cooperation between 14 countries. Each of the 9 units is divided into knowledge, skills and competencies necessary to carry out these activities and each has criteria and indicators for the evaluation (Didier, Paccoud et al. 2016).

Women are more and more interested in natural building, they represent 70-80 % of participants in most of the workshops we organize. Some people say: because women were the first to engage in gardening, women and earth give birth, women take care of the house in every possible sense and / or because they are more open to "alternative" techniques. According to some opinions, the first houses were built by women, because they are the ones who stay behind. Some people even say that there are so many women in this field as long

1 https://ecvetearth.hypotheses.org/, Retrieved on 10.10.2024.

as it's not profitable, but once it's about profit, men take it over. [2]

Working with earth involves a lot of experimentation, as each type of earth is different. Through many trials and errors, very spontaneously, we developed different workshop formats in the village of Mošorin: from volunteer, one-day, weekend thematic workshops, to mORA - summer school, summer camps, and the aforementioned ECVET training.

Fig. 1. Women making an adobe wall during Regio Earth Festival in Mošorin 2019. Photo credits: Flori Achim & Cosmin Neagu

Alongside these workshops in a familiar setting, different formats began to develop outside Mošorin: from short workshops in collaboration with local and regional institutions, to multi-day workshops with individuals and organizations - which always mean working in a new context, with different materials, tools, and people.

And always with the goal: to demolish or build a wall, floor, plaster.

But since 2018, through my PhD in Scene Design[3] at the Faculty of Technical Sciences in Novi Sad, I have started exploring whether and how earth can be used beyond architecture, in other arts. At the same time, I began exploring new ways and connecting with other professionals, artists, doing other formats: conferences, festivals (regional and local), and artistic residencies abroad.

All of this has led me to realize that earth is an exceptional tool for working with individuals and communities, for creating spaces and events.

3. MEANINGS OF EARTH

Earth has universal, local, and some very personal meanings.

2 https://madeoutofmud.earth/women-in-natural-building/, Retrieved on 11.10.2024.

3 https://scen.uns.ac.rs/studijski-programi/doktorske-studije/, Retrieved on 11.10.2024.

Earth is unique in our universe, yet it is so ordinary that it is taken for granted. However, the fact is that humans have always been connected to the earth for many reasons and in many ways. Some of the universal meanings of earth are: it is a planet, a homeland, and a home, a protector and nurturer, a substance and material, a medicine and neutralizer, a mediator and substitute for humans, an inspiration and creation. On it, our ancestors grew plants and animals, made houses, furniture, jewellery, paints... and, in the end, returned to it.

One of the universal meanings of earth is the origin of humanity, creation of humans from earth, or clay. This is a theme that appears in numerous myths and legends: from Greek, Sumerian, Babylonian, Egyptian, Chinese, and Hindu traditions, to African, Native American, Norse, Aboriginal, and Māori tribes. Almost all of them create humans from clay (yellow in China, red in America), adding water (Prometheus), or blood (the Sumerian god Enki), and some of the first humans were created by drying clay in the sun.

Viewed from a layperson's perspective, humans made of clay create various things, just as God created man; also, earth is associated with fertility, and fertility with creation.

However, from a scientific perspective, there are other, even more fascinating explanations – clay has three unique properties: first, it can be deformed without cracking; second, when the deforming force stops, the shape remains unchanged; and third, when it dries, it has significant strength. Moreover, the molecular structure of clay consists of hexagonal crystals, and it seems that this very structure could be key to the origin of life, a springboard for organic evolution (Kloprogge, Hartman, 2022).

Each of these universal meanings also has its many local variations.

"'It is said that almost every person – in our country – has a black grain on their navel that seems to be made of earth. The people believe that God created man from earth and that these grains are traces of the earth from which the first human was created" (Mijatović, 1956).

In folk traditions, man is often identified with the earth, and the earth changes him in many rituals – it is offered when someone has been ill for a long time in order to "ransom" them from death (by filling and throwing a sock with earth).

The earth is also used as a neutralizer: it absorbs rain, neutralizes the strike of lightning and thunder; it is worn as an amulet against curses, the evil eye, and illness... In principle, it was believed that "a child's first touch should be with the earth because it nourishes them" (Đapović, 1995).

The earth also appears as an intermediary between higher powers and humans, as a neutralizer of sins, but also of wrongdoings committed during life. It is also believed that throwing clods of earth during a funeral, along with the words "may the earth rest lightly on him", is a ritual in which the living "settle accounts' with the deceased."

Or a common sentence in our language: "You'll make me out of mud!" in the sense of: you will realize my value when I'm no longer here.

Finally, the earth also has many personal meanings: it almost always brings back memories of childhood, carefreeness, playfulness and sense of freedom.

For me, as for most of the people I worked with in last 15 years:

"Mud is contagious – it is love at first touch" (Gerretsen, 2022).

4. CREATING SPACES AND COMMUNITIES

4.1 In Mošorin

Through various workshops in Mošorin, we created different spaces (interior of the house, workshop space, classroom, toilet blocks, kids house, chicken house etc.) and we worked with many different groups: groups of pupils of technical schools, students of architecture, architects, scouts, volunteers, but mostly - spontaneously created groups of participants.

Fig. 2. Preparatio of eart during Regio Earth Festival in Mošorin 2019. Photo credits: Flori Achim & Cosmin Neagu

Most of them are tired of being in artificial spaces, confined for hours in offices in front of computers. Everyone enjoys being outdoors and, surrounded by earth and other natural materials; people feel warm, safe and secure.

It has also been proven that working with earth makes people happier, due to the bacteria found in the soil (Francis, 2010).

They relax while working with the earth (no matter how hard the work may sometimes be, such as when preparing large quantities of material or building a wall), and quickly connect with each other. They usually continue to socialize or work together even after the workshops are finished. Gathering, working and creating together is especially important to women and that can be one of the reasons why we have so many of them attending our workshops.

Also, in today's highly specialized world, people are delighted by the realization that they are capable of making something with their own hands, especially the fact that they are able to create a home for themselves, including their kids and their friends in that process.

Furthermore, by inviting other artists to conduct their creative experiments in Mošorin ("4 essays on the space of community"[4] by Tatjana Babić and Jelena Janev for example), we all get surprised and amazed by the possibilities of completely transforming our common and well-known space with such small effects (lights, installations, etc.).

4 https://sites.google.com/view/mikrokosmosinterakcija/home?authuser=5

Fig. 3. Togetherness and creation during Regio Earth Festival in Mošorin 2019. Photo credits: Flori Achim & Cosmin Neagu

4.2 Outside of Mošorin

Through years of organizing events in the Almaš quarter of Novi Sad, I realized that it is very important, regardless of the weather, to hold them outdoors, because they become more visible, more people can join or just be aware of the fact that something is going on in their neighbourhood.

Another lesson from it is that building a community is a process, it takes time for people to become accustomed to events and to attend them.

I've also learned that we don't always have to plan everything – it's enough to provide the framework for the workshop and a general idea, but give participants enough freedom to express themselves, because very often the best solutions come out of that.

During my artistic residencies in Western Europe, I realized that sometimes it is not easy to find basic materials, such as earth, due to various regulations, and that we have to look for it in recycling centers around, as it was in Innsbruck. On the other hand, I got inspired very much by the exhibition of the Architekturzentrum Wien "Land for all: self-interest or common good?!"[5] and included it into my final exhibition.

Through the artistic residency through Air on the Edge[6] project on Inisheer island (Aran Islands, Ireland), I learned that earth doesn't always have to come from the decomposition of rocks (as we were taught at Craterre), but also from decades of mixing seaweed and sand by local people. There, I met children who, for the first time, had earth in their hands – for them, it was only used by their grandparents for growing potatoes.

Working with other artists in interdisciplinary teams (e.g. for the play Pradevojčica at the National Theatre

5 https://aut.cc/ausstellungen/boden-fuer-alle#&gid=1&pid=1

6 https://www.airontheedge.com/

Toša Jovanović from Zrenjanin, or with artists at the Art-nature LAB, creating an installation within the Craft Natur Museum in Ringkøbing), I realized how important is to learn from each other, inspire each other, open new possibilities, and work with (natural) materials we've never used before.

For me, it is also important that there is no trash, meaning that the vast majority of things we do can be recycled or just simply brought back to nature.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In a world dominated by technology, where almost no product is natural anymore, but instead undergoes various transformations, people lose their physical connection with nature, with the basic materials, and ultimately – with themselves and their community.

On the other hand, working with earth bring the sense of togetherness, the ability to create with our own hands something meaningful, beautiful and/or useful.

Through the ongoing amàRéno project, led by researchers at amàco research center in Lyon, preliminary conclusions for training practices are structured around four objectives:

- Highlight the magic of the earth material and the sense of wonder it can evoke,
- Establish a "choreography and scenography" based on always unique uses of space, time, tools, and materials,
- Invite interdisciplinarity (sciences, techniques, arts, and architecture) into each of the proposed situations
- Connect the shared concepts with the personal, sensory experiences of the participants in the proposed situations.

It is very important, for us who create such events to think in advance and prepare them according to those objectives, but also for the audience to get as much as they can from attending them.

The serenity while working with the simplest material leads to a transformation that we witness on both an individual and collective level, moving simultaneously on a spatial level (from infinitely small to infinitely large particles) and a temporal level (human and geological time) (Anger, 2005), proving that art can have a much greater and more profound impact than we can even imagine on our serious lives.

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Biography

Aleksandra Pešterac (1984) is an architect. She received her doctorate from the Faculty of Technical Sciences at the University of Novi Sad, where she is currently an assistant professor leading courses in the field of scene architecture. Within the Department of Arts and Design, she is the Scene Design Chair. As an architectural designer, she participated in the development of several projects. She has published papers at international conferences, as well as in national periodicals. She is the co-author of several award-winning projects in the field of architectural design. She is a renowned author and mentor, regularly taking an active role in exhibitions and workshops.

Tatjana Babić (1970) is an architect and an associate professor at the Faculty of Technical Sciences in Novi Sad. She graduated from the Faculty of Architecture in Belgrade, and obtained her master's and doctoral degrees at the Faculty of Technical Sciences in Novi Sad. She is engaged in researching contemporary architectural practices, with an emphasis on exploring the potential of the creative educational process aimed at connecting people and creating a community of active citizens. During the teaching process, she designed and led a number of research projects involving more than 100 students. Together with colleagues, she organized several projects aimed at professionals and the general public. The results of these studies were presented at several representative professional exhibitions.

Professional paper
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KIBIC WALK AS A CREATIVE TOOL OF SCENE ARCHITECTURE

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Abstract

The "*Kibic Walk*" project, part of the *Regio Earth* festival, was implemented in Novi Sad in the historic *Almaška* neighborhood to engage festival participants and residents with the area's unique ambiance and cultural heritage. This initiative highlighted the efforts of the non-profit association "*Almašani*", which has dedicated itself to preserving and protecting the neighborhood since 2005.

Participants explored the winding and undulating streets, observed the architectural nuances, and engaged with locals, gaining insights into the area's rich history and the lives of its inhabitants. Over its 300-year long existence, significant portions of the *Almaška* area have disappeared. To illustrate these missing historical fragments, exhibition boards, referred to as "kibicari," were strategically placed at key locations. These structures were inspired by the traditional *kibicfenster*, an architectural element that once served for discreet observation of the street. In this project, these elements were used to illuminate the absent spaces, displaying photographs of authentic locales and narratives from the neighborhood's past on natural canvas. The walk concluded at the Svilara cultural station, where all "kibicars" formed a cohesive spatial installation. This installation not only piqued the curiosity of passers-by but also connected them with the stories of lost fragments from the Almaška area history. By transforming a traditional architectural element into a contemporary narrative medium, the project fostered dialogue among community members and visitors alike.

The aim of this paper is to indicate the existence of creative tools in scene architecture, viewed as an artistic expression that reveal how life of an authentic ambience and the everyday experiences within that space can be appreciated as new values.

Keywords: scene architecture, *Kibic Walk*, *Almaška* neighborhood

1. SCENE ARCHITECTURE AS AN EXPANEDED FIELD OF ARCHITECTURE

Contemporary architectural praxis is not only defined by designing, planning and construction stages of a project. In the last twenty years, under the influence of global social, economic, ecological and technological transformations came a substantial change in the way architecture as a discipline is perceived, produced and presented. The architect, as a creating agent of the designing process, faces complex and multilayer challenges of contemporary society, moreover they are constantly developing and applying diverse creative methods, strategies and tools with the goal of articulating critical thought and shaping answers to urgent questions of spatial and social reality. These changes brought about the so-called expanded field of architecture, within which borders are constantly shifting towards interdisciplinary praxis and experimental forms of expression. Architecture is not perceived as only a technical or aesthetic action, what is more architecture is now perceived as complex cultural process which at the same time includes research, reflection and communication with the broader social context. In that sense, international manifestations concerning the field of architecture are a relevant indicator of a change of paradigm. At these events practitioners do not only exhibit completed works of architectural praxis, what is more practitioners showcase more conceptual studies, theoretical studies, experimental processes and artistic interpretation of architectural thought. This kind of approach attests to a change in the way how architecture is presented – from purely material and visual to discursive and experiential. In parallel with this came about a change in spectre of media within which architectural ideas are presented. After a long period dominated by the twodimensional formats, such as drawings, plans and posters, in the contemporary exhibition praxis we can observe a more frequent use of means of expression borrowed from various artistic fields: spatial installation, video art, performance, and interactive spatial interventions. These forms of presentation enable architecture to expand beyond its traditional definition and to position itself as an interdisciplinary, reflective culturaly engaged practice, which tries to illuminate the relationship between space, society and art.

1.1. Scene Architecture as a Creative Tool

Transformations which characterize contemporary architecture are not only limited to the changes within the praxis, but these changes are also visible within the domain of architectural education, as well as in disciplines related to architecture on a theoretical and methodological level. One such discipline is scene design, which came about because of a need to answer complex and diverse challenges of contemporary theatre praxis and its spatial organization. Scene design studies[1] were created because of concrete needs and the state of professional theatre and educational system in Serbia, but these studies are gradually developing as an interdisciplinary platform which connects architecture, theatre and visual arts[2].

Expanding the scope of scene design beyond the institutional theatre space, as an artistic discipline which “can be created in all manner of creative process which entails a scenic attitude of mind and use of scenic means, while maintaining a goal of staging a scenic event” (Dadić Dinulović, 2017, pp. 25), its action incorporates public space, which we could say enabled and gave rise to a series of praxis we could call a work of scene architecture. Such praxis, we could say, shift the focus from representation towards eventfulness of space, in accordance with Lefebvrian thought of space as a social product (Lefebvre, 1991), where the concept of “production of space” is realized though the use of perception and meaning, and not only through material form. Scene architecture, in that sense, emerges from it as an intermediate field within which spatial materiality, physicality, and dramaturgy of performance are intertwined in a singular unique experience.

Viewed from the perspective of architecture, scene architecture can be defined as a process of designing and shaping spaces for various scenic events – from permanent structures, such as theatres, cinemas, and concert halls, to temporary, ephemeral structures which activate public space. However, in the case of starting from the domain of scene design, the process of creating scene architecture is closer to an artistic process, in which space can emanate from the act of performing, in accordance with theoretical principle of “space as an experience” which Juhani Pallasma postulated. Namely, Pallasma’s idea originates from experiencing

1 Scene design studies were first formed at the University of Art in Belgrade, after which they were formed in Novi Sad at the Faculty of Technical Sciences because of multiyear long research and concrete needs of professional theatre production in Serbia and the broader region.

2 https://scen.uns.ac.rs/h-content/uploads/2023/04/Akreditovani-studijski-program-OAS-Scenska-arhitektura-tehnika-i-dizajn-scen.pdf

architecture through the five primary senses (touch, smell, hearing, sight, and taste), as „strong tactile experiences because of a strong presence of materiality and weight “(Pallasma, pp. 79, 2005). In this context, architecture can no longer be understood solely as a static, material structure, but as a performative event – as a space which appears and disappears in interaction with body, movement and presence. The outcome of a process understood in this way represents a specific form of scene architecture which functions as an artistic expression and as a tool of research of the relationship between space, an event and community at the same time. In this way architecture becomes a common place, or a meeting point of art and architecture, and a field critical re-thinking of social and aesthetic function of space in the contemporary context.

Viewed from the perspective of architecture, scene architecture can also be defined as an area of research which incorporates the process of design of spaces and buildings for various scenic events. On the hand, in accordance with the principles of scene design, scene architecture can be interpreted as a form of design in the medium of architecture. This kind of understanding of scene architecture emphasizes a specific principle which postulates that space is produced in a way that space itself becomes an event, that is space itself does not function as a passive ambiance, it is rather perceived as an active act of including and engaging the viewer, where architecture can be viewed as an experience which is “unraveling” (Zumthor, 2006). Means with which scene architecture is built serve as a function of storytelling with a goal of establishing a specific experience of space within the viewer.

In the context of the project “Kibic walk” the primary research process emanated from the analysis of the expanded field of architecture and resulted in the process of re-thinking the relationship of scene design and architecture, and in the end the final spatialized result showcased scene architecture as a creative tool for presenting the research within the space of the *Almaška* area. The research process had a particular focus within the project, so did the articulation of the answer to the question: in what way can a specific urban area, the *Almaška* neighborhood, not only its phenomenological appearance, but also its broader contextual meaning? This sort of approach stands out specifically pertaining to historical narratives contributed to the local community, among which a non-profit association “Almašani”[3] stands out. The main goal of the project was to develop a narrative which tells the story of history, social happening, cultural context and life in general of this part of the city, along with showcasing the spaces and architecture within which life took place during the walking tour, framing the space of this neighborhood as a witness and an active actor of the life of the local community.

2. *ALMAŠKA* NEIGHBORHOOD

The *Almaška* area was created by the settlement of the village *Almaš* in the year 1717. It is situated in the near vicinity of the central zone of the city of Novi Sad and incorporates a significant part of the *Podbara* neighborhood – an area in the northeast part of the city characterized by a very specific urban matrix. This area differs from the predominantly radial and orthogonal system of the Novi Sad urban matrix. The area can be very easily recognized by its uneven block structure lined with winding and undulating streets, which in some areas saw expansions that formed small town squares or precincts. From its inception this area is predominantly a living quarter, and it has always related to traditional techniques of building and construction, as well as application of traditional materials. The houses are of the rural type – the shorter side is facing the street, the house is mainly short in stature, with very thick walls made from earthen materials[4], as well as a gabled thatched roof. From the second half of the XIX century onward in the context of new socio-political circumstances residential architecture of the *Almaška* area began to take new shape. The rural type of housing was replaced by new types of city architecture – the so-called “*preka*”[5] house, with a façade, shaped in the historicist style, facing the street and its roof covered with clay tiles. Among the houses there

3 More details about the work of the non-profit association *Almašani* can be found at: https://almasani.rs

4 These thick earthen walls were made of stacked mud bricks and limestone mortar was used as the adhering material that connected the bricks.

5 Construction process of this type of family house was observed first in the villages all around the autonomous province of Vojvodina dating back to the second half of XIX century and their fundamental characteristic is the extensive horizontal plan lining the street front this way forming a cohesive and constant the street profile.

was another significant contributing factor in the process of shaping the specific ambiance, still familiar to this day, situated at the edge of the area are the *Almaška* church, the eldest of the bunch dating back to 1733, while during the beginning of the XX century new urban focal points appeared – The Matica Srpska building and a few more buildings of the industrial type with their specific chimneys emphasizing the specific silhouette of this part of the city. Once a silk factory – today known as the *Svilara* cultural station, serves as a reminder of the industrial past of the neighborhood and has become a new focal point within the local area. Pertaining to the popular belief of many researchers the *Almaška* area "represents an urban area in which one can witness the cultural and historical as well as an architectural ambiance from the time the city was being built in the first place" (Sladić, 2013, pp.75). The *Almaška* area, with its preserved street matrix and rich immaterial heritage, contains within itself a part of the identity of Novi Sad, therefore preservation of the area is of imperative importance, along with all its specificities and ambient qualities (Figure 1).

Fig.1. Project Kibic walk: fragment of history of the *Almaška* area

After the II World War, especially during the transitional period of the last decade of the XX century, a part of the architectural heritage of the *Almaška* area was destroyed. Only a few singular buildings remain recognized with the status of high importance from the official institutions concerning the process of preservation of architectural and cultural heritage. Having in mind that the greatest quality of this area is the complete and we might even say total preservation of spatial poetics and *genius loci* of Novi Sad, the new plan for urban development of this area presents a new type of problematic regarding the system of preservation of the heritage. According to the plan for Detailed regulation of the city of Novi Sad for the *Almaška* area dating back to 2005, a large part of the area was scheduled for demolition and was supposed to be replaced by multi story buildings, and the existing street matrix would have also been disrupted by the construction of a new boulevard cutting through the central part of the area. This plan resulted in a strong reaction from the residents of the area, mainly concerned with keeping and preserving the traditional look, character, and charm of the area. Namely the residents formed a non-profit association called "*Almašani*" in hopes of saving the specific architectural heritage of the area. In the many years of its existence this non-profit association through a sequence of calls-to-action, and other projects excelled in raising awareness in the general populous, as well as the city officials, of the overall importance of preservation of both cultural and architectural heritage of the *Almaška* area, hence the plan that has been put forward in the first place was retracted. The scope of

actions put in motion by the non-profit association "*Almašani*" was very wide and diverse and it incorporated: collaboration with various educational and cultural organizations, tribunes, and event scientific meetings, as well as multimedia exhibitions dedicated to the research of the history of the area. Finally in 2019 the *Almaška* neighborhood was declared as a protected cultural and historical area of the city of Novi Sad and since 2022 it has undergone a process of reconstruction of its infrastructure, reconstruction of the facades of the existing buildings and its roofs, under the supervision of the Institute of protection and preservation of cultural heritage of the city of Novi Sad. Also, the building that used to be the factory for production of silk has undergone a process of reconstruction and has been named one of ten new cultural stations across the city of Novi Sad during 2021 when the city of Novi Sad was given the title of the European capital of culture. The non-profit association "*Almašani*" as a citizen-led initiative played a pivotal role in all the projects and was the main actor in the process of preservation of authentic qualities of the *Almaška* area (Đerković, 2022).

3. THE KIBIC WALK PROJECT

The "*Kibic walk*" project took place in the oldest part of the city of Novi Sad – exactly in the *Almaška* area, within the *Regio Earth* festival and by invitation of Dragana Kojičić, an architect specializing in earth architecture. Main goal of the project, which included the temporary spatial installation and the walking tour, was to familiarize the participants of the festival from around the world, but also citizens of Novi Sad that were interested in hearing more about the specific ambiance and the poetics of space which preserve the *genius loci* of the Novi Sad of the past. Within the project it was especially important to emphasize the actions of the non-profit association "Almašani", which in the period from 2005 until today have preserved the Almaška area with a sequence of spatial actions and saved the area from disappearing.

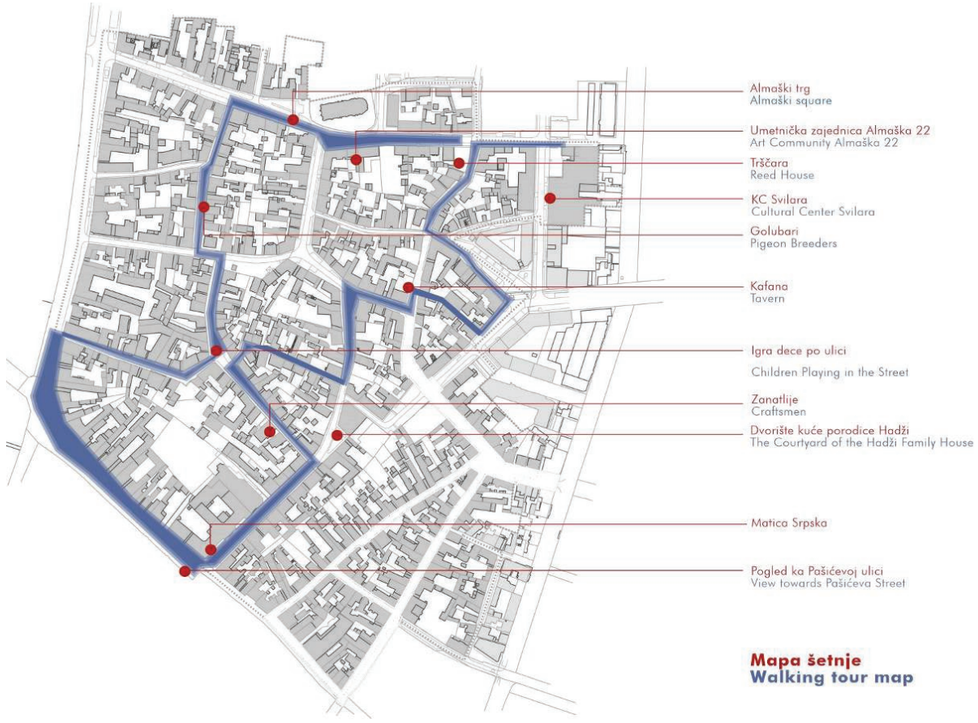

Fig. 2. Walking tour map in the Almaška area during the project "Kibic walk"

Walking along the winding and undulating streets, experiencing architecture of the area, entering some courtyards, and talking with the residents, participants of the *Kibic walk* had a unique opportunity to learn about the history of the *Almaška* area and the way of life of people who had settled here (Figure 2). During the

300 year long period of existence certain parts of the *Almaška* area had disappeared. Having a very specific goal in helping the participants understand the history of the area at previously and specifically determined places in the *Almaška* area the authors placed exhibition boards – *kibicari*. Design of a *kibicar* was defined by the process of transformation of an architectural element of local traditional architecture – the *kibicfenster*. This architectural element had once served as a place inside the house from which one could observe the hustle and bustle of the everyday life that took place within the city, while remaining invisible from the side of the street, meanwhile the *Kibic walk* project repurposed this architectural element as framed view of a fragment of space of this very specific area which are missing today. The authors selected photographs which were applied to a canvas using a technique called - *transfer to natural cloth*, put inside of the *kibicar* to ensure an authentic showcase of the spaces, stories, and images from the multilayered history of the *Almaška* area (Figure 3).

Fig. 3. *Kibicar* and the audience in front of the craftsmen's house

The walking tour concluded by returning to the place where it began – the precinct in front of the *Svilara* cultural station, where all the *kibicars* were placed along a single line constituting a unique spatial installation awakening the curiosty of passers-by which had an oportunity to percieve the story of various fragments of the *Almaška* area, that have been lost, in its enterity. Spatial installation percieved in this way, pertaining to the language of translating an architectural element into a spatial installation which established communication via its appearence within the space of the *Almaška* area, became a sort of an extension of the area and in this way it established dialogue with passers-by, but mainly with the local community. Along the 20-year long period of action of the „*Almašani*" non-profit association, many individuals have chosen to join their calls-to-action and various projcets, and in doing so have jointly contributed to the process of protection and preservation of the *Almaška* area. This project had a goal of showcasing the authenticity of this specific space, but also to raise awearness of the longstanding citizen-led struggle to secure a new life for this urban area.

4. CONCLUSION OR HOW SCENE ARCHITECTURE CAN BE EXPERIENCED

The *Kibic walk* project can be viewed from multiple dimensions of architectural and educational praxis. As a form of intervention in public space, the project serves as an educational tool for understanding and reinterpreting of architectural heritage, enabling the participants to directly experience the space of the *Almaška* area and its specific historical and social context. Simultaneously the *Kibic walk* project represents an exhibition of fragments of the missing heritage, reflecting the void and transformation of it into the material and symbolical sphere of the urban area (Figure 4).

This project can also be viewed as architecture of the exhibition and as design of the exhibit piece, whereupon space and buildings surrounding it are not there only to be passively observed, the surrounding space and buildings within it become an active medium for communication and engagement of the viewer. In this way, the *Kibic walk* project functions as a platform in which architecture, scene design, and performance space coexist, confirming the interdisciplinary potential of scene architecture as a creative tool which integrates space, performance and narrative.

Fig. 4. The „*Kibic walk*" project

For authors of this project, *Kibic walk* represents a creative research tool, a means through which various forms of scene architecture are articulated and tested. As such, the "*Kibic walk*" project enables development of new models of interaction between space, viewer and the local community, hence contributing to an understanding of architecture as an active participant of cultural, educational, and social processes. The project confirms that scene architecture, through an interdisciplinary and performative approach, can function not only as a physical structure, but also as a narrative tool, a tool of reflection and collective experience of space.

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Biography

Ivana Maraš was born in 1988 in Novi Sad. She enrolled in architecture studies at the Department of Architecture and Urbanism, Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad in 2007, where she completed her undergraduate and master's studies. She defended her doctoral dissertation entitled "Perception and imagination of urban landscapes in 20th and 21st century: cinematic projections of city" in 2019 at the same Faculty. She has been involved in teaching at the Department of Architecture and Urbanism, Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad, as a teaching assistant since 2013, and as an assistant professor since 2020.

Review paper
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DREAMSCAPES AND OTHERWORLDS: SURREALISTIC CITY STAGING

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Abstract

For the Surrealists, the city was an extensive playground. Their idea was to fully immerse themselves in the dynamics of the urban landscape and extract its hidden potential in order to rebel against what they perceived as an oppressive and monotonous everyday life. Following the above, this paper will focus on surrealistic city practices, the most clearly embodied in André Breton's seminal work 'Nadja', but will also refer to the works of other theorists such as Ivan Chtcheglov (Gilles Ivain) and the conducted actions of other practices such as the Situationist one headed by Guy Debord, with the aim of considering how applicable and necessary their ideas are today. Both of those listed continued in the footsteps of the Surrealists in the idea of carrying out journeys without a specific goal or plan through the urban landscape, deviating from established, everyday patterns with the idea of encouraging spontaneous situations and events in space.

Keywords: city, surrealism, dérive, psychogeography, maps

1. INTRODUCTION

The aimless stroll through the city by which is meant moving from one public place to another, on foot, in one's own pace, carried out without hurry or hastiness, for no particular reason or the specific end goal, is a modern urban phenomenon. It has its roots in European Romanticism, the late 18th century artistic and intellectual movement, with the strollers changing the classic Romanticism scenery – instead of being in the nature, they reside in the modern city. Many prominent authors, since the 19th century, have remained open to the experiential potential of wandering in the urban landscape, thus awarding a new quality, meaning and value to the public spaces, as well as to the activity itself, which is commonly taken for granted or underestimated. City walks are understood as synonymous for reflection, as an opportunity for gaining intellectual insights and aesthetic impressions, while exposure to a multitude of visual, sound and olfactory sensations is guaranteed to trigger imagination, if only attention is being paid.

Among those who believed that "the path to authentic being leads through the automatism of steps, through aimless walks through the streets and neighbourhoods of Paris, that is, through an activity that is not guided by any practical goal" (Novaković, 2018, p. 11), was also André Breton, the father of surrealism. His preoccupation with the urban landscape is almost excavational and deeply subjective in its nature, for "the outside world, Parisian streets, neighbourhoods, squares, monuments, become an image of his inner space, his imaginary world, a projection of his obsessions" (Novaković, 2018, pp. 11-12). For Breton, city spaces were both personal archaeological sites, containing a lot, and archaeological tools, bringing to the surface accumulated memories, desires and aspirations.

2. "... THERE IS ALSO ANOTHER MOVING WORLD, SPECIAL, VISIONARY, IRRATIONAL, WHICH ONLY SEEMINGLY COINCIDES WITH THE FIRST ONE..." (Musil, 2010, p. 405)

Surrealists led by André Breton were in never-ending quest for all things hidden trusting that what is unapparent is far more potent and has more content than what is evident, and so they sought to provide insights into the realms of mystery, of the unconsciousness, of the ambiguity in the world around them. Interested in all things dreamlike or illogical to be the final outcome, that is, the main quality of their work, members of the movement applied and developed numerous techniques in order to step out of the field of logic reasoning, and it can be noted that they were, among other things, influenced by the theories and research methods of psychoanalysis. Their main tendency was "to liberate the imagination... and to explore the realm of desires", whereby they relied on different procedures such are "hypnosis, recital of dreams, investigations into the methods of esoteric and magical arts, the recording of chance encounters, the staging of unusual events, and the collecting of found objects" (Livesey, 1994, p. 112).

In the manner of the above mentioned, André Breton conceived probably the most significant surrealist novel and one of the most important works of French surrealism in general, "Nadja" (1928), a first-person narrative book, whose essence and content are based on his rather purposeless walks, "guided" by a string of coincidences, through the city of Paris. Breton saw the French capital as one of the few places in the world "where something worthwhile can happen... [where] the rhythm of life is not the same as elsewhere, where certain beings still nourish a spirit of supreme adventure" (Breton, 1977, p. 28). In "Nadja" (Fig. 1.), references introduced in the literary text are, in significant part, supported by visual documentation throughout the book: those are the photographs of real places, objects and people which Breton encounters on his urban adventures. These make an essential part of the novel as he includes them "in order to discover in that reality what is unusual and incredible and which in some way refutes it", and with that he actually "twists the traditional type of novel that takes elements from reality to transform them and build fiction following the laws of logic and the law of probability, so that the reader accepts it as reality" (Novaković, 2018, pp. 9-10). For Breton, "the city becomes analogous to a book, a repository into which events are written" (Livesey, 1994, p. 110), as he is in the constant pursuit for the city's hidden layers, for its surrealistic potential which is "often discovered in the banal, in trivial and ephemeral things such as billboards and shop signs, and in more enduring objects such as statues and public places" (Livesey, 1994, p. 113).

The philosopher Walter Benjamin, a contemporary of Andre Breton, influenced by the work of the surrealists, and an author whose intellectual output is largely based on the French capital, similarly observed that "sign-

boards and street names, passers-by, roofs, kiosks, or bars must speak to the wanderer...", stressing that Paris taught him "this art of straying" (Benjamin, 1986, p. 9). In the essay "Paris, Capital of the 19th Century" (1935) by using the poetry of Charles Baudelaire, Benjamin introduced the character of the *flâneur* into the scientific discourse. For Baudelaire and his literary contemporaries, the *flâneur* represented a passionate observer who, seemingly aimlessly, wanders the streets of 19th century Paris, which were for him a source of constant artistic inspiration. Walter Benjamin considers the *flâneur* as the prototype of a modern man with excess free time, who is at the same time an inseparable part of the cityscape and its distant observer, an urban explorer, who "seeks refuge in the crowd... the crowd is the veil through which the familiar city is transformed for the *flâneur* into phantasmagoria" (Benjamin, 1999, p. 21).

Fig. 1. "Nadja"

It is also worth mentioning that the following quote from "Nadja": "Meanwhile, you can be sure of meeting me in Paris, of not spending more than three days without seeing me pass, toward the end of the afternoon, along the Boulevard Bonne-Nouvelle between the Matin printing office and the Boulevard de Strasbourg. I don't know why it should be precisely here that my feet take me, here that I almost invariably go without specific purpose, without anything to induce me but this obscure cure: namely that it (?) will happen here. I cannot see, as I hurry along, what could constitute for me, even without my knowing it, a magnetic pole in either space or time" (Breton, 1997, p. 32), reminds of a statement by Jean-Luc Godard, made few decades later, when the director pointed out that the city itself became his inspiration for the film: "Very often, I start to have an idea about a film by looking at a location... in "Breathless" (1960) my characters would have seen the Champs Elysées sixty times a day, so of course it had to be shown" (Godard, 2003, p. 155). The French New Wave is strongly linked to Paris, and most of its prominent representatives had a particularly emotional relationship with the city. They shot films in the locations they knew best, in the places where they worked and lived, and cafes, streets and parks that had not been shown before, began to appear on the movie screen. The script was not strictly determined in advance, so chance and fleeting encounters in the cityscape often influenced the course of filming and the film's narrative. Like their predecessors discussed above, the French New Wave filmmakers understood the city as place "defined not only by its physical structures but also and increasingly by lines of movement and connection, by the currents of energy and flows of information, goods, and bodies... with the protagonists set loose in an uncontrollable mass of other bodies, buildings, shops, automobiles, street signs, and movie marquees, the stuff that together constitutes the *mise-en-scène* of Paris" (Tweedy, 2013, p. 87).

3. "NOT TO FIND ONE'S WAY IN A CITY MAY WELL BE UNINTERESTING AND BANAL. IT REQUIRES IGNORANCE – NOTHING MORE. BUT TO LOSE ONESELF IN A CITY... THAT CALLS FOR QUITE A DIFFERENT SCHOOLING."
(Benjamin, 1986, p. 8)

The idea of gaining life experience by leaving it to the course of chance was also the subject of discussion by the founding member of the Situationist International Guy Debord, in the sense that the French philosopher considered how the activity of wandering through the city streets, which involves deviating from established, everyday patterns, stimulate spontaneous events in urban space and influence the behaviour of participants, thereby layering their everyday life. In 1956, Debord defined the strategy for exploring cities called *dérive*, during the implementation of which, over a certain period of time, "one or more persons... drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there" (Debord, 2006, p. 76). The inventive strategy of *dérive* is part of Guy Debord's broader study of psychogeography, which deals with the study of "precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals" (Debord, 2006, p. 20).

The key term, continuous drifting, that is, continuous *dérive*, Debord adopted from Gilles Ivain (Ivan Chtcheglov), a French political theorist, activist and poet, who first mentioned it in his text "Formulary for a New Urbanism" (1953), where he also stated the following: "We are bored in the city, we really have to strain to still discover mysteries on the sidewalk billboards, the latest state of humour and poetry..." (Ivain, 2006, p. 12). Ivain believed that the more a place is dedicated to free play, the more it influences human behaviour and the stronger its appeal grows, and he thought that the answer to the question of how to achieve this "must be sought in the magical locales of fairy tales and surrealist writings: castles, endless walls, little forgotten bars, mammoth caverns, casino mirrors..." (Ivain, 2006, p. 13). One of his solutions to avoid boredom in the city included dividing the city districts of Paris into moods that "could correspond to the whole spectrum of diverse feelings that one encounters by *chance* in everyday life" (Ivain, 2006, p. 18) while stressing out that his need for creation "has always been intimately associated with the need to play with architecture, time and space" (Ivain, 2006, p. 16).

Guy Debord and the Situationists drew inspiration from surrealistic ideas, although they remained somewhat sceptical of the Surrealist focus on chance and coincidence, believing that one must proactively participate in life by influencing one's circumstances on a daily basis, rather than just reacting to them. They emphasized that in the city, the situational frameworks within which people's lives unfold are rigid and impermeable, pre-created in advance by architects, urban planners and big business, which influences how urban life is shaped and directed, and they sought to disrupt and transform this pre-created framework as much as possible in their daily activities. For the purpose of the above, and as a product of intuitive wandering, i.e. *dérive*, situationist counter-maps were created, the most famous of which is certainly the "The Naked City" (Fig. 2), authored by Guy Debord and the Danish artist Asger Jorn, which represented a summary of Debord's numerous reflections and actions. This counter-map consists of nineteen drawings of parts of the city of Paris, which, according to the authors, were still beyond the destructive reach of the establishment and capitalism, and which were taken from a standard tourist map, printed in black ink and connected by red arrows that ignore what could be called a "logical" way of moving around the city. With this, Debord and Jorn wanted to reclaim Paris in a certain way, to take control of their (urban) lives as city dwellers, to take the scenic route, departing from the paths and directions dictated by capitalism as the dominant ideology.

Fig. 2. "The Naked City"

4. TAKING THE SCENIC ROUTE

"There were moments when the ordinary world was transformed into something different, something full of potential and mystery... and everything outside seems better, like the colours are brighter or the world looks like a different place and I wanted to keep felling that way..." –these were some of the reflections shared by participants of the highly successful alternate reality game *The Jejune Institute*, created by the artist collective "Nonchalance", which ran in San Francisco from 2008 to 2011 and drew over 10,000 players who, lured by strange flyers around the city, began their experience by "entering" the game's fictional headquarters inside a downtown office building. Alternate Reality Games (ARGs) are games that take place in real urban settings, where "players seek to uncover a hidden narrative through clues, events, and puzzles orchestrated by a team of *puppetmasters* who are responsible for the game design and how the otherwise secret game is executed" (Kristiansen, 2014, p. 242). Deeply connected to Surrealist and Situationist practices both in philosophy and in approach, ARGs seek to cultivate a heightened sense of presence and awareness within the urban environment, and not merely through observation, but by encouraging active participation with the space, with the goal of transforming and challenging the way inhabitants perceive and experience the city. Alternate Reality Games share a core belief with Surrealist and Situationist practices: that beneath the everyday city lies a hidden world, accessible through play or altered perception. They reimagine urban space not as a purely functional environment, but as a rich landscape of meaning and narrative – encouraging exploration guided by emotion and curiosity, and challenging conventional ways of experiencing public space by revealing it as layered, symbolic, and open to reinterpretation. Alternate Reality Games can profoundly affect city dwellers by advocating for a revolution in everyday life, much like the Surrealists and Situationists once did. They invite a new way of engaging with the urban environment – not merely as a space for survival, but as a realm for play, creativity, and ultimately, authentic living.

5. CONCLUSON

The discussed methods of thinkers and creatives, together with their unconventional urban practices, can indicate how routine by which life unfolds can be disrupted by paying attention to complexities and

contradictions that living in the city implies, and at the same time how this can be utilized in the field of contemporary urbanism. They advocated the idea of immersive approach to everyday, while believing that creativity and playfulness ought to be sought constantly as they are the only worthwhile way to participate in life. Along these lines, the work of André Breton "describe a shift into another reality – one that emerges from everyday life of the city either by chance or by searching carefully for the entry points", it is a quest for "the city of dreams – a necessary and hidden other... that sustains and is sustained by the verifiable city of appearances" (Livesey, 1994, p. 114).

On the other hand, Guy Debord, like several of his fellow contemporaries, called for a revolution of everyday life, insisting on "the revolutionary transformation of the world, of the all aspect of the world" (Debord, 2006, p. 22) and calling for an approach to the urban environment that entails putting something more than mere survival skills and optimal strategies in the foreground. After all, the idea behind situationists counter-maps was to represent discrepancies, intricacies and heterogeneities of the city and not objective, exact or dispassionate disposition and to point out, as Roland Barthes puts it, that "scientific geography and in particular modern cartography can be considered as a kind of obliteration, of censorship that objectivity has imposed on signification" (Barthes, 1986, p. 89). Debord devoted himself to creating counter-maps such as "The Naked City" because he considered that "along with various more difficult means of intervention, a renovated cartography seems appropriate for immediate utilization" (Debord, 2006, p. 23).

Today, perhaps more than ever, complex spatial conditions require urban practitioners to have a pluralistic perspective that is not pre-established and one-sided. Being on foot in the city enables the appropriation of the city fragments which consequently allows to connect them in a meaningful whole, or in the other words, walking, as a special research method, permit to "build up a coherent world out of the fragmentary appearances of a city that, taken in isolated grouping, would be merely kaleidoscopic" (Husserl, 1981, pp. 248-249). If one adopts Frederic Jameson point of view that it became "clear that there can be no true maps", while "at the same time it also becomes clear that there can be scientific progress, or better still, a dialectical advance, in the various historical moments of mapmaking" (Jameson, 1997, p. 51), one can argue for the importance of walking as a research method, by which continuity of research is achieved relatively easily, with the necessary and continuous mapping implied. In this way, everchanging urban conditions are continuously being "scanned, charted and mapped, thus investigating the spatial practices that have been woven into the fabric of the city" with the intention "not to explore singularities (infrastructure, post-conflict conditions, pollution, what have you), but to investigate the overlapping or the superimposition of such different spatial regimes" (Staničić, 2023, p. 203).

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Biography

Sonja Pejić is a sociologist, media literacy trainer, and peace educator. She is affiliated as an Associate Professor of Sociology at the Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad. Throughout her career, she has been dedicated to researching the complex challenges facing urban areas, particularly in relation to environmental sustainability and technological advancements. Sonja has authored numerous scholarly articles and research papers on topics such as smart cities, environmental issues, and the impact of technology on society. In addition to her academic pursuits, she conducts workshops and seminars as a media literacy trainer, aimed at enhancing digital literacy skills and fostering responsible online behavior.

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RETHINKING THE POWER OF ART: SOCIAL RESPONSE TO THE ARCHITECTURE OF CONTROL IN THE HYPERCAPITALIST ERA

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Abstract

Modern society and its institutions have been reshaped by global trends in technological and financial innovation, driven by consumerism, market dominance, increased corporate influence, media manipulation, intense migration, and rapid ecological shifts. These processes grant the built environment a key role in upholding political structures, fundamentally altering how space is perceived and utilized. In the age of hypercapitalism, we are witnessing the rise of an urban neopanopticon—a society of surveillance and control—where we are paradoxically led to believe in our freedom, with the illusion that we possess all the tools to assert it. This transformation of urban spaces inspires both creative responses and various forms of civic participation and resistance. This paper critically examines how art interacts with or challenges these structures of power and control in the context of hypercapitalism, drawing on case studies to explore specific examples of artistic intervention. In doing so, it addresses the broader societal response to these mechanisms, particularly through the lenses of art, architecture, and public spaces, offering insights into the potential for art to not only reflect but actively resist systems of control.

Keywords: urban neopanopticon, hypercapitalism, civic disobedience, art

1. UNIVERSALIZED PANOPTICISM

Contemporary society is a society of normalized surveillance and control, where space is related to formal and informal social control mechanisms. Information and communication technologies development, their widespread use, and implementation reshaped society and created a new power dynamic. Questions of power are essential to understanding how the city works: who makes decisions about urban space, to whom public places belong, who controls the space and use it, and who and how is excluded.

Michel Foucault's theories on surveillance, particularly the idea of a society as a panopticon, have significantly influenced contemporary understandings of power dynamics in society and could be used to better understand how art can actively resist systems of control in urban surroundings. Foucault's concept of the panopticon, originally proposed by Jeremy Bentham, serves as a metaphor for modern surveillance practices, illustrating how power operates through visibility and self-regulation (Foucault, 1995). Foucault's notion of disciplinary power extends beyond physical surveillance to encompass various social mechanisms that enforce norms and regulate conduct. This idea is echoed in the work of Simon, who discusses the resurgence of panopticism in the context of new surveillance technologies, suggesting that modern electronic means of surveillance have evolved but still reflect Foucault's foundational ideas (Simon, 2002; Manokha, 2018).

Regardless of the fact that contemporary scientific literature on smart cities mainly emphasizes the positive aspects of mass surveillance, data collection, and big data analysis, and suggests that transforming metropolises into smart cities is a key factor in enhancing residents' quality of life, many aspects of universalized neopanopticism are present. In theory, the smart city concept aims at modern urban management through advanced technical tools, offering cutting-edge technologies while adhering to ecological standards, conserving resources, and achieving desired outcomes (Winkowska, Szpilko, Pejić, 2019; Winkowska & Pejić, 2021). To convince people that surveillance systems are productive and beneficial, those in power argue that surveillance ensures security, safety, convenience, and fairness. To highlight these advantages, public media, including advertising, often uses visual imagery of peaceful, happy families, directing attention to the positive aspects of surveillance. When these images are disseminated through mass media, people are more likely to accept surveillance and control as essential measures for maintaining a safe life, especially in an era marked by global threats such as terrorism, financial crises, and the spread of pandemics. Even before the development of Smart cities, in the 1990, Gilles Deleuze (see Deleuze, 1992) foresaw a future city where natives carried e-cards to swipe in the morning when leaving home, and then when entering the office, and when checking out at lunch, when stopping at a restaurant in the evening. Today, that single card has converted into multileveled gathering by multiplying gatherers: contemporary technological reality is wildcatting data collection (Brusseau, 2020: 4).

The envisioned operation of smart cities aligns closely with the core principles of hypercapitalist societies, such as intensified market dominance, growing wealth inequality, corporate power, consumer culture, globalization, economic integration, and innovations in technology and finance, along with increased surveillance and control. Under capitalist forces, space becomes increasingly abstract, commodified, and less defined by its physical and geographical characteristics or its use value. In this system, the increasing production of impersonal "non-places" that are socially empty, detached from local context, and driven by instrumental needs, emerges. In these environments, controlling the behavior of the population becomes easier, as the lack of social and cultural ties creates a more uniform and manageable space. We are witnessing social atomization, detraditionalization, and radical disintegration of trust, which all help in deepening the practices of surveillance and the movement toward totalitarianism (see Vetter, 2012: 95).

The reciprocal relationship between power and space, as articulated by Foucault, indicates that surveillance is not merely about watching but also about shaping the spaces in which individuals operate (Randall & Newell, 2014; Koskela, 2002). Analyzing the two, Foucauldian modern modalities of power – disciplinarity and biopolitics – in a study of a mixed-use neighborhood in downtown Vilnius, Šupa (2015) showed that built structure, regardless of its function, employs both disciplinary and biopolitical techniques of social control at three distinct levels: a) urban planning, prescribed functionality and its correspondence to actual use; b) means of limiting access, containment and transparency; c) circulation of populations and their compliance to the particular spatial setup they find themselves in (Šupa, 2015). Šupa also identified distinct disciplinary and biopolitical strategies for spatial control. Disciplinary practices focus on organizing and maintaining functional order, enforcing physical access, containing and monitoring static populations (those remaining within structures), and ensuring the hierarchy of these populations (where relevant). On the other hand, biopolitical practices involve planning and risk management strategies, the use of technical tools for access enforcement (such as public surveillance technologies), and managing the dynamics of circulating populations (Šupa, 2015: 36). This spatial dimension of power is crucial in understanding how surveillance technologies, such as CCTV, create environments that facilitate control and normalization of behavior (Yar, 2002).

Moreover, the implications of Foucault's theories are evident in various contemporary contexts, including public libraries, train stations, governmental urban structures, schools, factories, shops, restaurants, churches, prisons, hospitals etc. For example, Randall and Newell explore how video surveillance in libraries reflects panoptic principles, where the design of space influences user behavior and reinforces institutional authority (Randall & Newell, 2014). Similarly, Koskela discusses the "Cam Era," positing that urban surveillance technologies extend the panoptic gaze into public spaces, thereby reshaping social interactions and power relations (Koskela, 2002).

This extension of surveillance into everyday life raises critical questions about privacy, autonomy, and the ethics of observation in a digital age (Saulles & Horner, 2011). Foucault's insights into self-surveillance are particularly relevant in discussions surrounding health and social behavior. For instance, Grant et al. examine how surveillance practices in smoking cessation programs illustrate the internalization of disciplinary norms, where individuals monitor their behaviors in response to external surveillance (Grant et al., 2015). This aligns with the notion that modern societies increasingly rely on self-regulation as a form of governance, where individuals are conditioned to act following social expectations due to the omnipresence of surveillance (Vaz & Bruno, 2002).

The integration of information and communication technologies into all aspects of urban life added complexity to the social networks within cities. These technologies not only shape urban spaces but also reinforce surveillance culture, blurring the lines between public and private life. Architectural landscape is being reshaped by surveillance technologies. Urban spaces are increasingly designed with surveillance in mind, often prioritizing security over privacy. This has led to a proliferation of surveillance technologies in public spaces, which can create environments that are both visually and psychologically oppressive (McGillivray, 2019). The aesthetic choices made in urban design can either reinforce or resist surveillance practices, as seen in the works of artists who utilize public space to provoke discussions about visibility and control (Hogue, 2024). The relationship between art and architecture in this context becomes a site of contestation, where the implications of surveillance are both critiqued and reimagined.

Our cities are increasingly becoming heavily monitored environments, where the possibility of individual anonymity is steadily disappearing. Smart city initiatives have often been used as a justification to normalize and institutionalize the systematic generation and collection of data by both governments and the private sector, purportedly for the benefit of citizens (Surveillance and the City: Turning Urban Centers into a Panopticon, 2018). According to Vetter (2012:) "control in the home, the workplace, the classroom, the hospital and almost every other architectural apparatus is a sign that we have come to live in a time of universalized Panopticism". This leads to many side effects of surveillance like the desensitization to surveillance which leads to gradual normalization; potential data misuse and the blurred boundary of privacy or privacy erosion.

Open, public spaces—once potential arenas for social disobedience, creative rebellion, and freedom of thought—are increasingly subject to surveillance and control. The content and architecture of the city shape the urban experience, but as Kevin Lynch (Lynch, 1960) argues, the city is not merely a physical structure; it is a process intertwined with the mental images people hold of it. Our interaction with the environment is deeply shaped by how we conceptualize it—what Lynch calls a "cognitive map"—and the city and its inhabitants continually influence one another, creating a distinct "urban climate." In this context, surveillance becomes a key feature of urban life, controlling the flow of people, information, and behaviors, further reinforcing the transformation of cities into spaces of control rather than spaces of freedom.

The modern city, in its clumsy physical form, becomes a place where the individual no longer finds peace

(Pušić, 1997: 357). As Simmel observed, the metropolis creates unique psychological conditions, intensifying nervous stimulation and contributing to indifferent, blasé attitudes. Life in the city increasingly revolves around impersonal, homogenized experiences, stripping away individual uniqueness and authenticity (Simmel, 2008: 289). Despite growing dissatisfaction with urban life, migration toward rural areas remains rare, even amid the rise of control and surveillance systems that monitor urban populations. Our challenge is to analyze whether art can spark reflexivity in individuals who may lack an inherent sensitivity to art, do not possess advanced education, and are unaware of the pervasive reach of surveillance in daily life.

2. SURVEILLANCE VS ARTVEILLANCE

The connection of art, architecture, and surveillance has become a critical area of inquiry, particularly as contemporary society deals with the impact of widespread surveillance technologies. However, we should bear in mind that before the development of reproductive technology, art was used by many powerful entities as propaganda to glamorize and advance their agendas (Cho, 2020). Art was an essential tool for politics. Nowadays, art can be a powerful medium against the architecture of control and surveillance culture.

According to Monahan (2018), some artworks enact plays of avoidance; expose surveillance practices to increase transparency; interrupt data collection and processing; emphasize viewers' complicity or participation in the regimes in question; activate a sense of connection and introspection to make recognition of social responsibility, and some are provocative enough to empower and engage public to actively participate against surveillance systems and systems of control. Artists and architects are increasingly engaging with the themes of surveillance, not only to critique its implications but also to explore the aesthetic dimensions of surveillance practices. This engagement has led to the emergence of concepts such as "artveillance" and "critical surveillance artworks," which challenge the normalization of surveillance in public and private spaces (Celis, 2020).

Artveillance is a term that blends art and surveillance to describe the use of artistic practices to explore, critique, and challenge surveillance systems and cultures. Many artveillance projects use public surveillance systems to critique the social impact of surveillance and cultivate a sense of responsibility on the part of viewers or participants (Monahan, 2018). For example, in 2004, near Hyde Park in London, graffiti and visual artist Banksy created a mural titled *What Are You Looking At?*, as a satirical commentary on surveillance culture. However, this ephemeral piece's lasting impact lies not in its physical existence but in its viral spread as a digital "meme." Reaching millions worldwide in the form of meme, it continues to prompt critical reflection on surveillance, illustrating how street art can amplify social critique far beyond its original site.

Fig. 1. The mural titled *What Are You Looking At?* by Banksy created in 2004 and is located in the Marble Arch underpass in London (Source: https://www.artofthestate.co.uk/blog/2005/04/24/banksy-what-are-you-looking-at/)

Another notable example of how a surveillance system can be used as a means for artistic anti-surveillance practice is Jill Magid's "Evidence Locker" which illustrates how visual art can challenge and interrogate surveillance, raising the question about complicity and resistance (Finn, 2012). In 2004, Jill Magid spent 31 days in Liverpool, building a close relationship with Citywatch, the city's public surveillance system managed by Merseyside Police and Liverpool City Council. Her project, *Evidence Locker*, featured videos staged and edited by Magid, filmed by the police using the city's public CCTV cameras. Dressed in a bright red trench coat, she would call the police, providing details of her location and asking them to record her in specific poses or even guide her through the city with her eyes closed, as seen in her video *Trust* (see, Evidence Locker, 2024). Normally, CCTV footage is stored for 31 days unless requested as evidence by the Liverpool police department that puts it into the evidence locker. To access her recordings, Magid submitted 31 Subject Access Request Forms, the legal documents needed to describe the 'incident' being reviewed. She filled out these forms like love letters, expressing her thoughts and emotions at the time. The normalization of surveillance and control, the illusory sense of security and comfort within the social body, is brought to consciousness through artistic projects like *Evidence Locker*.

Coming from the field of fashion Adam Harvey's "Anti-Drone" wear, raises critical questions about visibility and surveillance. This project challenges the notion of total visibility that surveillance technologies aspire to achieve, suggesting that concealment can be a form of resistance (Rhee, 2016). Such artistic practices not only highlight the vulnerabilities created by surveillance but also propose new ways of engaging with these technologies, emphasizing the importance of agency and resistance in the face of pervasive monitoring.

The dialogue between art and surveillance also extends to performance studies, where the embodied experiences of individuals under surveillance are examined. NYC-based troupe *The Surveillance Camera Players*, expresses their opposition to violating protected rights to privacy by performing specially adapted plays and performances (like Orwell's «1984» or Beckett's «Waiting for Godot») in public spaces and in front of surveillance cameras. This perspective allows for a nuanced understanding of how surveillance shapes identities and social interactions (Hall et al., 2016). By shifting the focus to the performances of both watchers and the watched, scholars and artists alike can better understand the complex dynamics of power and control inherent in surveillance practices.

According to Li (Li, 2023: 1), "[i]n the realm of art, artistic interventions serve as a powerful means of expressing dissent against surveillance culture. These interventions raise awareness about the need to safeguard privacy, prompting individuals to become active participants in the social discourse surrounding surveillance culture. Nevertheless, the "counter-gaze" that emerges through artistic interventions may lead to a reversal of roles, where the "watchers" become the "watched", contingent on varying layers of rights".

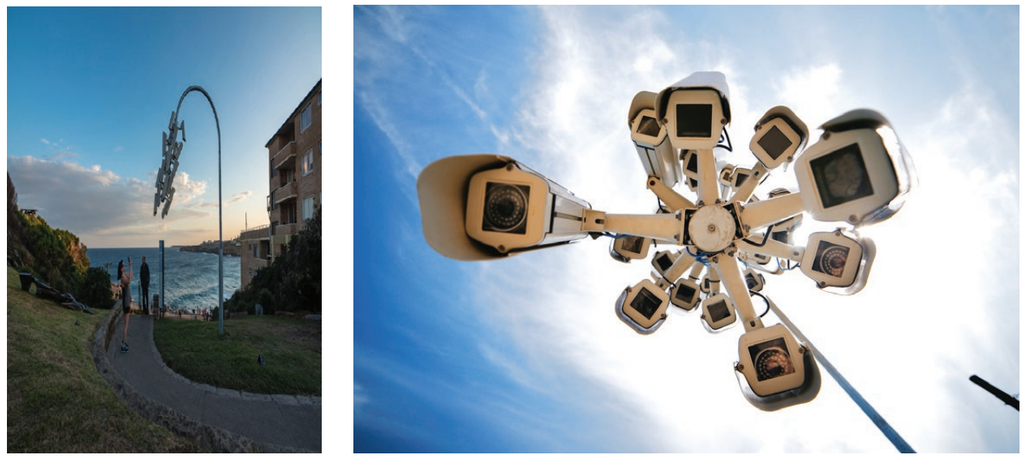

Fig. 2. Jakub Geltner (2011-2017) created *The Nest* installations that feature clusters of *CCTV* cameras and satellite dishes, arranged to resemble nests, and placed in various public spaces worldwide (Source: http://www.geltner.cz/2009/nest-06/)

Jakub Geltner's *Nest* (2015) invites us to reflect on our comfort with the increasing presence of technology in our lives. It goes beyond the act of watching and being watched; it challenges us to consider the broader societal impact of technology. Whether serving as a social critique or a wake-up call, Geltner's installations urge us to confront the technological landscape we engage with daily. His work offers a layered exploration of contemporary complexities, encouraging us to be mindful of the technological future we are creating, where the boundaries of surveillance are becoming increasingly blurred.

3. REACT: SUMMING UP THE JOURNEY OF RESPONSE, EMPOWERMENT, ENGAGEMENT, AND CHANGE

To deconstruct surveillance culture and foster the creation of "reflexive spaces" that promote contemplation, creativity, and personal meaning (Čaldarović and Šarinić, 2008: 338), both art and daily life should intervene, because art is rather serious, than serene. In the realm of daily life, artistic, creative interventions act as a potent form of dissent against surveillance culture. These works raise awareness about privacy rights and encourage individuals to engage actively in social conversations around surveillance, fostering a sense of collective responsibility (Monahan, 2017). This suggests that art is far from passive; it is deeply embedded in the dynamics of social change, with the potential to influence politics, the economy, culture, and daily life. Art holds a unique power to ignite critical reflection and inspire social action. Artists have a social responsibility to react to specific events in society.

ReAction is an organic artistic response to injustice, social inequality, social control, surveillance, poverty, discrimination, destruction of the natural and built environment, etc. This reaction has to be provocative enough to trigger a deliberate collective response to specific social circumstances, and promote the empowerment and inclusion of citizens, all intending to initiate social change. With their libertarian actions, artists can help citizens in the process of developing awareness of specific social problems, encouraging their social action, and reducing the fear of punishment in a system that disciplines. The interest of such system is to control its subjects and produce immanent fear at the very thought of social rebellion and social disobedience. This "counter-gaze" that emerges through artistic interventions may lead to a reversal of roles, where the "watchers" become the "watched", contingent on varying layers of rights. The outcomes of the art projects that engage community should be challenging the architecture of control; reclaiming public spaces; forstering resistance and empowerment; humanizing monitored environments; encouraging transparency and accountability; transforming surveillance into dialogue; creating reflexive spaces. In conclusion, the interplay between art, architecture, and surveillance is a rich field of inquiry that reveals the multifaceted implications of living in a surveillance society. Through critical engagement with these themes, artists, and architects not only challenge the status quo but also invite audiences to reconsider their roles and responsibilities in an increasingly monitored world. This ongoing dialogue is essential for fostering a more nuanced understanding of surveillance and its impact on contemporary life.

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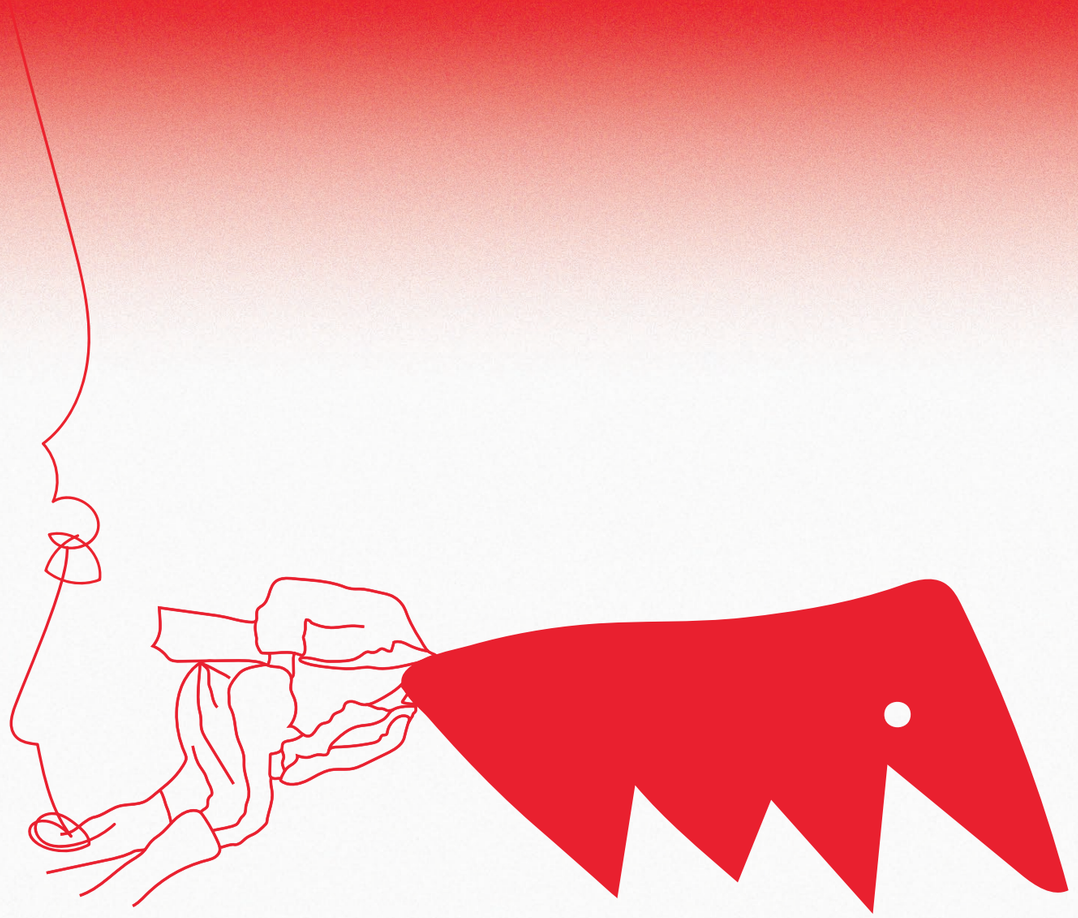
photo: Zorana Rabrenović



POSTER PRESENTATIONS

Life is Serious;
ART SERENE

POSTER PRESENTATION

Kosta Stojanović

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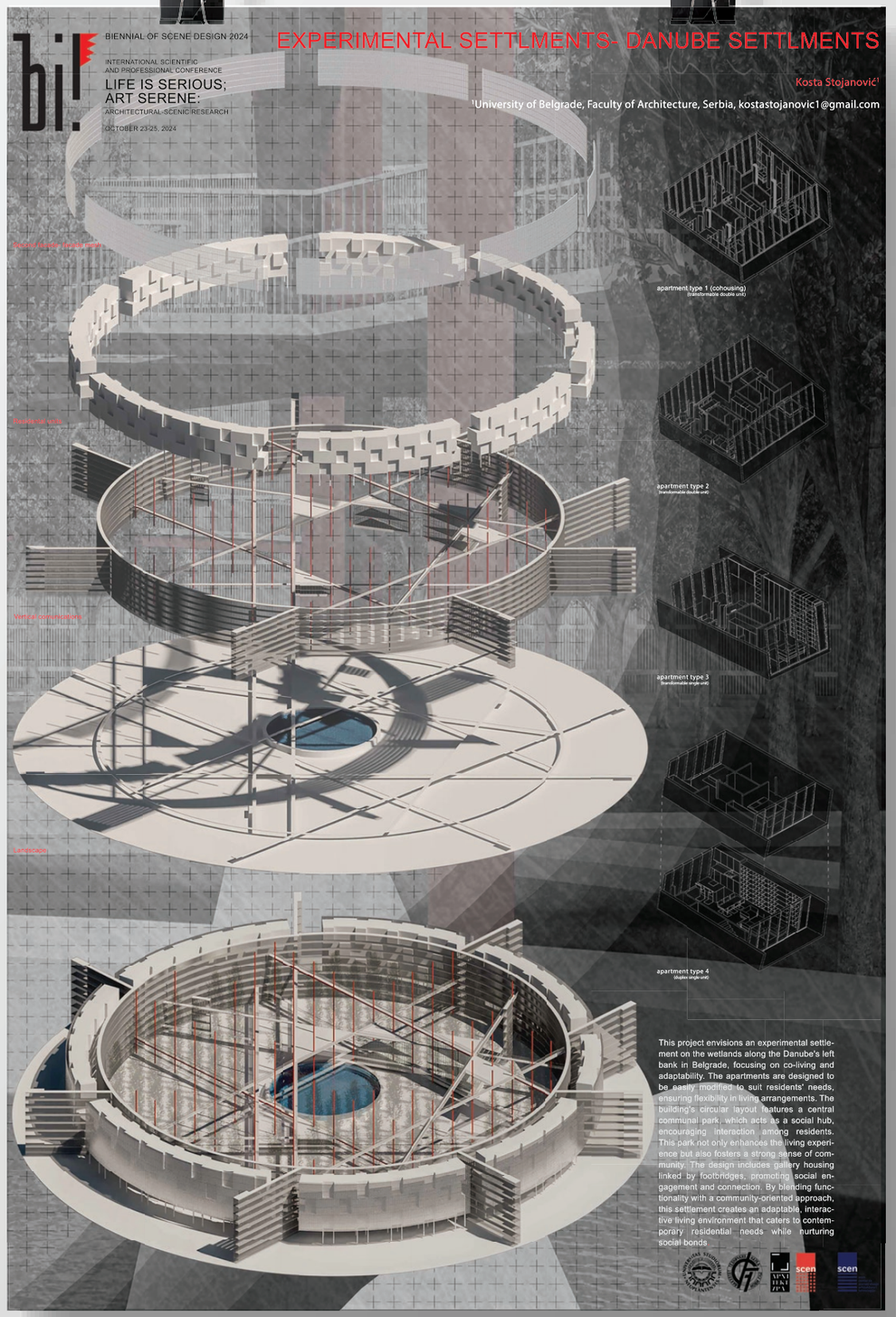

Life is Serious;
ART SERENE

POSTER PRESENTATION

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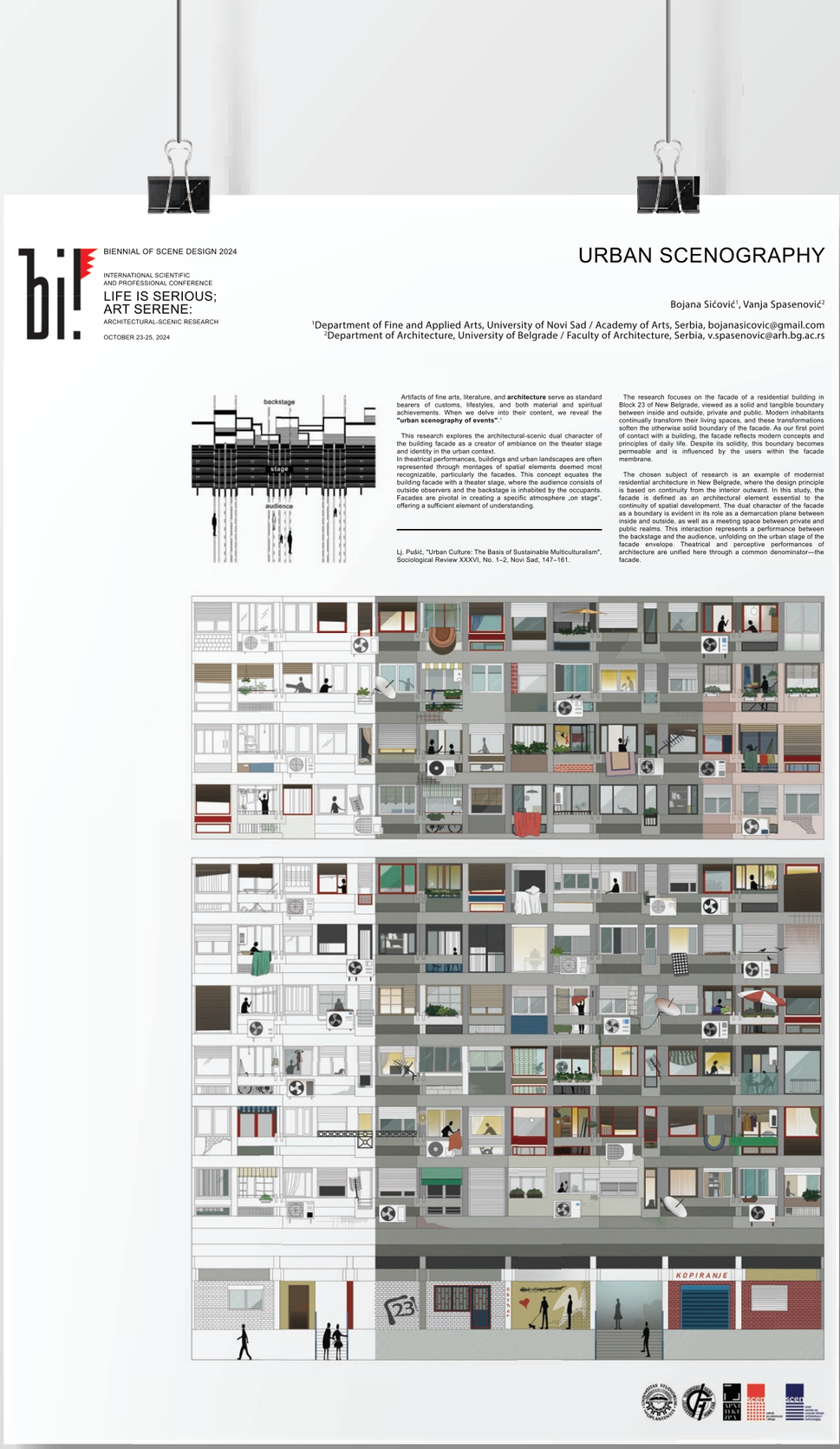
Department of Architecture, University of Belgrade / Faculty of Architecture, Serbia, v.spasenovic@arh.bg.ac.rs



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OCTOBER 23-25, 2024

URBAN SCENOGRAPHY

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Artifacts of fine arts, literature, and **architecture** serve as standard bearers of customs, lifestyles, and both material and spiritual achievements. When we delve into their content, we reveal the **"urban scenography of events"** [1].

This research explores the architectural-scenic dual character of the building facade as a creator of ambiance on the theater stage and identity in the urban context.
In theatrical performances, buildings and urban landscapes are often represented through montages of spatial elements deemed most recognizable, particularly the facades. This concept equates the building facade with a theater stage, where the audience consists of outside observers and the backstage is inhabited by the occupants. Facades are pivotal in creating a specific atmosphere „on stage", offering a sufficient element of understanding.

The research focuses on the facade of a residential building in Block 23 of New Belgrade, viewed as a solid and tangible boundary between inside and outside, private and public. Modern inhabitants continually transform their living spaces, and these transformations soften the otherwise solid boundary of the facade. As our first point of contact with a building, the facade reflects modern concepts and principles of daily life. Despite its solidity, this boundary becomes permeable and is influenced by the users within the facade membrane.

The chosen subject of research is an example of modernist residential architecture in New Belgrade, where the design principle is based on continuity from the interior outward. In this study, the facade is defined as an architectural element essential to the continuity of spatial development. The dual character of the facade as a boundary is evident in its role as a demarcation plane between inside and outside, as well as a meeting space between private and public realms. This interaction represents a performance between the backstage and the audience, unfolding on the urban stage of the facade envelope. Theatrical and perceptive performances of architecture are unified here through a common denominator—the facade.

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ART SERENE

POSTER PRESENTATION

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OCTOBER 23-25, 2024

THISBALANCE: EXPERIMENT PLATFORM

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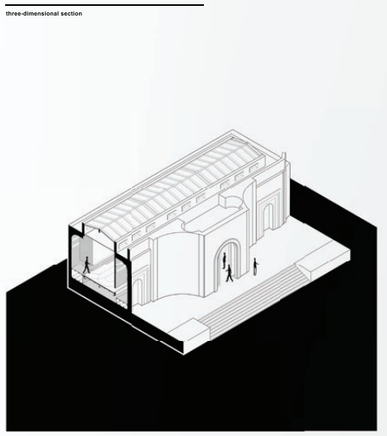
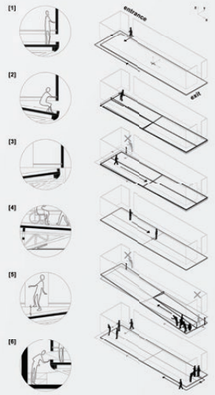
The "thisbalance: experiment platform" project was created in response to the competition's task of selecting a conceptual solution to represent the *Republic of Serbia at the 18th International Architecture Exhibition of the Venice Biennale (La Biennale di Venezia) in 2023.* In this paper, the Great War Island is analyzed as a potential *The Laboratory of the Future*. The study delves into the phenomenology of city islands, explores the historical context of the specific location, assesses the current physical characteristics and potential of the island and the social context within which it exists. The project was designed to create a performative space using a moving platform. Visitors can either be passive observers, remaining in the entrance area, or active participants with access to the main stage on the platform.

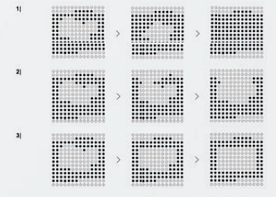
The focus is on the extent of change that the island will undergo over time in order to preserve its natural characteristics while accommodating visitors. The challenge lies not only in managing the number of visitors and their interaction with the protected natural environment, but also in aligning the future architecture with the overall context. The issue of further developing the island has become a topic in recent years (with several projects being considered, such as creating a new water source or building a 280-story tower). It's interesting to note that these proposals face resistance, despite numerous development plans being made for the past 100 years, dating back to 1923. Understanding the past with the aim of raising awareness of possible future action is put on the table when the visitor is shown the previous proposals for change of the Great War Island, and the question of the current is raised by entering the platform (2023). Showing the question "2123?" below eye level, visible only when the platform is unbalanced, is intended to engage the user physically and psychologically. This way, each user takes part in the experiment, becomes aware of the current imbalance in the space, and signifies that addressing future issues requires involvement in the present moment, with the need for collective action and consideration of others, whether it's another person or nature.



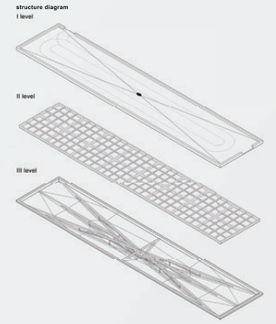
three-dimensional section



specific segments of structure



islands transformation diagram



structure diagram
I level
II level
III level

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POSTER PRESENTATION

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ARCHITECTURAL-SCENIC RESEARCH

OCTOBER 23-25, 2024

THE PERFORMATIVE NATURE OF FLEA MARKETS

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Flea markets, symbols of every city, represent places where the social dynamics and culture of everyday life are reflected. Every day, vendors occupy the empty space of the marketplace and stalls, establishing a type of stage through which they communicate with buyers. These spaces function as small stages where the relationship between the vendor, the stall, and the buyer is established, that is, the relationship between the stage and the audience. Vendors, whether consciously or unconsciously, create spatial installations, using objects as signs that convey meanings. Each stall can be viewed as a type of game with signs. In some instances, they are intentionally linked to tell a shared story, while in others, the elements do not connect clearly or are in an unusual type of contrast, such as the scene of children's Barbies and medicine. On some stalls, there is a noticeable play with the density of signs, which further highlights the objects.
The observer walks through a multitude of signs and identifies with one of them. Each object has its own story and potential for interpretation. The flea market offers an experiential encounter for the audience, giving them the space to complete the potential scene through their interpretation. It can be said that in this game of signs, space, and audience, the seriousness of everyday life transforms into serene art.

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POSTER PRESENTATION

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OCTOBER 23-25, 2024

SOCIAL FICTION AND THE DEMAND FOR A NEW HYPERREALISM IN CONTEMPORARY THEATER

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Social Fiction and the Demand for a New Hyperrealism in Contemporary Theater

Bone marrow transplantation, a pinnacle achievement of modern medicine, and baby theft, a form of modern barbarism, are the main elements driving the conflict in the drama "The Excluded." This play by Đorđe Petrović was first performed at the National Theatre in Sombor on the small stage on April 5, 2024, under the direction of Mia Knežević. The creative team included Daniela Dimitrovska as the set designer, Bilja Grugur as the costume designer, and Branko Džinović as the composer.

The play intertwines two main narrative threads: one taking place in the present, where two mothers meet in a hospital corridor in 2018, and the other set 30 years earlier, where a gynecology resident, following his mentor's orders, takes a newborn baby from the hospital, unknowingly putting it in the clutches of a baby trafficking network. This story reflects the heritage of the 1990s while exploring cracks in human morality and psyche that lead to decades-long consequences, forming a unique and uninterrupted narrative flow. Despite being 30 years apart, both narrative threads are closely connected through the spatial-conceptual design. The maternity ward from the 90s is, in its spatial design, the same hospital where the two mothers in 2018 are engaged in an existential battle to save their sons, both of whom are in life-threatening situations.

Hyperrealism as Proof of Truth

Social reality (where baby theft is possible both bureaucratically and morally) appears more fictional and unreal than stage reality. However, it was necessary to construct a hyperrealistic stage imagery. The proof for this story, given that it does not deal with legal proceedings, lies in the hyperrealistic, convincing space. Architecture of hospitals and their layout, one of the main focuses during the research phase, often seemed phantasmagoric, due to their dilapidation. As a result, these facilities exist in opposition to their primary purposes of healthcare, safety, and protection. A documentary approach to the research was crucial for the stage representation of the space. The purpose of this approach was not to photographically transfer the space from real life to the stage but to create, through this hyperrealistic process, a space that possesses more convincing qualities than a real space does in a dramatic context. This authenticity is further emphasized by the fact that the play is performed on a small stage STUDIO 99, creating a unique stage-audience space where the boundaries between the two are blurred, thereby giving the audience an active role as observers within the story.

The importance of hyperrealism in contemporary theater as a means to explore and depict social realities that may seem unbelievable or unreal. The play "The Excluded" uses this aesthetic strategy to emphasize the moral dilemmas and psychological fractures that arise from real events, such as baby theft and bone marrow transplantation. Through a carefully constructed stage reality based on documentary research, the play successfully conveys authenticity and persuasiveness that engages the audience, blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction, and creates a deeper understanding and reflection on social issues.

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Life is Serious;
ART SERENE

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REALITY AS PREDESTINATION, REALITY AS CHOICE OR REALITY AS RESPONSIBILITY

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The relationship between predestination as the given, inevitable circumstances of a person's life and their free, (ir)responsible choice within those circumstances represents the fundamental conflict on which the theme of my artistic doctoral project, titled "Life Path: Between Destiny and Free Will – Scene Design Artwork" is formed. The artistic work, which arose from the theoretical and artistic research of the dissertation, is titled "The Pilgrim" and stands as an independent work in the field of scenic design artistic practices. It was performed on October 16, 2022, in the schoolyard of the "Slavko Rodić" Elementary School in Backi Jarak (my hometown), Serbia.

The theme on which the empirical research and artistic inspiration of the dissertation are based is summarized in the statement that "a man cannot escape his destiny, whichever path he chooses, but he builds his destiny by choosing the paths he will take." This stance, generated from my perception of reality, in its essential nature, represents an antinomy. This stance is composed of two, from the standpoint of rational thinking, opposing statements, but which can both be true when observed from the position of personal belief. Therefore, they are perceived as accurate, as they are experienced and emotionally felt. These statements, through subjective understanding of the key moments in life, and then through objective reflection (after establishing a time distance and changing certain views on life values), were recognized not only as true but also as paradigms for further life paths. In this way, these statements become a relevant basis for the theoretical and artistic exploration of the theme.

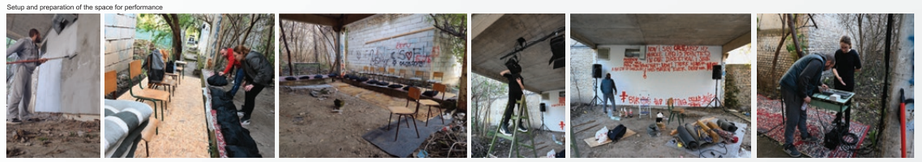
In the context of the conference theme (the relationship between reality and fiction, as well as the "seriousness" of life), the doctoral dissertation addresses two important questions:

The first relates to the nature of "fate" (predestination), i.e., the set of given influences that define the context of a person's existence within a particular time frame and spatial structure, and which they can influence little or not at all through their actions. Such a context, in which an individual finds themselves, is determined, on the one hand, by general influences such as the spirit of the times, the spirit of the place, spatial potentials and characteristics, social relationships, technological development, and the availability of resources, and on the other hand, by psychological, emotional, sensory, spiritual, and physical predispositions of the individual caught in that context. From the perspective of the artist (or any creator), awareness of the circumstances in which one creates and for which one creates is the basic prerequisite for any action.

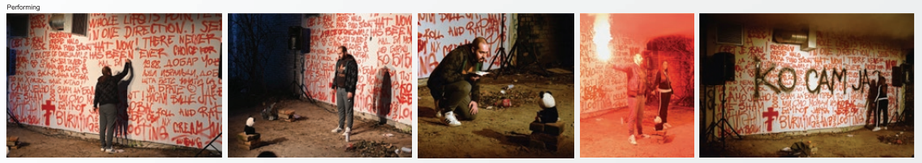
In addition to the view that emphasizes the necessity of a person's awareness of the circumstances in which they find themselves, an essential aspect of every life process (including artistic ones) is personal commitment within the given framework, that is, free will. However, free will in practice (whether artistic or otherwise) does not exist on its own, that is, without causal relationships with other categories. One (probably the most important) category, which is inextricably linked with freedom (or at least should be) – is responsibility. The Russian film director Andrei Tarkovsky, on the topic of the relationship between artistic activity and freedom, says that "only complete honesty and sincerity, combined with the knowledge of one's responsibility toward others, can ensure the fulfillment of the artist's creative destiny." Thus, this (conscientious) understanding of free will and freedom in general, in relation to artistic practice (but also life itself), where a person, with sincere intent and an honest relationship with themselves and others, responsibly, consciously, and with dignity chooses and expresses their ideas, represents the second important question of my dissertation in relation to the theme of the conference.

Space in its existing condition

Setup and preparation of the space for performance



Performing



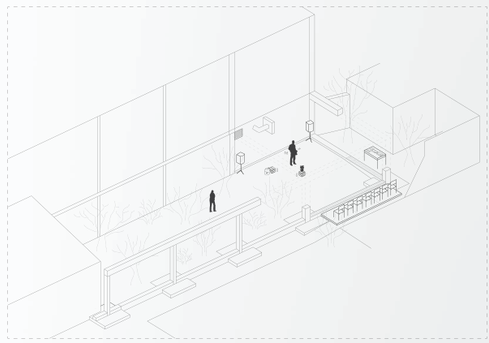
The artistic work "The Pilgrim," as an independent piece of scenic design artistic practice, incorporates elements of site-specific performance, monodrama, and hip-hop musical, with a special emphasis on the use of stage tools, recognizing and utilizing all morphological, aesthetic, and ambient potentials of the selected space, as well as maintaining an active relationship with the audience. It is dramaturgically divided into four acts. For the performance, I wrote an original dramatic text (as a kind of "confession"), which reflected my personal relationship to significant life decisions that determined my life path, my personality, and my awareness of the circumstances in which I exist.

A particularly important aspect of the work, which is related to the theme of the conference, is the choice and use of the performance space. In the search for an appropriate space, certain criteria were established. First and foremost, it had to be a space that had a direct connection to some part of my life, meaning there had to be a strong and deep emotional-spiritual bond in our relationship, that the spirit of the place (genius loci) be sufficiently and strongly expressed, and as such, serve as an actor that would enhance the interpretation and contribute to a more effective presentation of my "confession." The second important criterion was that the space had to be an "urban street environment" and, as such, equivalent to "street culture," which greatly shaped me as a conscious individual. Therefore, its appearance, spatial characteristics, and aesthetics were meant to contribute to street narration, by being marginalized, abandoned, dilapidated, and in a raw state. Lastly, the space had to meet practical requirements for performing a stage piece: formation of a playing space and audience area, appropriate morphology to better define these units, unobstructed and safe audience access, space for technical staff, and the possibility of setting up stage lighting and sound.

Based on these criteria, the chosen performance space was the schoolyard of the "Slavko Rodić" Elementary School in Bački Jarak, the school I attended as a child. Specifically, it involved a particular, marginal segment of the yard that, due to the negligence of the designers, school, and local authorities, had remained undeveloped and neglected. Over many years, this space has deteriorated, and today it is completely overgrown with vegetation. Visible remnants of the construction of a part of the building that was never completed have also decayed over time. This space is frequently visited by drug addicts, alcoholics, and other marginalized community members, as they are hidden from the public here. Additionally, there have been incidents of violence among the school's students in this space. In my adolescent years, I too occasionally visited this place for the consumption of light narcotics.

A special value of the work is reflected in the activation and offering of a new perspective on this space, which possesses specific ambience, both because of its architecture and the stories associated with it. A seemingly unusable, devastated, and abandoned area of the schoolyard in Bački Jarak was transformed, through thoughtful arrangement and furnishing, into an adequate stage space. This transformation did not negate its nature and appearance, but rather the marginal, degraded, aesthetic, and ambient characteristics were sublimated, i.e., transformed into a utilitarian playing space. The destructive energy of the space was not suppressed but enriched, and as such, used to elevate the overall experience of the work.

With this artistic work, besides sharing personal stories on the theme of predestination and free will, I sought to highlight the existence of a space that has been neglected for years and has therefore become suitable for various problematic activities. It is especially important to note that this space is an integral part of an educational institution attended by children. The fate of this space is unknown, as no one is willing to deal with it. It has the potential to become something beautiful and useful, like an outdoor classroom or a stage space for school performances. Circumstances have caused this space to not fulfill its potential, the irresponsibility of the authorities has allowed its decay, and the act of free will by individuals on the margins of society has imprinted their stories into it. One of those stories is mine.



Position of basic spatial elements

- Part of the auditorium on the foundations
- Part of the auditorium on the ground
- Auditorium platform with chairs
- Space for stage light and sound control
- Elements of the playing area, brick chair

Position of stage technology

1. Mackie SRM450 - speakers
2. Soundcraft Signature 12 MTK - audio mixer
3. Laptop
4. ETC: Smart fade - Portable stage light mixer

ETC: Source Four Fresnel 750W

ETC: Source Four Profile Spot 50 750W

Link to my YouTube channel with rap songs from the performance

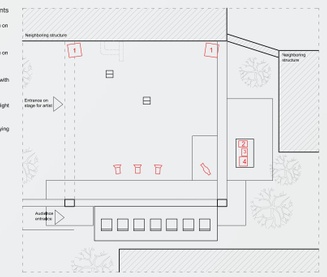


photo: Isidora Vujasinović

REVIEWS

REVIEW

About Seriousness and Serenity

The book **“Life is Serious: Art serene: Architectural Scenic Research”** is, obviously, more than a collection of conference proceedings. Despite all the thematic, stylistic, and even ideological diversities in individual approaches, it offers a rich and inspiring exploration of the dynamic and non-reliable relation between art and existence. At the very beginning, in the introduction, while discussing Böhme’s understanding of the relationship between architecture and scene design, Slađana Milićević asks crucial questions related not only to this duality but also to the connections (or differences, or borderline) between architecture and performance in the contemporary society of spectacle. The main issue concerns different, not rarely even opposite understandings of life itself, its values and challenges, and finally, the place, role, functions, importance, and impact of art in everyday life – for artists and audiences equally.

It is important to emphasize the wide range of differences among the authors: in their professions (architects; scene, stage, costume, and exhibition designers; theatre directors and playwirghts; musicians; visual artists and art theorists; writers and philosophers, etc.), age, living environments (from Canada, Brazil, Mexico, India, or Australia, to Portugal, Czech Republic, and, finally, all parts of ex-Yugoslavia), and circumstances. Nevertheless, the topic and topos (τόπος) of each research establish a rich and vivid field of (often passionate) individual contributions, creating a wide platform of perspectives (or discourses) for rethinking the design, articulation, and use of space.

The content of this book reassures us that theatre and architecture have always interacted mutually, encouraged, and built between themselves. In this sense, scene design acts as a field of encounter and integration of space and play – a place of common presence and common experience for performers and audience in the chronotope we call a performance. Since the starting point of architectural activity is existential space, and theatre is undoubtedly a form of existence, a new reality, scene design should be viewed primarily as a type of architecture, and as such, related to visual or applied arts. In the exact sense of the word, scenography (writing a scene) originated as a Renaissance architectural experiment, so Sebastiano Serlio placed his three iconic scenes on an imaginary stage, not to apply them in the theatre, but to generate new architectural tools and a different spatial expression through the medium of theatre.

Challenges of terminology, definitions, and classifications are one of the major contributions of the book. What makes a difference between scenography and scene design? Is there a line of separation between the two disciplines, or is it a matter of individual understanding and belief? Are architects and visual artists equally competent in scene design as stage and costume designers? Does formal education necessarily lead to specific professional practice? Who represents performance and/or performing space, and how?

On the other hand, what determines space to become a place? Or a stage? What about the interaction between real and imaginary space in media (film, video, virtual, augmented or hyperreality)? Is the exhibition space always a stage? When is it, and when is it not? What defines the borderline of a performing space? Do

Life is Serious;
ART SERENE

we need walls, or are chalk lines enough? How does city (or village) life become a performance, and what public space converts into a theatre? Is it possible to read the built environment as a dramatic text? Does spontaneous theatricality of space exist, or is everything already predetermined? What should we do with abandoned spaces? Could the temporary use of those spaces be significant for the built environment? What makes forgotten places so inspiring for site-specific events?

What is the role of the audience, in conventional or in unusual configurations? Are their attitudes different even when they share the same space with performers? How far does the responsibility of authors and performers extend, especially when creating for children or for an audience with limited abilities? How can theatre serve as a platform for critiquing societal norms, or society in general, considering all ideological, political, economic, or ecological issues? Could we observe wars and destruction as staged performances? What should be done about collective memory, responsibility, and even guilt? How can we rebuild a sense of community and care for public values? Could scene design be a tool in the battle for a better world and a different life? Are there already existing projects, collectives, and initiatives that could be connected and united?

All these questions, and many more, were deeply investigated, and some answers can be anticipated, if not taken for granted. In any case, the almost thirty research papers presented in this book will be an important and valuable document about the relationship between art and life in these dramatic, tense, and uncertain times.

Radivoje Dinulović

REVIEW

Radivoje Dinulović (PhD, Arch) is professor of Scene Architecture & Design and at the Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad, Serbia. He was professor at the Faculty of Drama Arts in Belgrade, founder and director of Interdisciplinary MA and DA Studies in Scene Design at the University of Arts in Belgrade and visiting professor in Banjaluka (Bosnia & Herzegovina) and Skopje (Macedonia). He lectured, realised or exhibited architectural and scene design projects throughout Europe, in Russia, China and United States, including the Venice Biennial in architecture and in theatre, and Prague Quadrennial of Performing Design and Space, where his students received international awards. At the PQ, he curated National exhibition in 2007 and was a member of the international Jury in 2015. He published books “20th Century Theatre Architecture” (Clio, 2009) and “Theatre – Politics – City” (with A. Brkić, Yustat, 2007), as well as great number of articles in leading national and international magazines.

Guardians of the Public Happiness

The publication *Life is Serious: Art Serene* is all about blurring boundaries in (and between) art(s) – from theoretical point of view as much as from the practical one. Not only that it presents a heterogenous assembly of authors coming from different disciplinary fields – mostly architects, scenographers and stage designers, followed by light designers, art theoreticians and historians, sociologists, dramaturgs, musicians, opera singers, dancers, theatre directors -but being themselves *divided* or, better to say, *integrated* by various professional backgrounds (architect *and* scene designer, opera singer *and* architect; dancer *and* light designer, to put only few examples). These *multiple professional identities*, as one would expect, did produce a material of extremely interesting and inspirative insights, questions and dilemmas. And almost all of them took a step further. Opposing directly or indirectly to Böhme's famous dichotomy between seriousness of life and serenity of art (as simply unsustainable within contemporary world social practices), the authors showed many various examples of blurred distinctions, not-easily-definable entities, and/or offered propositions to overbridge *the gap*, where and if it ever actually did exist. As a common denominator of these insights I could quote a line – elegantly extracted by object-oriented ontology method – from the paper of one of the respective contributors: "Life is serious but so is art!" In other, less ontological words, the (scenic) space – be it cinematic, theatrical, "purely" architectural, or political – is always socially constructed, thus never independent from the public atmo/sphere.

From the perspective of a theatre researcher, while reading this volume I learned a lot about in-betweens of architecture, scenography and scene design, but my attention was naturally floating more toward topics and authors closer to performing arts. In that regard, I found especially interesting and potent for further exploration the case studies that showed the ways how to transform the audience from mere spectators to the participants (creating concepts as for example "dialectical wall", "walking dramaturgy", "artveillance"); ways of interaction between "character portrayal and spatial representation"; or how concepts of "tactile scenography", "expanded scenography" and "performative environment" offer new perspectives on looking at scenography as "looking with the whole body", thus, can produce "multisensory experience", which is especially precious for blind and visually impaired spectators. Speaking of the latter concepts, they can easily be seen as associated with the concept provided by another author: a musical repetition by which "invisible, subjectively-imaginary spaces" can be created, and so transition from everyday life to art (and back) can happen. Innovative strategies of combining natural and artificial light in contemporary dance performances, where light design often functions as "the only" scene design, connected with double ontological status of dance as being in the same time real and artificial, contribute again to modes of rethinking the life/art dichotomy. Such unintentional *dialogues* that "happened" are not rare moments within dramaturgy of this book. Digital theatre plays for young audiences that question relationship between "new technologies and old theatre features" and isometric video game are topics that at some point share idea of rejuvenating one of the oldest art media on Earth, while the idea of videogame environment and scene design as mode of re-writing the city, as well as

city stories, strongly corresponds to Surrealist concept of city as a playground, with its *dérive* practices of the *flaneur* – which is directly addressed by the third author, and so on.

Out of these critical analyses, professional presentations, theoretical and autopoietic insights, one could extract a new vocabulary of *producing the world* (referring to Greek word *poiesis*) and the ways we should politically re/act in it – exactly as Hannah Arendt understands world, art and politics in her seminal book *Vita Activa (The Human Condition)*. Last but not least: the fact that the participants of last year conference in Novi Sad – literally a couple of days before the railway station tragedy – were pointing out so often and so much the problems of neglected public space followed by political and social apathy, parallelly reclaiming the production of shared spaces, places of connection and collective experience, sense of community and civic responsibility, is not to be taken as a mere coincidence. It is just a prove that they acted as insightful, free and responsible human do.

Agata Juniku

Agata Juniku (1974) is an associate professor at the Academy of Dramatic Art, University of Zagreb. She holds a DEA (Diplôme d'études approfondies) in Philosophy from *Université Paris 8* and a PhD from University of Zagreb. She is the author of the book *Indoš and Živadinov, theatre-bio-graphies: The Sacred and the Ludic as Modes of the Political in Theatre* (2019). She has been following contemporary theatre and dance practices since 1988, when she started cooperating with *Radio 101* as a journalist and editor. She was the executive producer of theatre and dance radio-programs *Kazališ̌tarije* (*Theatralia*) and *Odeon: izvedi i snosi posljedice* (*Perform and else*) broadcast by the Third Program of the Croatian Radio for ten years, and has worked for a long time for the journals *Zarez* and *Frakcija* (magazine for performing arts). Her academic research is mostly focused on contemporary theories of performance, construction and presentation of identity in theatre, as well as the procedures and strategies of political action in the context of performing practices, including radio art.

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