PS

PERFORMANCE & SPACE

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE
PERFORMING SPACE 2023 CONFERENCE**

Edited by
Pablo Berzal Cruz, Athena Stourna, Christina Zoniou, Giorgos Kondis

University of the Peloponnese   Universidad Politécnica de Madrid

2025

**Contemporary Theatre Has Left the Theatre...
"Houses" Made of Bricks, Sticks and Straw**

Dorita Hannah

Contemporary Theatre Has Left the Theatre…
"Houses" Made of Bricks, Sticks and Straw

Dorita Hannah

University of Newcastle, Australia

Abstract

Like Elvis, much contemporary theatre seems to have "left the building"; a statement suggesting the architectural show is over and signalling a death of sorts, that of well-made drama in a well-constructed edifice. As the stable ground of theatrical representation is increasingly ungrounded, live and mediated performance 'takes place' elsewhere, reconfiguring theatre as both art form and built form. This paper expands a book chapter on the place of architecture in *Contemporary European Theatre and Performance* (Remshardt/Mancewicz, 2023), which is affected by spectacular events of the 21st century that invade the global imaginary, primarily via screened imagery of political upheaval, conflict, contamination, climate change, pandemics and the plight of those seeking refuge from these threats. Theatre, like contemporary civilisation, can no longer rely on a home that is safe and sound. By drawing on a cautionary fairytale of *The Three Little Pigs*, the paper reverse-engineers the story that privileges the value of building one's house out of bricks rather than sticks and straw. Instead, it maintains that the environment housing theatre has moved from enduring standalone monuments of the 19th century to more experimental sites of the 20th century, to ephemeral and transitory locations of the early 21st century, in which deliberate homelessness reinforces the community itself as house.

Keywords: Theatre architecture, performance space, architectural scenography,

Contemporary Theatre Has Left the Theatre… "Houses" Made of Bricks, Sticks and Straw.

> To approach the problem of "the new," then, one must complete the following four requirements: redefine the traditional concept of the object; reintroduce and radicalize the theory of time; conceive of "movement" as a first principle […] and embed these later three within an all-encompassing theory and politics of the "event". (Kwinter 2001, p. 11)

For millennia, 'theatre' – conventionally defined as both *dramatic practice* (performance) and the *building* (architecture) housing that practice – has been a place-based undertaking, fulsomely experienced when the live act and built artefact unite through a focussed spatiotemporal event. As architectural typology in the Westernized imagination, it tends to be reduced to a distinct building designed to spatially regulate the communal experience of a dramatic production upon a prescribed technological stage faced by a darkened room of spectators allocated numbered seating in alphabetised rows. This is evidenced in a global proliferation of cookie-cutter performing arts venues with proscenium stages and black box studios. However, deferring to this Euro-Western archetype fails to acknowledge that the boundaries of contemporary "live" performance and its many genres have become blurred through mediated and participatory events, which, resisting the fixity of a stage separating performers from audience, are increasingly enacted within an expanding public arena where the real and virtual are ever more entangled. This owes much to our hyper-connected, post-truth, increasingly "Artificially Intelligent" condition where, as Jon McKenzie (2008) maintains, "the world has become a designed environment in which an array of global performances unfold" (p. 114). Our turn-of-the-millennium precarity, marked by unfolding events – associated with political upheaval, conflict, climate change, contamination, pandemics and the plight of those seeking refuge from such threats – has led to revolution, resistance and occupation, which trouble the grounds upon which we perform our identities and therefore theatre as an architectural typology.

Theatre Architecture is conventionally considered an enduring static object – as a playhouse, concert hall, dance space, opera house, stadium, or even art gallery – designed to contain performance within its disciplinary hold. However, due to increasing interdisciplinarity and the blurring of boundaries between fiction and reality, contemporary performing arts now exceed genre taxonomy and even architecture itself. Performance therefore can neither be spatially contained nor restricted – especially in our age of media spectacles, fluid technologies and uncontainable bodies. In *Architectures of Time*, Sanford Kwinter (2001, p. 11) maintains that "the new" in architecture emerges from rethinking its

objecthood by paying attention to temporality, mobility and the event dimension. This perceptual shift from a static spatialization of time (architecture as durable built form) to the livelier temporalization of space (architecture as dynamic environmental spacing), acknowledges 'spatial performativity', which philosopher Jacques Derrida (2004) refers to as "*espacement* (...) the archi-manifestation of force, or of life", (p. 46). By emphasising movement, relativity and duration, both Kwinter and Derrida hypothesize architecture as *evental* – active, spatiotemporal and interruptive of the status quo – and therefore as dynamic becoming rather than passive being. So, what does this mean in relation to the 'contemporary' in theatre architecture, particularly in the so-called West (UK, Europe and North America), which continues to influence the global status quo? According to Giorgio Agamben (2009), being "contemporary" necessitates returning "to a present where we have never been" (pp. 51-2). This involves contemplating an ever-changing 'now' in which the new interrupts, challenges and eventually shifts the status quo. Friedrich Nietzsche (1997) referred to this as the "untimely": when one finds oneself "a little vortex of life in a dead sea of darkness and oblivion" (p. 64); when time, as Hamlet claimed, "is out of joint" (Shakespeare, Hamlet Act I Scene V). So, to consider the current state of European theatre architecture requires paying attention not to elegant contemporary designs reworking the enduring proscenium form via signature buildings but to proposals that destabilise the status quo, aligning innovative practices with equally inventive spatialities responding to conditions of alienation, inundation and contamination. This often entails breaking well-established conventions, including repudiation of the traditional home where performance has long been housed. The framework for this chapter therefore comes from an English fairy story, *The Three Little Pigs*, which forms a cautionary architectural tale that is here reverse-engineered to reflect the state-of-play, in which theatre has tended, over time, to leave the theatre.

   The Three Little Pigs is a 19th-century fable in which each little pig constructs its own house – one of straw, one of sticks and one of bricks – to resist a predatory wolf who, denied entry, threatens to destroy each structure – "I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house in" (Jacobs 1890, p. 69) – before devouring its occupant. The wolf easily destroys the flimsy house of straw, soon followed by the more substantial house of sticks, but is unable to demolish the sturdy house built of bricks. This classic folktale could be interpreted as a salutary lesson advocating the need for sound construction of 'house and home' for safety and longevity. However, a close look at the development of European theatre architecture over the last 150 years shows a tendency to move away from abiding construction towards more and more transitory structures to a point where significant new interdisciplinary practices deny any purpose-built venue. This paper, therefore, considers noteworthy theatres that encapsulate such a move from the enduring, solid and fixed structure as house to the fleeting transient and portable, in which the community is no longer housed but house itself.

House of Bricks: Standalone *Master*pieces

Theatre architecture, which has traditionally accommodated performance, is often referred to as a "house" – of play, of dance, of opera, and of music. In the prelude to her lament on *Opera, or, the Undoing of Women*, Catherine Clement (1998) refers to the *Palais Garnier* (1875) as "[a] great house, a strange one, in the heart of the city", where the working world is exchanged "for one of fantastic fleeting leisure" (pp. 3-5). This iconic late 19th-century theatre – a monumental node in Haussman's axial renovation of Paris – represented an apotheosis of the 300-year-old baroque model, once the domain of aristocrats, now transformed into a bourgeois glory machine for the people. As Walter Benjamin (1999) noted, "conceived of as a place of pageantry," it offered a stage to mirror a new era, providing "an urban centre, a centre of social life – this was a new idea, and a sign of the times" (pp. 411-2).

Named after Charles Garnier – the new post-revolutionary bourgeois "starchitect" – the *Opéra Garnier* represented both apotheosis and denouement of the decorative Italianate auditorium that provided audiences with a performative interior in which they themselves could perform. However, this notion of a monumental standalone edifice endures today through other renowned architects commissioned to design venues as urban events that bestow identity on the city within which they are constructed.

Theatre as a monument, therefore, remains the purview of internationally celebrated (generally white, male) European architects who design signature venues within and outside the continent. These tend to be principally concert halls, opera houses or performing arts centres in major cities. There are those designed by local architects, such as Snøhetta's *Oslo Opera House* (2008), with its multileveled 1370-seat horseshoe auditorium, a 400-seat courtyard theatre and 200-seat black box. However, the building's most effective aspect is the external "carpet" of horizontal and sloping surfaces that move up from the water's edge, forming the external surface and transforming the entire environment into a performance landscape for the city.

Many European star-architects (frequently referred to as 'starchitects') are commissioned by cities in countries other than their own. This includes Paris-based Jean Nouvel (2024) whose *Danish Radio Concert Hall* (Copenhagen, 2009) presents a crustaceous form nestled within the blue gauze-covered volume with "Piranesian public spaces" (Atelier Jean Nouvel), boasting a warm timber landscape inside its 1800-seat auditorium with asymmetric shelves of audience wrapping the stage. Likewise, Swiss firm Herzog and de Meuron were behind the long-anticipated riverside *Elbphilharmonie* (Hamburg, 2017) with its 2100-seat concert hall, also featuring subtle asymmetry, buried within a crystalline addition floating atop the Kaispeicher, a 1960s industrial brick storehouse that appears like a ghost ship. While the main auditorium distributes a multi-level public on tiers and terraces – drawing on the more populist

football stadium as inspiration, the primary stage in this building is the panoramic public space between old and new building, forming a public deck that affords spectacular views.

European architects have contributed to venues on other continents: such as London-based Michael Wilford and Partners, whose Singapore *Esplanade – Theatre on the Bay* (2002) is known as 'The Durian' because its spiked forms resemble the tropical fruit; China's *National Centre for Performing Arts* (Beijing, 2007), designed by French architect Paul Andreu and referred to as "The Great Egg" with its domed form reflecting in an enormous pool; and *Taiwan's Wei-Wu-Ying Centre* led by Francine Houben of Netherlands-based Mecanoo Architects, which, hailed as the world's largest performing arts complex, is housed beneath a long and low undulating roof that refers to the canopies of local banyan trees. In each complex, any reference to local cultural expression begins and ends with the exterior form that houses familiar Euro-Western-styled auditoria.

Such architectural icons may make their mark on the urban landscape as aesthetic spectacles but contribute little to new models of performance space. Even Renzo Piano's *Tjibaou Cultural Centre* (1998) in Nouméa, New Caledonia, with its reference to Pacific forms, inevitably houses a conventional rectangular auditorium with an end-stage format – buried underground – despite the competition-winning design proposing a more culturally inflected space opening to its island surroundings.

As landmark venues, increasingly constructed away from historic centres, these theatre monuments continue to provide spectacular municipal houses of culture and public platforms for viewing and being viewed. Despite some experimentation with dynamic asymmetry within the auditorium, their generally predictable and marketable layouts are linked to cultural investment and global exchange. This forecloses on either regionally specific environments or spatial diversity for experimentation in favour of homogenised standardisation of the interiors, despite the outer shells presenting uniquely distinctive objects. Public accessibility is limited to the consumption of retail, food, and beverage provided for the duration of the event, with highly regulated and securely controlled performance spaces. They contribute to identifying and gentrifying the area while attracting tourists and marketing theatre as a cultural resource within the post-industrial city, providing what UK architecture critic Rowan Moore (2021) refers to as 'attention-seeking' 'urban clickbait'. Their role is to house well-equipped, sealed auditoria for touring festival shows by celebrated auteurs that, like the starchitects who designed them, tend to represent what Gyatri Spivak (1999, p. 314) calls "the transnational dominant". These standalone monuments fail to acknowledge that 21st-century Europe is increasingly "multicultural" with migration resulting in a demographic recognition of ethnic minorities, requiring public infrastructure that accommodates cultural and economic diversity. Instead, like the "great house" described by Clement (1998), they continue to fleetingly come alive for the singular occasion, expressing "the pomp of festive bourgeois in search of a forgotten nobility" (pp. 3-5).

House of Sticks: Porous Community Residencies

European theatre architecture has tended to dominate the global imaginary, multiplying throughout (and far beyond) the continent, despite considerable inroads made last century by its historical and neo-avant-garde movements experimenting with multiple formats, moveable systems, and repurposed infrastructure. Their revolutions emerged from a preoccupation with the metropolis, new industrial technologies, a rejection of tradition and the collapse of Cartesian perspectivalism that had previously defined and stabilised the spatial image of stage and architecture. The well-constructed playhouse seemed as meaningless as the well-made bourgeois play, both rejected in favour of expressive performing bodies and conceptually incorporated audiences. This led to extraordinary venues of which exemplars include: *Hellerau Festspielhaus* (Dresden 1911) by scenographer Adolphe Appia who worked with Heinrich Tessenow to create a "shining meadow" of pale glowing walls wrapping a variable landscape of relocatable platforms; the *Großes Schauspielhaus* (Berlin, 1919), a circus hall renovated as a vast performance space under a dome of stalactites designed by Hans Poelzig for Max Reinhardt; Vsevolod Meyerhold's equally fleeting Theatre (Moscow, 1932) developed with architects, Sergei Barkhin and Mikhail Vakhtangov; Ariane Mnouchkine's *Cartoucherie* de Vincennes (Paris, 1970) housing Théâtre du Soleil in a repurposed arms factory; Peter Brook's *Bouffes du Nord* (Paris, 1974), which reworked the spatial relationships within a burnt out late 19th century vaudeville theatre; the *Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz* (Berlin 1962), established as instrumental venue in a reworked cinema; the *Manchester Royal Exchange* (1976) that landed like a spaceship in a Victorian trading hall; and Aldo Rossi's *Teatro del Mondo* (Venice 1979), a tower-like structure floating on the canals and out into the Adriatic Sea. There were also visionary, though unrealised, proposals that endure on paper and in the imagination: such as the responsive, vertiginous architecture of Friedrich Kiesler's *Endless Theatre* (1924); Walter Gropius' *Total Theatre* (1927), the theatrical machine designed for Erwin Piscator; and the *Fun Palace* conceived by Cedric Price and Joan Littlewood as a social laboratory for the city of London (1961); all interactive and adaptable venues that were before their time in terms of artistry and technology. Two particular exemplars can be found further afield: James Beard's flexibly asymmetric *Hannah Playhouse* in New Zealand (Wellington 1973), created with scenographer Raymond Boyce; and Lina Bo Bardi's *Teatro Oficina* in Brazil (Sao Paulo 1984). Yet, this fertile avant-garde period of creative collaboration that produced distinctive auditoria seemed over by the 1980s, with very few theatres built since that radically assert avant-garde artistry.

Significant new contributions at the end of last century can be found in post-Soviet Prague with two venues both involving architects Jindřich Smetana and Tomáš Kulík: the cylindrical *Spirála Theatre* (1992), winding the audience on circular ramps around a central playing space

to facilitate media projection from above; and *Alfred in the Courtyard* (1997), a tiny "garden theatre pavilion" constructed of five box forms telescoping away from the stage to form glazed portals through which daylight can enter. This gesture of letting light into the hermetic auditorium is found in the *Theatre De Kampanje* (2015) by Dutch firm, Van Dongen-Kochuch in the former docklands of Den Helder, where the glazed auditorium can be light-isolated by sliding-folding doors. It recalls Amsterdam's frameless *Glass Music Hall* (1990) – an "acoustical aquarium" – designed by Pieter Zaanen with engineer Mick Eekhout to occupy the Berlage Exchange and then relocated to Tilburg's historical Locomotion Hall in 2018.

While many contemporary auteurs and independent companies concentrate on developing work to tour in predictable venues, some seek sites to explore alternative spatialities. This includes Germany-based American choreographer William Forsythe whose company has resided in three significant venues: Zürich's *Halle im Schiffbau* (2001) in a former shipyard, the refurbished *Hellerau Hall* (2004), and Frankfurt's *Bockenheimer Depot* (1999), the latter transformed into a flexible venue with architects Nikolaus Hirsch and Michel Müller by utilising heavy felt drops and modular units to articulate multiple spaces and modulate between the busy city centre and a more controlled interior. This enabled the development of new work exceeding the standardised stage, seen in Forsythe's commitment to working in galleries, museums and found spaces. The same goes for Berlin-based choreographer Sasha Waltz, whose company is housed in *Radialsystem V* (2006), a former sewage pumping station repurposed by Gerhard Spangenberg. Waltz inaugurated the complex with one of her signature *Dialogues* between performance and architecture, where the public wandered freely through a collage of old and new spaces to encounter fragmented and overlapping moments of dance, music, and song. This tendency to reside in abandoned buildings proliferates around the continent, with hundreds of venues included in the *Trans Europe Halles* network, providing 'micro-universes' that range from gritty occupations to aestheticised gentrifications.[1] Such 'brownfield' sites tend to be approached site-specifically, playing an active role as "hosts" to the "ghosts" summoned by performance (Kaye citing Clifford McLucas, 2000, p. 128).

By the new millennium, more open, improvisatory, and community-focused venues emerged aligned to urban regeneration: including Paris' *104: Cent Quarte* (2008), a late 19th-century funeral complex repurposed by Atelier Novembre into an accessible public facility for cultural practices and innovation; and London's long-running *Battersea Arts Centre* (2018), a former town hall transformed over a decade into a venue with over 35 performance spaces by Haworth Tompkins Architects. Steve Tompkins also reworked London's *Young Vic* (2006) as a flexible producing house in Southwark, highlighting its pre-existing materiality and removing the stage door to establish the foyer as a neighbourhood 'living room' while merging "private"

---

[1] *Trans Europe Halles* https://teh.net/

and "public" territories to "heighten the sense of a shared democratic architecture" (HWA). These more porous venues explicitly focus on the 'local' through programming multicultural events that include hosting refugee communities.

Such an emphasis on community residence rather than urban centre is found in smaller dynamic venues that also claim redundant buildings, such as Barcelona's *Beckett Theatre* (2014), a former social club towards which Ricardo Flores and Eva Prats adopted a palimpsest approach for experimental performances to overwrite any venue formality while fostering a sense of home. A remarkable new build for such open-ended communality is found in Lille's *Polyvalent Theatre* (2013) by Pritzker Prize-winning architects Anne Lacaton & Jean Philippe Vassal, who challenge heroic architectures through the provisional and the non-proscriptive. Sheltered by an overarching roof, the structural framework of this multi-hall "greenfield" development affords numerous spatial configurations by drawing large curtains or sliding acoustic walls. Porosity, diversity, familiarity and accessibility are key in this renewal of a local park where the entire façade can open to connect the interior with the garden. At the same time, an inherent resistance to disciplining space and bodies is designed into the architecture.

'Polyvalence' appropriately sums up the more informal community venues reinhabiting brownfield buildings and greenfield sites around Europe for which flexibility depends on construction itself flexing, but with less reliance on highly automated systems favoured by modernism. Relaxing theatre's conventional borders, they emphasise multi-disciplinarity, multi-programming, and multi-mediality while recognising and incorporating the rhythms and materiality of existing environment and occupants, encapsulating this new century's impulse to open theatre's doors to reality and the unpredictable fluctuations of sound, temperature, light, shadows, air currents and the ongoing activities of human and non-humans. Recent incidents on a highly mediatised global stage – such as viruses, uprisings and displacements – reveal a hyper-theatricalization of everyday life, which is countered by a tendency for contemporary theatre practices to leave the 'dead air' of its designated building, actively seeking urban, suburban, rural and coastal conditions in all their manifestations. This is effectively embodied in the spiral layout of 150 circular haybales, designed by Spanish architect Josep Maria Puigdemasa to briefly occupy a Catalonian field for a music concert in 2017. As a literal house of straw, it brings us to the first little pig's precarious home, fabricated from ephemeral materials susceptible to the huffing and puffing of environmental and political forces.

Houses of Straw: Fugitive Constructions and Nomadic Landscapes

The space housing *performance events*, also a container for a myriad of minor *quotidian events*, is fundamentally shaped by significant paradigm-shifting *historic events* of our time that signal an increasing precarity of site itself. In the first quarter of this century, they include falling skyscrapers, decimating earthquakes and tsunamis, the propagation of fires and floods caused by climate change, and a parade of obliterating wars transmitted live on proliferating screens. A global pandemic has radically changed our sense of scale and proximity through microbial awareness of bodies and environments as potential sites of contagion. Recognising the Anthropocene as an ever-present reality, 'site' is now threatened by a myriad of untenable conditions – caused by natural and humanmade disasters – in which the unsustainability of many homelands has already produced the involuntary exile of over 100 million people (UN News 2022). How do these extended moments in nature and civilisation impact environments hosting cultural events, which, as performative spacing, are themselves a plurality of events and integral drivers of experience? No longer safe nor sound, the built and natural environments' inveterate association with continuity, coherence and autonomy has submitted to the exigencies of time, action and motion, revealing an impossible task to provide secure containment for inherently uncontainable bodies. They question the propriety of property and destabilize the foundations upon which we perform our identities to a point where, as Manfred Brauneck (2017) claims, 'the theatre in general lost ground' (p. 32), challenging architecture's impossible task to provide secure housing for the arts. Theatre has tended to leave the building, suggesting the predictable architectural show is over and making way for spatial performativity – involving a perceptual shift from a static spatialisation of time (architecture as durable built form) to the livelier temporalisation of space (architecture as dynamic environmental action) – experienced in 'found' and 'fleeting' spaces that proffer alternatives to the persistent cookie-cutter auditoria.

The new millennium's association with catastrophe specifically affected the performing arts in 2002 when Moscow's *Dubrovka Theatre* was seized by Chechen rebels, who disrupted and transformed a musical performance into a prolonged international spectacle of terror that ended after three days with Russia's Spetsnaz soldiers storming the building, having pumped in a narcotic gas that killed over 170 people. In that event the enduring Italianate theatre, with its controlled exits and numbered seating matrix, was revealed as an intrinsically carceral space for all its occupants. Almost two decades later (1920-1922), theatres across the continent stood empty, their inherent spatiality unable to accommodate social distancing in the uncertain time of Covid where indoor spectatorship is a biopolitical hazard. Theatre has therefore evacuated the building, tainted with violence and contagion, to embrace technology and fugitivity.

Even before the global pandemic, many experimental theatre practitioners sought alternative sites that enabled a more critical engagement with the 'real' while encouraging a self-organising public. Since 2010, the National Theatre Wales has deliberately adopted an itinerant condition by mounting collaborative productions in alternative sites, including a library, a miner's institute, a forest, village halls, a beach and a disused aircraft hangar. Rejecting a fixed home in the nation's capital, the company focuses on site-specific performances 'where architecture and environment play a key role in creating dramatic meanings' (Pearson 2010, p. 6): the most celebrated being Aeschylus' *The Persians* (2010), staged in a mock German village within a Ministry of Defence site to which the audience was bussed and ended up sitting in original stadium seating before a façadeless house broadcasting war on various devices within. A training facility for urban warfare becomes both auditorium and scenography for one of Europe's first recorded plays based on lost battles and their aftermath in history's ever-returning time of 'confusion, chaos and collapse' (ibid). This work, created by Mike Pearson, advances the "placeevents" of his performance company Brith Gof in the 1990s, working with what Nick Kaye (2000) describes as "the coexistence of distinct 'architectures' inhabiting one another and the site itself without resolution into a synthetic whole" (p. 53). Similar situated projects were concurrently being explored by Rome's *Il Pudore Bene in Vista* through 'teatro del luoghi' (theatre of places) and in the Netherlands with "locatietheater" (location theatre), involving events such as the *Oerol Festival of Landscape Arts* on the island of Terschelling in the Wadden Sea, where shows and laboratory projects investigate a relational engagement between nature and culture.

Site-specific performance led to immersive theatre in the work of London's *Seven Sisters Group,* augmenting reality in museums, galleries, railway stations and even local lidos where spectators, carrying iPods and wearing headphones, simultaneously double-view active public swimming pool and subaquatic mythical world of *A Fish Out of Water* (2012). *Punchdrunk,* another London-based company, co-opt multilevel warehouse spaces to establish dozens of rooms through which masked spectators wander and physically engage with highly detailed installations while pursuing overlapping threads of performance action. Unlike black box productions audience experiences are intentionally tinged with the site itself, most eloquently experienced in their ground-breaking production, *The Masque of the Red Death* (2007-8), combining environmental and promenade performance within the *Battersea Arts Centre* (BAC). This collaboration with Steve Tompkins, developed 'scratch architecture', an iterative process of testing performance space through public events, contributing to BAC's 10-year renovation.

Processional, site-specific, immersive and augmented performances are produced by a refusal to be securely contained by house-as-building or house-as-auditorium, resulting in fugitive architectures and a proliferation of 'pop-up' venues. Often born out of economic necessity, these expeditious, flexible and low-cost solutions have contributed to regenerating

vacant sites (often as gentrification), as well as increasing theatre's audience base. The Red Room's *Jellyfish Theatre* (London 2010), designed by German artist/architect Martin Kaltwasser, fleetingly occupied a Southwark schoolyard as an ecological ark constructed out of recycled materials donated by the local community. Deliberately enacting an 'aesthetics of resistance', the patchwork "junkitecture" (Glancey 2010) invoked revolutionary barricades, eschewing any expectations of a hermetically sealed auditorium. Assemble collective – the first architecture studio to gain the UK's prestigious Turner Prize for art in 2015 – also works with communities and a DYI aesthetic to create fleeting venues. In 2014 they established *The Playing Field,* a robust timber-framed transversal space with no raised stage in Southampton's city centre. Conceived 'to widen participation and attract new audiences to the theatre' (Mark 2014), it drew on the cultural rituals, crowd dynamics and spatialities of football stadia. Assemble's ephemeral projects are intentionally political, critiquing urban landscapes and rehearsing more enduring architectures, like those established by other tactical groups such as Antepavilion (London), Exyzt (France), Epos257 (Czech Republic), Raumlabor (Germany) and Guerilla Architects (Bulgaria/Italy/Germany).

Another temporary theatre made of straw was commissioned by Estonian theatre company, NO99, when Tallinn became European Capital of Culture in 2011. A multi-award-winning demountable venue by Salto Architects, *Straw Theatre* is constructed from black spray-painted bales. Although fundamentally a black box studio with end-stage seating, its agrarian materiality presents an earthy spatiality that forecloses on any architectural neutrality. However, in 2015, the company utilised the city itself as a theatre for *Estonia United!*, a high-profile political campaign for a fictitious populist party that ironically gained over 20% support in the polls, reaching its zenith by filling a 7,000-seat convention hall. Fifteen years earlier, German director Christof Schlingensief also critiqued Europe's rising populism with *Please Love Austria* (2000) by provocatively setting up a shipping container in front of Vienna's State Opera House. Crowned with a sign reading *Foreigners Out!,* it sheltered a dozen asylum seekers who were publicly ousted from the country through an online voting system. This focus on exclusionary politics and the plight of those on the margins is embedded in Rimini Protokoll's *Cargo-X* (2006-19), which converted a truck trailer into a 50-seat observatory on the move through the borderlands of European towns while migrant drivers discuss the transportation of bodies and goods. The audience as haulage is exposed to the realities of global logistics in a mobile venue that draws attention to the very real politics of landscape's specificities. These projects trouble any fascination with shipping container architecture, aesthetically exemplified in Berlin's *Container Kunsthalles* (2011) by Platoon Cultural Developments, exposing this ubiquitous pop-up element as far from neutral. The house is neither the theatre building, nor the auditorium, but the collective and individual body moving through ever-changing and highly contested territory. This is epitomized in another ousted

figure – the colossal puppet of a Syrian refugee child walking 8,000 kilometres across the European continent, which provides an extensive stage for *The Walk* (2021). Like the monstrous mobile forms of Germany's open-air Titanick Theater, and the gargantuan mechanical marionettes of France's Royal de Luxe, 'Little Amal' commands global attention while forming an ever-changing caravan of followers. A character in search of her mother, she traverses eight countries and dozens of cities to platform the plight of millions of displaced refugees, made homeless by the predatory winds of this new century. Initiated by Good Chance Ensemble – a diverse collective of storytellers from different cultural and artistic backgrounds – *The Walk* manifests Europe's borders as a theatrical space where, as Sophie Nield (2008) contends, the person appearing there 'must simultaneously be present and be represented' (p. 137). Experiencing this global event on and offline, the audience – theatre's "living archive" (Pustianaz 2022) – has also been unhoused and required to wander.

Conclusion: Counter-Performance Spatialities

Theatre (as dramatic art form) has left *the theatre* (as abiding built form) in search of the "real", as in reality rather than representation. But, in leaving the mimetic machine, it's also seeking the "Real" (with a capital 'R') – defined by Jacques Lacan (1990) as an 'impossible' real that, exceeding language and meaning, defies symbolisation (p. 36). Embedded within everyday reality, the mythopoetic and traumatic Real challenges representation, especially concerning performances addressing the aforementioned geopolitical, climatic, endemic and discriminatory threats haunting this new century. Calling stable ground into question and the propriety of property, contemporary avant-garde artists are refiguring theatre as counter-performances with architecture as spatial acts of resistance. This can be seen in recent projects challenging the status quo: such as the *Teeter-Totter Wall* (2020) by Rael San Fratello, an architecture studio that slotted three bright pink seesaws into the border wall between Mexico and the USA, allowing children to play briefly across the divide; the *Brick Arches* (2019) set up as miniature roadblocks by Hong Kong's pro-democracy protestors to demobilise cars; and the tensegrity structures made of wire and bamboo, used by Extinction Rebellion from 2020 as makeshift protest towers, capable of being quickly erected and held in place by the out-of-reach bodies of climate activists.

By looking at three theatre architecture typologies – monumental, porous and fugitive – this paper has proffered noteworthy projects that encapsulate the recent development of performance space: from the enduring, solid and fixed edifice as "house"; to more permeable auditoria in adaptable buildings; to fleeting, transient and portable structures, in which community is no longer housed but house itself. Although impressive standalone venues continue to serve the urban cultural market, and less formal community facilities focus on

access for more diverse publics, the singular interior stage is increasingly decentred, multiplied and distributed while opening to an outside world that is both virtual and very real. The secure house that European theatre built is undermined by questioning the very ground upon which its hegemonic and homogenising culture has been constructed, thereby 'bringing the house down' to challenge director and architect as individual creative geniuses and audience as passive consumer. In these volatile times, it seems more urgent than ever to critically reconsider the necessary and entangled relationship between space and performance, between site and action, between object and event, between theatre as built form and theatre as art form.

References

Agamben, G. (2009). *"What Is an Apparatus?" and Other Essays*. Stanford University Press.

Atelier Jean Nouvel. *Danish Radio Concert House* (DR Koncerthuset). https://www.jeannouvel.com/en/projects/salle-symphonique-de-la-radio-danoise [accessed 20 October 2023].

Benjamin, W. (1999) *The Arcades Project.* (Translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin). Belknap Press

Brauneck, M. (2017) Preface. In M. Brauneck / ITI Zentrum Deutschland (Eds.) *Independent Theatre in Contemporary Europe: Structures – Aesthetics – Cultural Policy*. Transcript.

Clement, C. (1998). *Opera, or, the Undoing of Women*. University of Minnesota Press.

Derrida, Jacques (2004). The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation. In E. Scheer (Ed.), *Antonin Artaud: A Critical Reader*, (pp. 39–46). Routledge.

Glancey, J. (2010) Junkitecture and the Jellyfish Theatre. In *The Guardian* (16 August 2010): https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2010/aug/16/junkitecture-jellyfish-theatre-kaltwasser-kobberling [accessed 20 October 2024].

HWA (Haworth Tompkins Architects): 'Young Vic, 2006: rebuilding a world famous theatrical powerhouse'.
https://www.haworthtompkins.com/work/young-vic [accessed 20 October 2024]

Jacobs, J. (1890). *English Fairy Tales*. Oxford University.

Kaye, N. (2000). *Site-Specific Art: Performance. Place and Documentation*. Routledge Press.

Kwinter, S. (2001). A*rchitectures of Time: Toward a Theory of the Event in Modernist Culture*. MIT Press.

Lacan, J. (1990) *Television*. (Translated by Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson). W.W. Norton and Co.

Mark, L. (2014). Assemble Reveals Pop-up Timber Theatre. In *Architect's Journal* (03 Sep 2014): https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/assemble-reveals-pop-up-timber-theatre [Accessed 20 October 2024]

McKenzie, J. (2008). Global Feeling: (Almost) All You Need Is Love. In D. Hannah & O. Harsløf (Eds.), *Performance Design* (pp. 127-142). Museum Tusculanum Press.

Moore, Rowan (2021). 'Urban clickbait? Why 'iconic architecture' is all the rage again' in The Guardian (24th January 2021) https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2021/jan/24/urban-clickbait-why-iconic-architecture-is-all-the-rage-again [accessed 20 October 2024].

Nield, S. (2008). The Proteus Cabinet, or 'We Are Here but Not Here. In *Research in Drama Education*, v13 n2 p137-145 Jun 2008.

Nietzsche, F. (1997). *Untimely Meditations* (trans R.G Hollingdale). Cambridge University Press.

Pearson, M. (2010). "Director's Note." In *The Persians Programme*. Accessed September 22, 2022.https://www.nationaltheatrewales.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/06_The_Persians_Programme.pdf [accessed 22 March 2020].

Pustianaz, M. (2022). *Surviving Theatre: The Living Archive of Spectatorship*. Routlege Press.

Remshardt, R. & Mancewicz, A. (2023). *The Routledge Companion to Contemporary European Theatre and Performance.* Routledge Press.

Spivak, G. C. (1999). *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. Harvard University Press.

UN News (2022). "UNHCR: A record 100 million people forcibly displaced worldwide" (23 May 2022): https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/05/1118772 [accessed 20 October 2024]. United Nations.