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Another Stage is Possible: Theatre Venues outside the Theatre Buildings

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Another Stage is Possible: Theatre Venues outside the Theatre Buildings

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Abstract

Schechner's *6 Axioms for Environmental Theater*, published in *The Drama Review* in 1968, basically states the principles of the theatre genre in which the entire space that the performers and the audience are present is the space of the show. Today, examples of environmental theatre have been staged in Istanbul too. This paper delves into the use of space in performance, using Schechner's *6 Axioms for Environmental Theater* as a reference. The paper focuses on three plays, namely *Freak*, *The Teapot Left a White Trace on the Rosewood Table Inherited from My Mother*, and *Büyük Zarifi Apartment*, which were all staged in the Beyoğlu district of Istanbul, Turkey. These plays were performed in spaces that were not originally intended as theatres but were re-functionalized and transformed into performance spaces, showcasing environmental theatre features.

The purpose of this paper is to explore how areas beyond traditional theatre venues have been converted into performance spaces and to investigate how historical spaces have been transformed into performance spaces. This research will determine if plays that use environmental theatre, with different areas used throughout the space, comply with Schechner's principles. If the plays do not conform to Schechner's principles, the research will identify new principles that should be developed.

All three plays take place in three historical locations in Beyoğlu. The play venues are Zarifi Apartment, an old Greek apartment building; Metrohan, the world's second oldest metro tunnel on the ground floor; and Hope Alkazar, the old cinema on Istiklal Street.

This paper uses a research method based on observation and experience of the plays. It aims to determine principles on the impact and transformation of space on performance.

Keywords: environmental theatre, theatre venues, 6 axioms, performing spaces, site-specific theatre.

Another Stage is Possible

In his book *The Environmental Theater* (1973), Schechner states: "In traditional theater architecture, the dark auditorium is like a stomach, waiting to be filled by the pre-chewed experience offered from the brightly lit stage mouth (p.18)." Thus, after the second half of the twentieth century, there was a shift in theatre production towards staging plays in non-theatrical spaces such as garages, car parks, homes, and ateliers. Moreover, the themes explored became more critical, focusing on social issues, highlighting everyday life, and aiming to inspire the audience to action. To achieve this, the themes centred around social issues, leading to performances in more accessible, everyday spaces that brought theatre closer to the public, with theatre groups staging their works in ordinary, daily-life locations.

Schechner's 6 Axioms for Environmental Theatre

Schechner, aimed to merge Western theatre with traditional forms, creating a ceremonial theatre that revived early human storytelling and rituals. He criticized the passive role of the audience in Western theatre and envisioned performances based on physical expression and active participation. Several factors influenced his approach to environmental theatre, including the rise of alternative theatres, politically oppositional groups challenging commercial theatre, shifting political freedoms, and the emergence of "happening" performances. These elements collectively positioned Schechner as a pioneer in environmental theatre.

In the spring of 1968, Schechner published his *Six Principles of Environmental Theater* in TDR, aiming to shift Western theatre toward a more performative style. He emphasised that the entire space shared by artists and audience should be viewed as the performance space. These principles reflected the styles of independent and alternative theatre groups and performance art forms. which Schechner (1971, p. 379) called "other theaters" Here are the principles of Environmental Theatre:

- 1.The Theatrical Event is a Set of Related Transactions
- 2.All the Space is used for Performance; All the Space is used for the Audience
- 3.The Theatrical Event Can Take Place Either in a Totally Transformed Space or in 'Found Space'
- 4.Focus is Flexible and Variable
- 5.All Production Elements Speak in their own Language
- 6.The Text need be neither the Starting Point nor the Goal of a Production. There May be No Text at All.

(Schechner, 1968, p.41-64)

Figure 1

Relationship Between Space and Performance within the Scope of Environmental Theatre Principles Space. Source: Made by Author

6 Axioms for Environmental Theatre	Hope Alkazar /Freak	Büyük Zarifi Apartmanı /Büyük Zarifi Apartment	Metrohan / The Teapot Left...
			
1.The Theatrical Event is a Set of Related Transactions	An Anatolian Tale	A Daily Story from Real Life	A Daily Story from Real Life
2.All the Space is used for Performance; All the Space is used for the Audience	Audience Positioned in a U-Shape, No Barrier Between Audience and Actor	Audience in a Single Row, No Barrier Between Audience and Actor	Audience Positioned in a U-Shape, No Barrier Between Audience and Actor
3.The Theatrical Event Can Take Place Either in a Totally Transformed Space or in "Found Space"	Transformed Space /Former Cinema	Found Space /Old Apartment	Found Space /Old Train Station
4.Focus is Flexible and Variable	Dual Focus (Actors and Visuals)	Dual Focus (Actors and Video)	Single Focus (Actors)
5.All Production Elements Speak in their own Language	Equally	Equally	Equally
6.The Text need be neither the Starting Point nor the Goal of a Production. There May be No Text at All.	Text Present /Story Told in a Linear Manner	Text Present /Story Told in a Linear Manner	Text Present /Story Told in an Episodic Manner

Theatre Plays Beyond Traditional Theatres in Istanbul

The alternative theatre movement and the use of unconventional theatre spaces that increased in Turkey during the 1990s have inspired some contemporary alternative performances. These groups, often staging their plays in Istanbul, premiere their productions at international festivals and continue showing them throughout the season. A common feature of these plays is their use of non-theatrical spaces as performance areas, eliminating any physical boundary between the audience and the actors, thereby transforming the entire space into a stage. Thus, these performances are defined and promoted as forms of environmental theatre. This section will examine *Büyük Zarifi Apartmanı*, performed in an apartment on the second floor of the Zarifi Apartment, a 150-year-old Greek building; *Freak*, staged at the renovated venue Hope Alkazar, formerly the historic Alkazar Cinema; and *The Teapot Left a White Trace on the Rosewood Table Inherited from My Mother*, performed on the second floor of the old tunnel metro station. These plays will be analysed in terms of the relationship between space and performance within the scope of Schechner's environmental theatre principles.

Conclusion

Today in Turkey, environmental theatre, even if it adheres to all of Schechner's principles, does not aim to mobilize the audiences or direct them toward social issues. Instead of being deeply integrated with the public, it is presented as a specialized form of environmental theatre, often with limited seating capacity and typically located in a special venue in the city. To offset the increased costs, private companies mostly sponsor these productions, which usually premiere at festivals.

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