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# PROCEEDINGS OF THE PERFORMING SPACE 2023 CONFERENCE

(2025)

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## 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

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# PERFORMANCE & SPACE

## PROCEEDINGS OF THE PERFORMING SPACE 2023 CONFERENCE

**7 - 9 July, 2023, Nafplio, Greece**


Edited by

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



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Christina Zoniou, University of the Peloponnese



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University of the Peloponnese





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**2025**

# PERFORMING SPACE 2023
# Conference Programme
### 7-9 July, 2023, Nafplio, Greece

## Friday 7th

9:15 Registration

9:30 Welcome address

**1st Session. Site-Specific Performance I**

Chair: Athena Stourna

9:50 Anna Tsichli Boissonnas. University of the Peloponnese, Greece

*Traumland - The Land of (our) Dreams. A Journey through Space, Body, Language and Performance for the Search of the Iconic and Sublime Place to Live in Surreal Times*

10:10 Fatma Erkök. Istanbul Technical University, Turkey

*Site-Specific Performance Works of Tugce Tuna: Examining Spatial Performativity through a Turkish Choreographer's Perspective*

10:30 Kimvi Nguyen. Xi' an Jiaotong- Liverpool University, Suzhou. China

*Performing Topophilia*

10:50 Dimitra Kordomenou. National Technical University of Athens. Greece

"Lifting one's head up": Two Cases of Public Nomadic Interventions

11:10 Discussion

11:50 Break

**2nd Session. Space, Ritual and Myth I**

Chair: Maria Mikedaki

12:00 Ioanna Papadopoulou. University of the Peloponnese, Greece

*This Used to Be my Playground… Argos as "Background", as Scenery, as Past and as Present in the Aeschylean Tragedy*

12:20 Stefania Strouza. University of Thessaly, Greece

*Posthumanist Performativity in Heiner Müller's Play 'Despoiled Shore Medea-Material Landscape with Argonauts'*

12:40 Evangelia Danadaki. Central Saint Martins, UK

*Metramorphosis: a Performative Model of Becoming and the Paradigm of Antigone (Again)*

13:00 Ilias Sapountzakis. University of Athens, Greece

*Tragic Space in Site-Specific Productions of Aeschylean Tragedies: Prometheus Bound (2010) by Theodoros Terzopoulos and Persians (2010) by Mike Pearson*

13:20 Discussion

14:00 Lunch break

**3rd Session. Space, Ritual and Myth II**

Chair: Maria Mikedaki

16:30 Ufuk Soyöz. Kadir Has Üniversitesi, Turkey

*Reconstructing Hellenistic Performance: Rituals of Nikephoria at the Precinct of Pergamon Altar*

16:50 Aristotelis Kaleris. Cornell University, USA
Gabi Castro. Architect. Arch, Cornell University, USA

*De-form to Re-form. Architectural Preservation as Safekeeping of the Performative Structure of Space, an Experimental Study for the Temple of Apollo Epicurius at Bassae*

17:10 Discussion

17:30 Break

**Keynote speaker**

17:40 Dorita Hannah

*Theatre Has Left the Building: What Is (a) Theatre Now?*

18:20 Discussion

## Saturday 8th

**4th Session. Site-Specific Performance II**

Chair: Athena Stourna

9:30 James Martin Charlton. Middlesex University, UK

*Farms, Libraries and Adventure Playground Spaces for Orwell, Hardie, Carroll and Fry: James Martin Charlton's Site-Responsive Productions of James Kenworth's Plays in Newham*

9:50 Aycan Kizilkaya. Technical University of Munich, Germany

*Site-Specific Theatre: A Case Study in Istanbul*

10:10 Rania Kapetanaki. University of Athens, Greece

*Performance – Public Space and Time: A Dialogue of Co-Creation and Interaction*

10:30 Discussion

11:00 Break

**5th Session. Performance and Space Theory**

Chair: Eftichis Pirovolakis

11:10 Tyrone Grima. Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology, Malta

*Spatial Dynamics in Sartre's Huis Clos: Otherness as a Spatial Oppression*

11:30 Magdalini Dourou. National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece

*The Politics of Space in Ça ira (1) Fin de Louis Directed by Joël Pommerat*

11:50 Thomas Symeonidis. Athens School of Fine Arts, Greece

*Aesthetic Description as Performative Act. On Re-Figuring Spatial Loss*

12:10 Break

12:20 Elena Peytchinska. University of Applied Arts Vienna, Austria

*Performing Stage: An Interdisciplinary Re-reading of the Black Box*

12:40 Eleni Linaki. National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece

*How the Tangible and the Intangible Cultural Assets of the Space Create a New Identity*

13:00 Discussion

13:40 Lunch break

**6th Session. Understanding Space through Performance**

Chair: Pablo Berzal Cruz

16:00 Dimitra Kanellopoulou. ENSA Paris-Malaquais School of Architecture. France.
Stella (Styliani) Dimitrakopoulou. University of Peloponnese. Greece

*Performing Architecture: A Collaborative Educational Research in Akronafplia*

16:20 Burcu Bostancı. Istanbul Technical University, Turkey
Fatma Erkök. Faculty of Architecture. Istanbul Technical University, Turkey

*Exploring Symbolic and Temporary Spaces in Urban Rituals Using Fire as their Primary Component*

16:40 Ursula Dimitriou. Central St Martins University of the Arts London, UK
Aliki Kylika. National Technical University of Athens, Greece. / Central St Martins, University of the Arts London, UK
Eliza Soroga. National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece. / Goldsmiths University of London, UK

*Negotiating Performance Architecture as a Pedagogical Tool*

17:00 Break

17:10 Renato Bocchi. Università Iuav di Venezia, Italy
Juan Carlos Quindós. ESI Escuela Superior de Diseño, Valladolid, Spain
PhD(C) Valentina Rizzi. Visual artist. Università Iuav di Venezia, Italy

*Performing Bodies, Performing Architectures. Lab Excursion between Art Installations, Build Space and Transformative Practices*

17:30 Anna Tzakou. University of the Peloponnese, Greece

Performing Landscape as a “Dream of Presence”

17:50 Discussion

## Sunday 9th

**7th Session. Perceiving Space**

Chair: Christina Zoniou

9:00 Antonia Vasilakou. University of the Peloponnese, Greee

*Healing Flavors: Exploring Emotional Perception in the Landscape of Askleipeion Sanctuary*

9:20 Iro Grigoriadi. University of Peloponnese, Greece

*The Notion of Space in Dance Performance*

9:40 Patricia Lazou. Artist. University of Ioannina, Greece

*Anti-Memory. The Space Where the Body Moves Becomes its Place of Origin*

10:00 Georgia Eleftheraki. National Technical University of Athens, Greece.
George Tzamalis. National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece.

*The "CATography" of Apo Syros. A Different Narration.*

10:20 Discussion

10:50 Break

**8th Session. Digital matters**

Chair: Alba Balmaseda Domínguez

11:00 Fernando Zaparaín Hernández. Architect. Universidad de Valladolid, Spain
Jorge Ramos Jular. Architect. Universidad de Valladolid, Spain

*Digitalstage. Spatial Analysis of 21st C. Digital Scenographic Installations*

11:20 Pablo Llamazares Blanco. Universidad de Valladolid, Spain

*Digital Stages for a New Performative Space. The Work of Random International*

11:40 Daniel Barba Rodríguez. Universidad de Valladolid, Spain

*Digital Interactive Space Created by Adrien M & Clarie B*

12:00 Vasiliki Sirakouli. University of Athens, Greece

*Virtual Spaces of Music and Dance. The TRaMIR Project on Intangible Heritage*

12:20 Discussion

12:50 Break

**9th Session. Performing Space I**

Chair: Alberto Morell Sixto

13:00 Christina Zoniou. University of the Peloponnese, Greece

*Performing Democracy. Site-Specific and Forum Theatre in Spintime, Rome*

13:20 Athena Stourna. University of the Peloponnese, Greece

*Of Real and Mythic Places: Performing in Archaeological Sites in the Argolid*

13:40 Discussion

14:00 Lunch break

**9th Session. Performing Space II**

Chair: Alberto Morell Sixto

16:00 Andrea Moneta. Nottingham Trent University, UK

*The City as a Museum: Restoring the Identity and Intangible Heritage of Nottingham's Multicultural Past through Augmented Reality and Location-Based Technology*

16:20 Alba Balmaseda Domínguez. Università degli Studi Roma Tre, Italy

*WET Cities: Reversing Bathing Rituals*

16:40 Pablo Berzal Cruz. Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Spain

*Spatial Performativity in the Natural Environment. At the Origins of the Asclepieion at Epidaurus*

17:00 Discussion

17:30 Closing ceremony

# CONTENTS


**Introduction** ..... i

**Keynote speaker: Dorita Hannah** ..... 1

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

**Fatma Erkök** ..... 15

*Site-Specific Performance Works of Tugce Tuna: Examining Spatial Performativity through a Turkish Choreographer's Perspective*

**Kimvi Nguyen** ..... 31

*Embodied Topophilia and Vernacular Place-Making: An Analysis of British Artist Kimvi's Filmed Performance Auntie's Tiles in the Chinese Context*

**Dimitra Kordomenou** ..... 43

*"Lifting One's Head Up": Two Cases of Public Nomadic Interventions*

**Stefania Strouza** ..... 61

*Posthumanist Performativity in Heiner Müller's Play 'Despoiled Shore Medea-Material Landscape with Argonauts'*

**Evangelia Danadaki** ..... 73

*Metramorphosis: a Performative Model of Becoming and the Paradigm of Antigone (Again)*

**Ilias Sapountzakis** ..... 83

*Tragic Space in Site-Specific Productions of Aeschylean Tragedies: Prometheus Bound (2010) by Theodoros Terzopoulos and Persians (2010) by Mike Pearson*

**Aristotelis Kaleris & Gabi Castro** ..... 94

*De-form to Re-form. Architectural Preservation as Safekeeping of the Performative Structure of Space, an Experimental Study for the Temple of Apollo Epicurius at Bassae*

**James Martin Charlton** ..... 112

*Farms, Libraries and Adventure Playground Spaces for Orwell, Hardie, Carroll and Fry: James Martin Charlton's Site-Responsive Productions of James Kenworth's Plays in Newham*

**Rania Kapetanaki** ..... 119

*Reflecting on Four Performances in the Public Space of Athens*

**Tyrone Grima** ..... 132

*Spatial Dynamics in Sartre's Huis Clos: Otherness as a Spatial Oppression*

**Magdalini Dourou** ..... 146

*The Politics of Space in Ça ira (1) Fin de Louis Directed by Joël Pommerat*

**Thomas Symeonidis** ..... 161

*Aesthetic Description as Performative Act. On Re-Figuring Spatial Loss*

**Dimitra Kanellopoulou & Stella (Styliani) Dimitrakopoulou** ..... 170

*Performing Architecture: A Collaborative Educational Research in Acronafplia*

**Burcu Bostancı & Fatma Erkök** ..... 181
*Exploring Symbolic and Temporary Spaces in Urban Rituals Using Fire as their Primary Component*

**Ursula Dimitriou, Aliki Kylika & Eliza Soroga** ..... 193
*Negotiating Performance Architecture as a Pedagogical Tool*

**Valentina Rizzi** ..... 203
*Performing Bodies, Performing Architectures. Lab Excursion between Art Installations, Build Space and Transformative Practices*

**Antonia Vasilakou** ..... 216
*Healing Flavors: Exploring Emotional Perception in the Landscape of Askleipeion Sanctuary*

**Iro Grigoriadi** ..... 230
*The Notion of Space in Dance Performance*

**Patricia Lazou** ..... 236
*Anti-Memory. The Space Where the Body Moves Becomes its Place of Origin*

**Georgia Eleftheraki & George Tzamalis** ..... 251
*The "CATography" of Apo Syros. A Different Narration*

**Fernando Zaparaín Hernández & Jorge Ramos Jular** ..... 265
*Digitalstage. Spatial Analysis of 21st C. Digital Scenographic Installations*

**Pablo Llamazares Blanco** ..... 275
*Digital Stages for a New Performative Space. The Work of Random International*

**Daniel Barba Rodríguez** ..... 289
*Digital Interactive Space Created by Adrien M & Clarie B*

**Vasiliki Sirakouli** ..... 299
*Virtual Spaces of Music and Dance. The TRaMIR Project on Intangible Heritage*

**Christina Zoniou** ..... 306
*Performing Democracy. Site-Specific and Forum Theatre in Spintime, Rome*

**Athena Stourna** ..... 326
*Of Real and Mythic Places: Performing in Archaeological Sites in the Argolid*

**Andrea Moneta** ..... 334
*The City as a Museum: Restoring the Identity and Intangible Heritage of Nottingham's Multicultural Past through Augmented Reality and Location-Based Technology*

**Alba Balmaseda Domínguez** ..... 348
*WET Cities: Reversing Bathing Rituals*

**Pablo Berzal Cruz** ..... 362
*Spatial Performativity in the Natural Environment. At the Origins of the Asclepieion at Epidaurus*

**Other Papers Presented at the Conference** ..... 375

**Anna Tsichli Boissonnas** (Abstract) ..... 377
*Traumland - The Land of (our) Dreams. A Journey through Space, Body, Language and Performance for the Search of the Iconic and Sublime Place to Live in Surreal Times*

**Ioanna Papadopoulou** (Abstract) ..... 379

*This Used to Be my Playground… Argos as "Background", as Scenery, as Past and as Present in the Aeschylean Tragedy*

**Ufuk Soyöz** ..... 379

*Reconstructing Hellenistic Performance: Rituals of Nikephoria at the Precinct of Pergamon Altar*

**Aycan Kizilkaya** (Abstract) ..... 381

*Site-Specific Theatre: A Case Study in Istanbul*

**Elena Peytchinska** (Abstract) ..... 382

*Performing Stage: An Interdisciplinary Re-reading of the Black Box*

**Eleni Linaki** (Abstract) ..... 383

*How the Tangible and the Intangible Cultural Assets of the Space Create a New Identity*

**Anna Tzakou** ..... 384

*Performing Landscape as a "Dream of Presence"*

# Performing Space 2023

**Pablo Berzal Cruz**
Universidad Politécnica de Madrid
**Athena Stourna**
University of the Peloponnese
**Christina Zoniou**
University of the Peloponnese
**Giorgos Kondis**
University of the Peloponnese

Performing Space is an ambitious project that aims to explore the relationship between performance and the built environment from all disciplines that study human activity. Using Erving Goffman's (1956) definition in his influential essay *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* as “an action carried out by a participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way in any of the other participants” (p. 8), we could consider that any activity that people perform with the conscious or (usually) unconscious intention of “influencing” their social, but also spatial, environment is a “performance”. Our performances influence our environment, transform it, and the environment also influences and transforms us. So, we can deduce the daily activities or rituals of an ancient people from the remains of their environment, and we can also improve the performances of our society by optimising the environment in which they take place. Traditionally, the relationship between space and performance has been studied within the practices and studies of the performing arts. It is only in recent decades that other disciplines such as philosophy, anthropology, architecture, archaeology or cognitive science have become interested in this relationship, but in an isolated way, usually ignoring all the resources that the performing arts have to offer. The study of the relationship between performance and space can only be approached in a multidisciplinary way. The main objective of Performing Space is to create a meeting point where studies from different disciplines can be presented, experimented with and discussed. The Performing Space 2023 Conference and Workshop, held in Nafplio, Greece, from 7 to 14 July 2023, was the second edition of this project. It was organised by the University of the Peloponnese together with the Polytechnic University of Madrid and hosted by the University of the Peloponnese. This second edition had 36 papers

and 12 workshop participants from more than 10 different countries. In the next edition, in July 2024, the number of papers and the countries of origin of the participants almost doubled, and the number of participants in the three workshops tripled, as a sign of the growing interest in this topic. The results of Performing Space 2023 presented in this publication show some of the main lines of work currently being carried out. A large number of presentations show the performative expression of space through site-specific performances, a recurring line of work since the origins of the artistic expression called Happenings or, later, Performance art. There is also a large number of papers exploring, from different angles, the relationship between space, ritual and myth, a very interesting approach to the built environment that has been recurrent since the 19th century in archaeology, anthropology, geography and sociology, but which is here extended to theatre studies and cognitive sciences. Different philosophical approaches to the scenic space were also presented and we hope that in future editions, within the always necessary philosophical approach, more works on the built environment will be presented. Another interesting approach is represented by the works of different disciplines that use performance as a tool to understand our environment, of which we had several presentations in this edition. One approach that could not be overlooked is the digital, a medium that is becoming increasingly present in our perception of the environment. In this issue, several papers reflected on the use of the digital image in different types of performance. Finally, several papers were presented on the use of performance in education, an increasingly important issue that needs to be addressed in order to counteract the harmful effects of digital media.

In the Performing Space 2024 Conference, these trends have been reinforced with new approaches and new ones have emerged. We hope that the project will continue to be enriched by new editions and new ways of working together in this fascinating way of understanding our world. We would like to thank all the participants in Performing Space 2023 for sharing their research and artistic practice and for providing a rich and diverse body of work that is captured in this volume.

# PROCEEDINGS OF THE
# PERFORMING SPACE 2023 CONFERENCE

# 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.

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# Site-Specific Performance Works of Tuğçe Ulugün Tuna: Examining Spatial Performativity through a Turkish Choreographer's Perspective

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## Abstract

The term "performance" has become extremely common in various arts, literature, and social sciences activities. Performance theorist Richard Schechner has searched the relationship between theory and practice in social sciences and theatre studies, mainly focusing on Turner's model of "social drama". Performance progressively got out of its shelter, the cultural institution, and assumed the role of provoking critical questions about the meaning of art in our highly mediated daily lives. Bodily art performance in space demonstrates a reciprocal interaction. Particularly, site-specific performance has even got a higher dependency on space, architectural or natural. Most site-specific indoor or outdoor performances are primarily concerned with unconventional performance spaces, drawing particular attention to the physical qualities of space and its social or historical connotations. Tuğçe Ulugün Tuna is an awarded Turkish choreographer, contemporary dance and interdisciplinary performance artist, body reader, and academician. Tuna is known to exhibit site-specific choreographies in her works and theatre festivals. Some of her conceptual and choreographic creations stand out as works realized in Istanbul for particular sites, such as *Machine Body* at The Energy Museum Santralistanbul (2008-2009), *Wet Volume* at Bayrampaşa old prison (2010), *Displacement* at the old Hasköy Cotton Factory (2012), *Show of Strength* at St. Pulchérie French School (2014-2019), *Body Drops* at an old public bath (2017), and *Revert* produced in an old shoe factory (Istanbul Beykoz Kundura stage, 2022). *Show of Strength* takes place in a historic high school building and leaves many questions about the body, what the body contains, lives, learns, transforms, changes, accumulates, expresses, and is exposed to. *Wet Volume* undertakes the architectural space (an abandoned prison) and the body as "wet volumes" and interprets feelings such as happiness, service, shame, passion, desire, fear, and human reaction towards these feelings. *Machine Body* focuses on the relationship between body and machine, taking

place in the former Ottoman time power plant converted into a Museum of Energy. This study aims to investigate the structures of Tuna's choreographic works in terms of their particular relations with their location, how the site delivers meanings, how these meanings are interpreted, and how the body exposes these interpreted meanings in the concept of the performance.

*Keywords*: Site-specific performance, Istanbul, industrial heritage, bodily experience.

## Site-Specific Performance Works of Tuğçe Ulugün Tuna: Examining Spatial Performativity through a Turkish Choreographer's Perspective

This paper aims to introduce and examine the work of the Turkish artist Tuğçe Ulugün Tuna, who carries many titles, like contemporary dance artist, performer, movement lecturer, and choreographer. Her *Dance with Different Bodies* project, founded in 2000, focuses on individuals with different physical features and diversity and transforms the body's mental, sentimental, and biodynamic structure. She has used and applied the therapeutic effect of dance and movement, kinaesthetic intelligence, and awareness studies in national and international platforms and different age and social class groups since 2010.

Within the scope of the research, her site-specific works (that she has been producing in the last 15 years) will be mainly under examination. The aim is to investigate the structures of choreographic works in terms of their particular relations with their location, how the site delivers meanings, how these meanings are interpreted, and how the body exposes these interpreted meanings in the concept of the performance. The works mentioned above, realized in Istanbul, will be analysed and discussed systematically to highlight how the phenomenology of place is materialized with the help of bodily performative works.

### Delineating Performance

The discussion on the term "performance" and "site-specific performance" as a particular type of performance can start by providing some broad accounts from key names in performance studies. To begin with the first cited reference, performance theorist Richard Schechner examines the concept of performance concerning four actions: doing, showing doing, and explaining "showing doing." Then, he defines performing as "showing doing," namely, pointing to, underlining, and displaying doing (Schnechner & Brady, 2013). He has searched the indications of such "showing doing" from social sciences to theatre studies, mainly focusing on Turner's model of "social drama."

Carlson (2018) states that "performance" is heavily indebted to terminology and theoretical strategies developed in the social sciences during the 1960s and 1970s, particularly in anthropology and sociology. Goffman defines "performance" as all the activity of a given

participant on a given occasion, which influences any of the other participants in any way (Goffman, 2022). In this definition, influencing other participants is remarkable and recalls the performance's social and collective aspects. Gay McAuley (2010) asserts that for an activity to be regarded as a performance, it must involve the live presence of the performers and those witnessing it, that there must be some intentionality on the part of the performer or witness or both, and that these conditions, in turn, necessitate analysis of the place and temporality which enable both parties to be present to each other, as well as what can be described as the performance contract between them, whether explicit or implicit.

Richard Schechner introduces the term "environmental theatre" into the critical performance lexicon in the 1960s and 1970s as a way to designate stages that broke realism's "fourth wall," getting out of a proscenium stage format by placing spectators inside the action to interact with performers (Schechner, 1973). As such, performance progressively got out of its shelter, the cultural institution, and assumed the role of provoking critical questions about the meaning of art in our highly mediated daily lives.

## Site-Specific Art

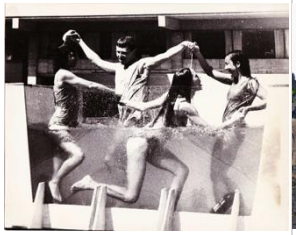
Performance, taken in all terms, is contextual, and bodily art performance in space is by all means bound to the qualities of space. A particular type of performance, site-specific, has even a higher dependency on architectural or natural space. For Miriam Seidel (2003), there is a continuum starting with a performance staged in a nontheatrical venue, through work shaped by its setting, and ending with a performance that could not have happened elsewhere. The more site-specific a piece is, the greater its capacity to transform perceptions of the place. Hal Foster (2011) argues that place is fundamental to all this work, yet, as Rosalind Krauss considers site-specificity is not its end so much as its medium, or, more precisely, its medium is "the body-in-destination" in a particular site, and in this respect, the body remains as primary as place. Modernist sculpture broke with this logic in its abstract forms and found materials and its break with the pedestal. This was a dialectical event that opened sculpture to the possibilities of both modernist "sitelessness" and postmodernist site-specificity.

In its earliest formation, site-specific work focused on establishing an inextricable, inseparable relationship between the work and its site and demanded the viewer's physical presence for the work's completion. Richard Serra wrote that his 120-foot sculpture *Tilted Arc* was "commissioned and designed for one particular site: Federal Plaza. It is a site-specific work and as such not to be relocated" (Kwon, 1997, p.86). Nick Kaye (2013) asserts that site-specific art frequently works to trouble the opposition between the site and the work. He stresses that this troubling means that the site functions as a text perpetually in the process of being written and being read. The term "site-specific" originates in the visual arts and is

grounded in the minimalist art practices of the 1960s. Artists such as Donald Judd, Frank Stella, Beverly Pepper, Jo Baer, Dan Flavin, Mary Obering, Sol Lewitt, Eva Hesse, and Robert Morris reacted against the modernist tendencies of Abstract Expressionism to create art that centred on perception, the viewer with the art object. Political street theatre, environmental theatre, invisible theatre, ambulatory theatre, happenings, the early twentieth-century avant-garde, and popular festive traditions such as parades, carnivals, and processions are some of the myriad theatrical influences on site-specific practices (Ferdman, 2018).

**Figure 1**

*Some Works of Site-Specific Dance Artists*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |
| Trisha Brown, Man Walking Down the Side of a Building, apartment, New York, 1970 | Marylee Hardenbergh, Young Bridge, Mississippi River, 2011 | Heidi Duckler, Out of Circulation, Santa Monica Civic Library, 1993 | Stephan Koplowitz, KOKEREI-Projekt: Kokerei Zollverein Factory, Essen, Germany, 1999 |
|  |  |  |  |
| Body Cartography, *Togethering*, Oslo Public Space, 2019 | Joanna Haigood - Zaccho Dance Theater, *Picture Red Hook, Grain Terminal,* NY, 2002 | Tamar Rogoff, *In Deep*, Lincoln Center, NY, 1991 | Amelia Rudolph - Project Bandaloop, Vertical Dance Company Golconda Fort, India |

## Site-Specific Performance/Dance: Some Key Names & Works

Performance can reformulate how we perceive and experience space and place. The specific nature of performance is the propensity for both “site” and “performance” boundaries to slip (Birch & Tompkins, 2012). For Nick Kaye (2013), this slippage is inherent to the form: “site-specificity arises precisely in uncertainties over the borders and limits of work and site”. In practice, “site-specificity” initially referred to artwork creatively tailored for a specific location (Ferdman, 2018). In works like these, the ingredients of one contemporary art form -movement and music, the outdoors, a profoundly involved audience, and a sense of altered experience- begin to approximate those of a traditional ritual event. Tamar Rogoff says: “My most intimate theatrical experiences happen in site work. The energy of so many people, the inherent spirituality of being under the sky.” (Seidel, 2003, p.22) In describing the effects of this transformation process, many artists speak of “activating” or “enlivening” places. Site-specific artistic approach can interpret and utilize underused, liminal spaces (vacant lots, polluted waterways) and urban ruins. Moreover, it can heighten one’s experience of structures and areas already charged with decades of historical use (Seidel, 2003).

Some pioneer artists/dancers are noteworthy for having chosen unfamiliar public spaces for their performances, which led them to take place in the literature of performance studies (Figure 1).

To summarise, the attributes of site-specific performance could be listed as:

- a performance that is staged in a non-theatrical venue, through work that is shaped by its setting, and ending with a performance that could not have happened anywhere else;
- experimented on by artists who take their work out of the theatres and lofts
- an “activation” of the site;
- able to change awareness of the place in which it happens;
- able to establish an engagement with the audience;
- drawn heavily on the principles of sensory awareness;
- an outgrowth of artists’ working process,
- built on improvisational movement “scores.”

## Tuğçe Ulugün Tuna and her Artistic Identity

Tuğçe Ulugün Tuna is a multi-talented artist, award-winning choreographer, contemporary dance and interdisciplinary performance artist, body reader, and academic. She has also been working as a dance and movement therapist in the field of transformative activism. She describes her central artistic understanding in this brief statement: *“*I believe in the uniqueness of the body within this relative concept called time. If there is a gap between creativity, life, and

existence, my works are a transparent transition area." (Tuna, 2023). She describes her site-specific work understanding as such:

> The idea of producing site-specific work has had a profound effect on me. That space becomes the hidden subject or skeleton of the work I want to make. I spend time in places and decide which bodies I should invite here, that is, should I invite every dancer/actor friend I know, or which body can respond to the idea I want to realize/to the embodied idea I will do here? The question is whether the space can also accept that body as an extension of it. In site-specific work, site/space is the hidden subject but becomes the core subject. This is not to perform in the venue but to produce the work in the venue. It is an excellent opportunity to allow the space to change and transform production (Fatma Erkök, personal communication, 20.10.2023).

She likes playing with definitions, distorting what she knows while making the definition. She prefers the idea of transforming a closed space within itself and that the stage can be changed differently than its usual structure.

## Selected Site-Specific Performances by Tuna

Most site-specific indoor or outdoor performances were primarily concerned with unconventional performance spaces, drawing particular attention to the physical qualities of the space and its social or historical connotations. Tuğçe Ulugün Tuna is known for exhibiting site-specific choreographies in her works and theatre festivals. Some of her conceptual and choreographic creations stand out as works realized in Istanbul for particular sites (Figure 2), such as:

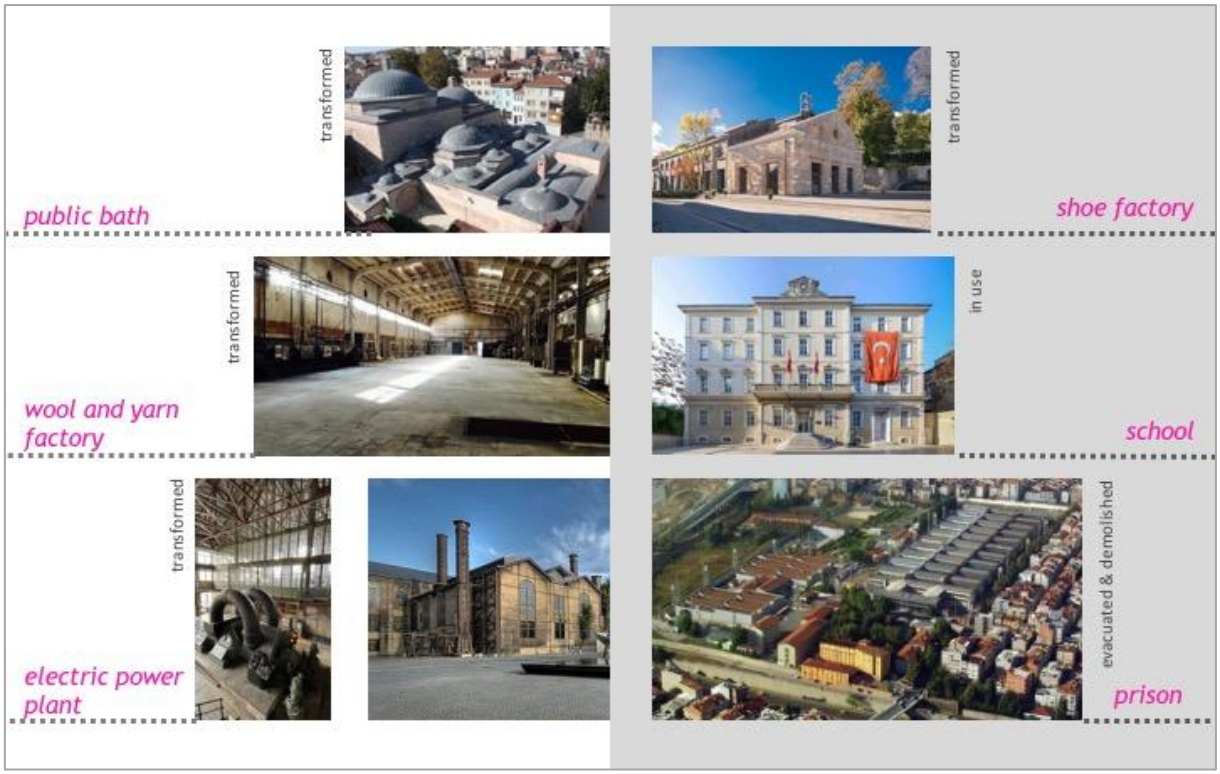
- *Machine Body*, in the Energy Museum Santralistanbul (former electric power plant), 2008-2009;
- *Wet Volume*, in Bayrampaşa prison, 2010;
- *Displacement*, in former Hasköy Wool-yarn Factory, 2012;
- *Show of Strength*, in St. Pulchérie French School, 2014-2019;
- *Body Drops*, in a former public bath (Küçük Mustafa Paşa bath), 2017;
- *Revert*, in a former shoe factory (Istanbul Beykoz Kundura stage), 2022.

Tuna explains here how she places her artistic behaviour relating to the city of Istanbul:

> It is also possible to stage a work you produce in different places, but it is specific to the place when you make a work specific to an area, then the central core is the place. I have witnessed the transformation and destruction of Istanbul over the last 20 years. That is why working in transformed and destroyed places, being in touch with the memory of that place once again, or carrying the memory of that place to the present through my body attracts me a lot (Fatma Erkök, personal communication, 20.10.2023).

**Figure 2**

*Tuna's Selected Site-Specific Performances with Their Particular Sites in Istanbul*




***Machine Body*, The Energy Museum Santralistanbul, Istanbul Bilgi University, 2008-2009**

*Machine Body* was produced for the 16th International İstanbul Theatre Festival in 2008. The now Energy Museum of a private university was once an electric power plant. With the remnant vast machines of the plant, this industrial heritage space itself is impressive. Tuna was captivated by seeing how these machines brought the past with them. She felt as if she could hear the sound of the past and what was going on there from these machines. The things that are common to both the human body and machinery interest her very much. Tuna interprets the machines' vitality, bodies, systems, and energies by analogy to the human body. She describes this as: "Only time and energy are left alone among partitions of iron-skin, blood-engine oil, cable-artery, breath-area, hot-cold, cease-standby, corrosion-aging, and immobility-movement" (Tuna, 2023).

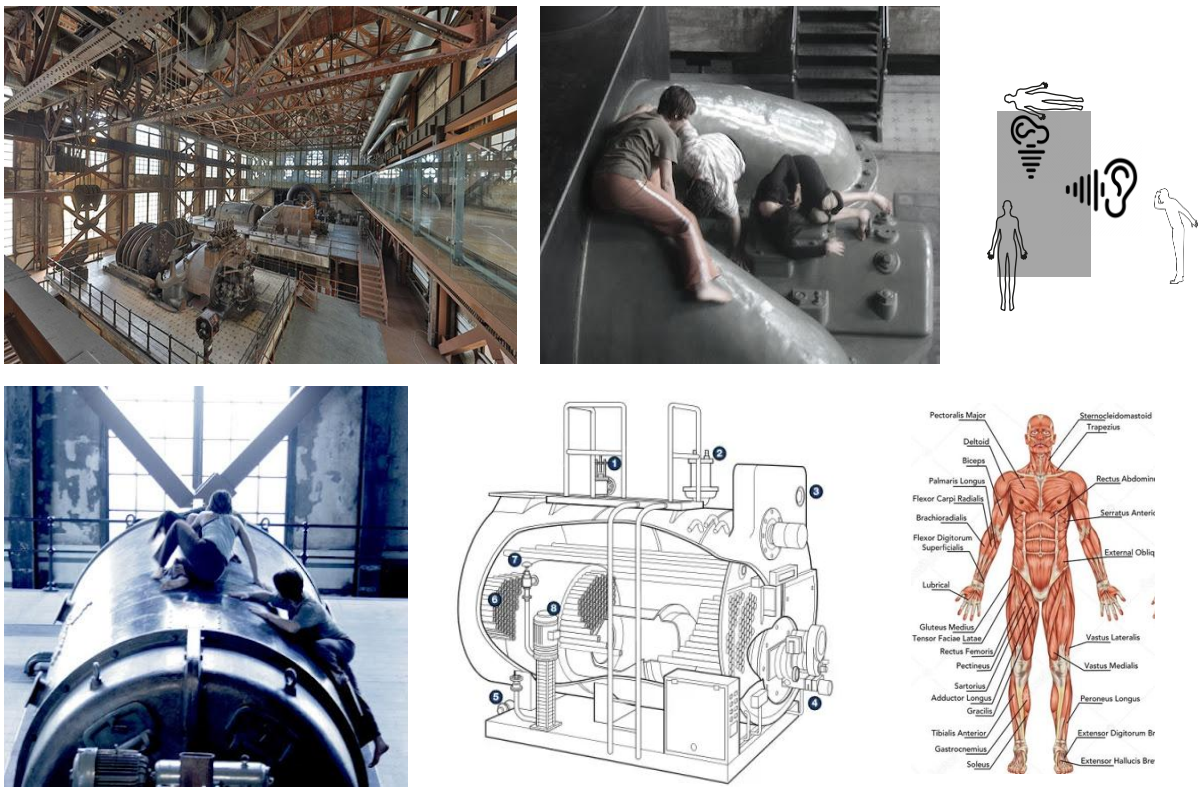
Some energy is left in the air, searching for the essence and joining with the body. Dancer bodies are seen intermingling with machine bodies. Spectators tour the museum, watching the simultaneous performances between the machines at different parts of the museum (Figure 3). This work displays the artist's state of listening to the spirit of the place (*genius loci*) and the past life of it.

The main conceptual aspects of this work are: questioning the machine-body relationship; hearing-sensing the body of the machine, which once produced energy; performing as an

interpenetration of machine-body and body-machine; playing on the dualities of skin-iron, blood-engine oil, artery-cable, hot-cold, aging-corrosion and movement-immobility.

**Figure 3**

*The Energy Museum, Machines and Bodies in Performance*




### *Wet Volume,* Former Bayrampaşa Prison, 2010

This work was produced for the 17th International İstanbul Theatre Festival in its venue, the former prison, Turkey's most significant at the time. Tuna narrates how she decided to use this place:

> It is closed now; I remember it from the resuscitation operation I watched on TV. It was a place where police and special teams landed from helicopters, and firebombs were thrown inside. Then I remember seeing their roofs on a city flight from Ataturk airport; I was very impressed and kept it in my mind for a long time. In 2010, I received permission to work there as part of the Theatre Festival. (Fatma Erkök, personal communication, 20.10.2023).

She created a choreography in which dancers made several performances at several parts of the prison (courtyard, rehabilitation hall stage, corridors, refectory), and the audience was taken from one point to another, where an episode with a physical expression followed each place (Figure 4).

Tuna undertook the architectural space and the body as “wet volumes”. Tuna explains the occurrence of this concept as such:

> While searching for places to use, I noticed the walls were full of holes. I asked myself: “How could there be so many holes simultaneously?” There were crime files on the floor, photographs, documents of prisoners, and personal belongings all around, and suddenly, it started raining, and water started flowing from the ceiling above because of the holes. Then I realized I wanted it to rain on the audience while they were watching. I wanted them to experience that water can spill out of all the holes and that it can rain through the building, because the ceiling was improper and the wall was inadequate. (Fatma Erkök, personal communication, 20.10.2023)

**Figure 4**

Wet Volume *Performed in a Former Prison*



Tuna had prepared to create an artificial rain by pouring water from above, but it rained on the performance day, so this effect happened naturally. The concept of wetness opens up both the wetness found in ruins (damp, mould) and the water found in the body. The artist searches gloomy traces of past life in the abandoned and dilapidated prison. She investigates the relations between crime and the individual and questions pain, guilt, fear, evil, innocence, shame, memories, dreams, traces, and purification. She interprets feelings of happiness, shame, passion, and fear, along with human reactions towards these feelings.

She evaluates this work as psychologically very tiring, because it took place in the burned cells of Turkey's previously largest prison through the old prisoners’ belongings. The performers lit great hellfires, burnt the doors, and made videos they used in their performances,

all happening right in the heart of all the gloomy traces of the past. For Tuna, it was incomprehensible that the state would drop firebombs to deal with the events there.

The choreography is set up so the audience enters through fire and smoke. They then sit at the wards and watch the performance, which takes place in the courtyards. From there, they proceed to the second ward, the refectory, the ventilation halls, and then finally to the so-called stage, watching stories and solo performances within each of them. Tuna continues to explain the notion and deeper meaning of the place to her:

> Bayrampaşa was one of the places that challenged me the most. Because we were also seeing what was “not good” there, what crime was. The impact of that place stayed with me for years. It is impossible for anyone who enters there to come out better. Therefore, the idea of prison in philosophy or the state of imprisonment within the body and overlapping these concepts has challenged me the most (Fatma Erkök, personal communication, 20.10.2023).

She defines this work as “an installation work based on the body-space relation, rather than a dance performance”, stating that the entire space and everyone established a live performance environment.

### *Displacement,* Old Hasköy Wool-Yarn Factory, 2012

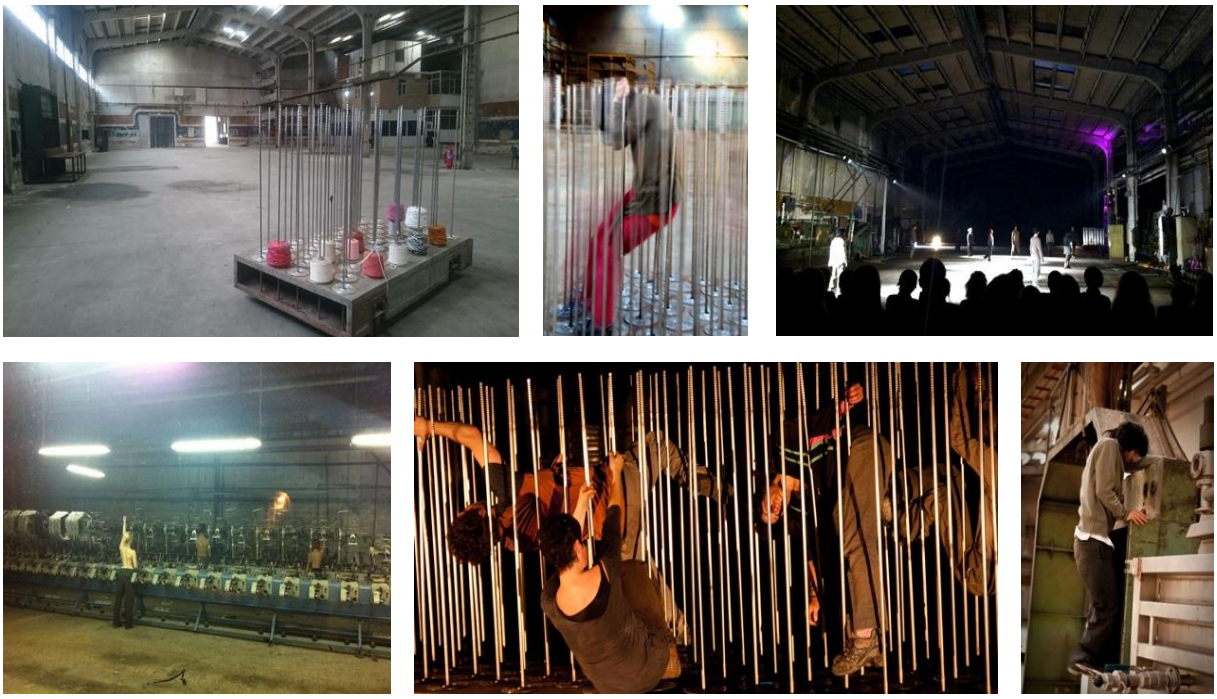
One of İstanbul’s idle industrial heritage, Hasköy Wool and Yarn Factory was founded by the Eluashvili family in 1952 and manufactured yarn for 65 years. In the conceptual stage, all the remaining materials of the factory, the threads, and spools drove Tuna to think of the phrase “life hangs/depends on a thread”. She then asked questions: What did we steal from life? What did you steal from someone else? She then manifested this into an analogy-play of the structures in the body called ligaments (thread-like structures) with the strings of the factory. She questioned what the thing is that pulls these strings, which conceptually relates to terms of stimulation, impulse, balance, displacement, bodily/mental ties, etc.

Embodying, choreographing, and expressing this conceptual theme, she prepared this performance using old factory equipment (yarn dyeing apparatus, production line machines, plastic curtain, yarn, etc.). She also created body installations that the audience sees while entering. She placed the bodies between the multi-armed wool machine, separating the wool from lint to lint. As the audience passes, they suddenly see 8-9 performers side by side. Performers also used the yarn dyeing apparatus as performing space, as if they were yarn to be winded (Figure 5).

In this work, the artist dives into an abstract journey starting from the product of the old industrial facility.

**Figure 5**

*Old Wool-Yarn Factory and* Displacement



***Show of Strength,* St. Pulchérie French School, 2014-2019**

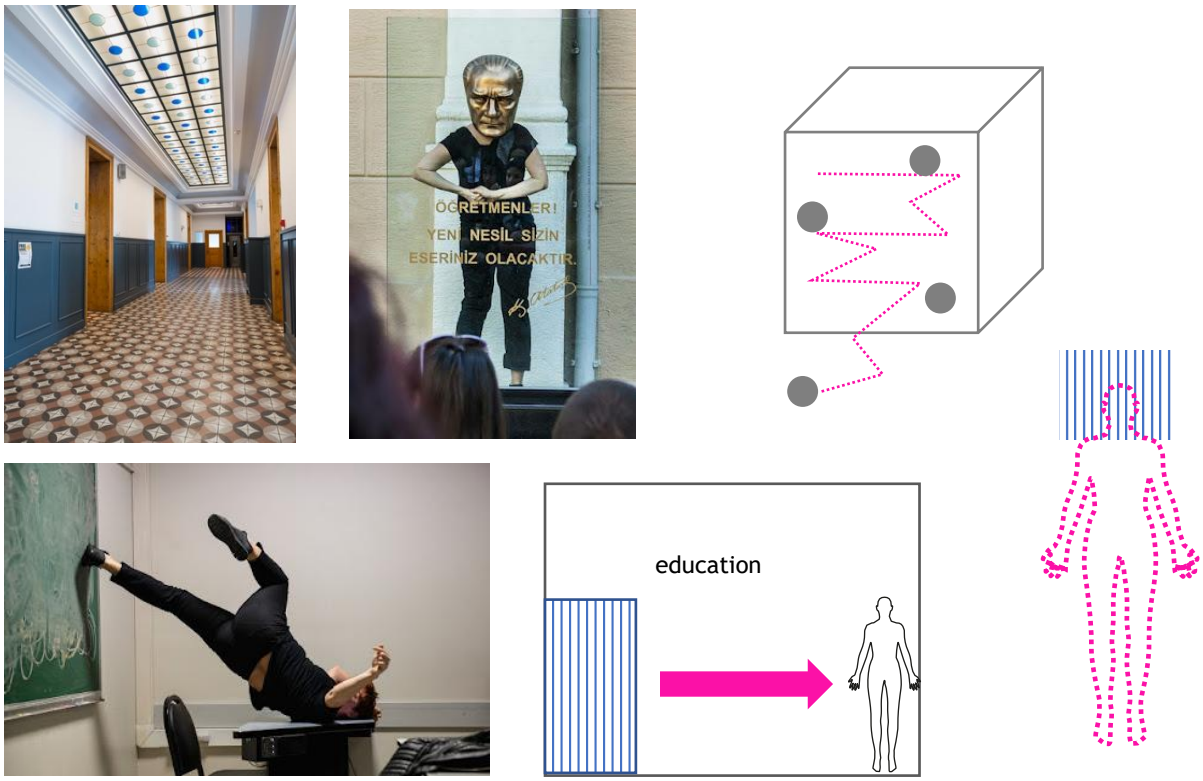
In the 177-year-old Sainte Pulchérie French High School in Istanbul, this performance strongly criticised education and questioned what school should be. For Tuna, spaces are generally designed to win, control, and consume more. Thus, the body sleeps, forgets, and begins to give up on itself. School tames the mind and is where the seeds of blockages and fears are planted. Tuna narrates the state of youth, our school memories, and concepts of power as:

> We are in a period where childhood and youth disappear like a grain of sand falling through your fingers. I wanted to get into black humour. I searched for the answers to the question, “What could I have learned in school to make me a happier individual?” My generation is a period where someone is always watching you, either Atatürk or God. I also aimed to revive people's childhood memories, teachers, etc. (Fatma Erkök, personal communication, 20.10.2023).

The school was used as a maze in the performance, letting spectators tour the building like pupils. They passed through various parts of the school, watching performances, questioning teaching, symbols, the body, and symbolic objects. In order to shake and provoke the spectators, Tuna danced behind the bust of Atatürk, questioning the ever-accepted symbols like the heavy bust without a body. This is a critical performance and a bold attitude towards the individual’s position under power (Figure 6).

**Figure 6**

*Show of Strength*




The term “show of strength” means people who advocate the same thing to come together, but in Turkey, that meaning has been lost; show of strength sounds like bravado. Concepts of power, heroism, and social teachings become meanings for a body to form a “show of strength”. Tuna explains the circumstances of the period as follows:

> That period was right after the Gezi events[4] when we were troubled. We could not speak or write anything, so what signal could we send to the universe? Sounds do not disappear. I wanted them to be hung in the air. We left signals to the universe that were based on Morse code. Abandoned signals that threaten to say I am here; seek a place (Fatma Erkök, personal communication, 20.10.2023).
>
> … --- … (in Morse alphabet) SHOW OF STRENGTH means 'SOS' (Mimesis Portal, 2023).

[4] The Gezi Resistance started in Taksim, Istanbul on May 27, 2013 as a protest against the cutting down of trees in Gezi Park to rebuild the Artillery Barracks in its place, despite the decision of the Cultural and Natural Heritage Conservation Board. The events later spread to many parts of Turkey with demands for justice, democracy and freedom. These protests, which lasted for nearly 20 days, are among the events that have left their mark on Turkey's recent history.

### *Body Drops,* Küçük Mustafa Paşa Public Bath, 2017

This work was created for the 15th Istanbul Biennale in a former public bath (15th cent.), later restored and converted into a multifunctional activity space. The Biennale theme, “a good neighbour,” was reflected in Tuna’s choreographic intention to be a neighbour to the “other” body, to get out of the standard body we are in.

The bath was like another planet with a different reality for Tuna. Water droplets rose and fell to the ground; as such, the space allowed for dripping. Architecturally and historically, the bath takes place in an in-between area. Tuna coins this in-betweenness of the environment with the in-betweenness of vapor (between the ground and dome), and the concept occurs as “bodies dripping in space.”

*Body Drops* focused on kinaesthetic empathy, accumulations of the body, invisible losses of the body, and what the body leaves behind in mind and space. The artist brings together neighbouring bodies (she danced with physically disabled dancers, whom she calls “different bodies”) under the bath dome, creating a choreography inspired by the space’s architectural characteristics and the performance artists' star signs as choreographic routes. As an essential element in this space, the architectural space and the aura of the bath and water laid out the basis of her choreography (Figure 7).

**Figure 7**

*Body Drops, in the Former Public Bath with Different Bodies*



### *Revert,* İstanbul Beykoz Kundura Stage, 2022

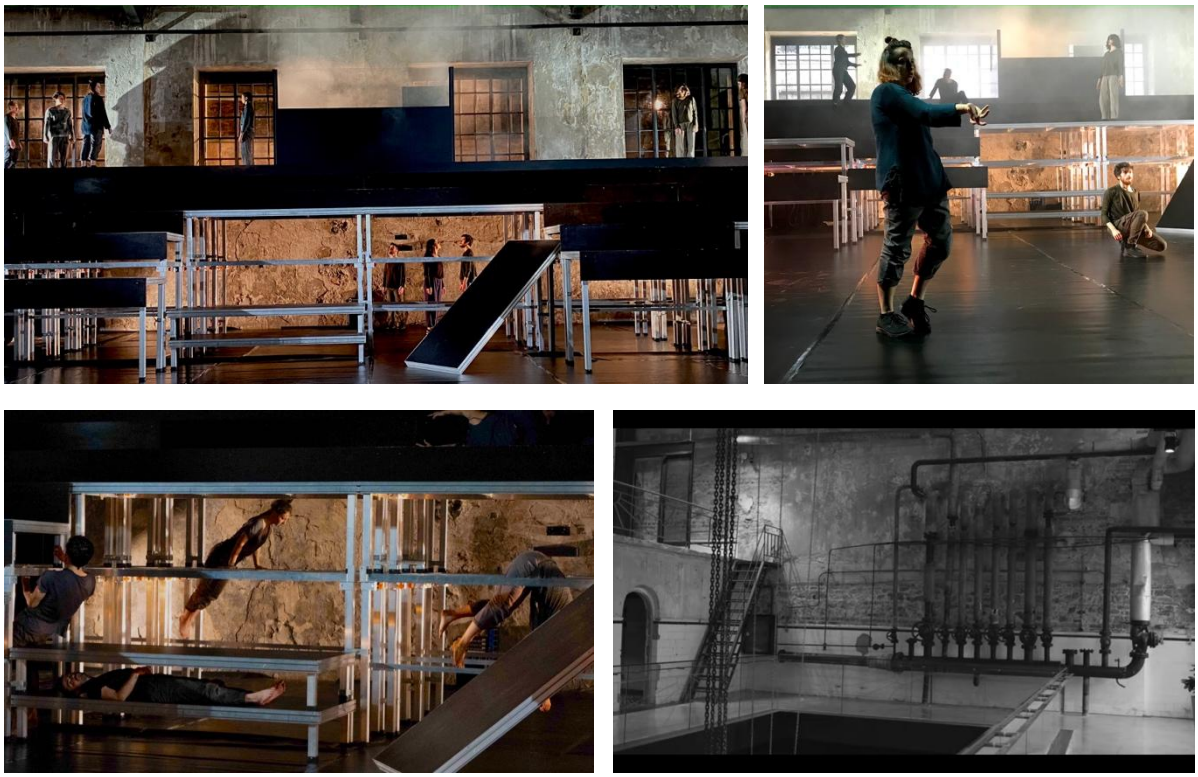
Beykoz Kundura, dating back to the early 1800s, is one of Turkey's most important industrial heritage. This area, where leather and paper factories were located during the Ottoman period, continued its activities as Sümerbank Leather and Shoe Factory after the Republic. The factory ceased production in 1999 and is now used as a performance and movie hall, exhibition hall, and film stage.

This performance was realized to inaugurate the interdisciplinary performance stage *Kundura* (meaning “shoe”). It was based on the word “revert,” which means “to get rid of the add-ons and to return to the initial structure, the primitive and the root.” Post-pandemic thoughts have led to returning the self to the primary state. With this implication, the artist questions primitiveness, intelligence, and the timelessness of the body, inspired by the fact that the human body maintains its validity throughout existence. In a holistic approach and through the body, this work examines the journey, the quests, and the thin bridge between the real and the surreal.

The hall used for “revert” with distinctive industrial and architectural identity still keeps its original industrial technical installations (for gas or water), stylish iron railings, and some apparatus from its past activity. To question/reverse the performer-audience placement in the performance, Tuna removed the tribune seating used in the converted factory space. As Tuna describes the work, *Revert* continues to work as a live mechanism”, the audience is treated as a piece of this mechanism. The work builds on the spirit of the place, touching and relating to the factory equipment (Figure 8).

**Figure 8**

*Kundura Stage and* Revert *Performance*



## Conclusion

> … as a choreographer, the architectural structure of the performance area, social identity and socio-cultural and political structure of the space, destruction of the invisible wall between the audience and the -stage- inspires me a lot… Tuğçe Ulugün Tuna (2023).

The artist is interested in everything related to the body: human beings, minds, memories, intuitions, reflexes, errors, others, bodies of others, embodied lives, and other spaces. She tries to melt, transform, and deepen boundaries starting from the body. She is eager to create site-specific works. She takes areas where she performs as areas where she wants to explore and discover and aims to make the invisible visible in space.

After examining the selected site-specific performances of Tuğçe Ulugün Tuna, some diverse uses of site-performance-body relations can be traced. Her ways of interpreting space and conceptualizing her work based on that interpretation can be grouped as follows:

- The “physical qualities” of the site/place are used such as: the giant old industrial machines in *Machine Body*; the yarn dyeing apparatus and production machines in *Displacement*; Bust of Atatürk, basketball field and classrooms of the school in *Show of Strength*; and the left material of the prison in *Wet Volumes*;
- Use of the “semiotic qualities” of the site/place such as: meaning of water in the public bath, in *Body Drops*; meaning of memory of place, crime, harm, innocence and individual relations, in *Wet Volumes*; invisible but felt energy of the old machines, in *Machine Body*; school as the place of power/taming of the body-mind, in *Show of Strength*;
- Using the “aura” of the site/place such as: the presence of water in the public bath, in *Body Drops*; space full of traces in the abandoned prison, sediments of lives, in *Wet Volumes*; sediments of production in the old power plant, in *Machine Body*;
- Questioning the “body itself” such as: returning to the origin of the body/existence, in *Revert*; questioning body-mind break by education, in *Show of Strength*; perspective towards otherness, in *Dance with Different Bodies*.

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# Embodied Topophilia and Vernacular Place-Making: An Analysis of British Artist Kimvi's Filmed Performance *Auntie's Tiles* in the Chinese Context

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## Abstract

This essay introduces the concept of "topophilia", using Kimvi's evocative filmed performance, *Auntie's Tiles*, as a lens to explore the concept within the realms of Chinese spatial imagination and vernacular observation. Located at the intersection of people, place, and emotional affinity, topophilia signifies individuals' profound connections with their environments, enriched by layers of tradition, intimacy, and cultural nuance. In the vivid tableau of rural China, as captured in *Auntie's Tiles*, the symbiosis between the local and the foreign, past and present, illustrates a rich tapestry of human-place interactions. The essay aims to unveil the complexities of our relationships with our environments, transcending cultural and generational boundaries and fostering a deeper understanding of embodied experiences in diverse spatial contexts within a vernacular understanding.

*Keywords*: Topophilia, performance art, China, vernacular, embodiment, Chinese spatial imagination, Shan Shui painting.

## Topophilia

This essay focuses on the humanistic observation presented in *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* by Chinese-American Geographer Tuan (1990), which investigates the various manifestations of this bond, ranging from the aesthetic appreciation of nature to the deep-seated sense of belonging to a homeland. He posits that topophilia arises from individual experiences and collective cultural values, making it a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Furthering the exploration of human-place relationships, Tuan's (2018) later works emphasise the significance of personal experiences and memories in shaping one's perception of place. He argues that while "space" is a more abstract concept, "place" acquires meaning and value through human experiences and emotions, with topophilia

being a vital component of this relationship. Edward Relph (1976) supports this by discussing the notions of place attachment and place identity, complementing Tuan's ideas and reinforcing the importance of emotional bonds in understanding human-environment interactions. He contends that space is not merely an empty expanse, an isometric plane, or a vessel containing locations; instead, we must understand space by how individuals perceive and experience it. In the *Place Concept* by Ralph (1976), he emphasises that having a practical understanding of a place is essential to human life, referring to it as an “authentic attitude”. In this definition, one of the foundational elements for enhancing a distinctive sense of place in the rural Chinese environment is recognising how people utilised various places to meet their everyday needs. People invest in spaces to understand behavioural appropriateness, social significance, and cultural expectations. Individuals frequently visit a place setting because it offers safety, harmony, and spirituality. The fusion of human and cultural landscape elements is centred on an individual's immediate world experience. People can experience places on various scales as complete entities, combinations of natural and manmade items, activities, functions, and the meanings they assign—the unique characteristics of a place manifest in physical forms, rituals and activities that individuals repeatedly perform. Therefore, personal experience embodies the essence of a 'sense of place' (Seamon & Sowers, 2008).

## Embodied Topophilia and Vernacular Place-Making

Embodiment, an intricate concept interweaving our physical presence with our experiential and cognitive processes, when considered with topophilia, makes the relationship becomes even more profound, prompting questions about how our intrinsic bodily experiences connect with the spaces we inhabit and the places we hold personally close to us. In this way we can explore the intricate relationship of our embodiment influenced by our affective bonds with places. The term topophilia, while not in the everyday lexicon, is derived from the Greek words *“topos”*, meaning place and *“philia”*, meaning “love” or “affinity”. Topophilia, a term coined by British poet John Betjeman, describes a unique affection for specific places. W. H. Auden first utilised this concept in Betjeman’s poetry collection Slick but not Streamlined (1948), emphasising its distinction from a mere love of nature and its reliance on historically rich landscapes. The concept gained further prominence in Gaston Bachelard's influential work *The Poetics of Space* (1958). Yi-Fu Tuan further explored “topophilia” in his humanistic geography studies, interpreting it as a deep emotional bond between individuals and their environments. *In A Reenchanted World* (2009), James W. Gibson discusses topophilia as an innate, culturally embedded connection to place, lamenting its erosion in contemporary society but noting a growing movement to rekindle these ties.

Kimvi's (2022) filmed performance, *Auntie's Tiles*,[5] to introduces topophilia set against the backdrop of the C-Platform Lucitopia artist residency in China. This performance is a testament to the essence of vernacular observation and the nuanced concept of place-making. Through her art, Kimvi captures moments and encapsulates the delicate connections between the foreign and the familiar, the past and the present, and most prominently, between places and people. The choice of *Auntie's Tiles* as a focal point is not arbitrary. The performance, rich in its contextual setting and layered in its narrative, offers a unique lens to understand the universality of human connection to places and traditions. It raises questions about how cultural settings realise, experience, and express embodiment and how it intertwines with our topophilia inclinations. As we journey through this exploration, the performance serves as both a guide and a mirror, reflecting broader truths about our shared human experience.

**Figure 1**

*The Rural Landscape of the Zixi Qingliang Mountains Surrounding Lucitiopia Residency. Image by Kimvi. 2022.*



[5] YouTube link to the Filmed performance Auntie's Tiles https://youtu.be/1RvIumjJf1I

### *Auntie's Tiles*

Kimvi, a British performance artist, explored what it means to search for an authentic narrative from June to August 2022 as an artist temporarily living in rural southern China.Located against the backdrop of the C-Platform Lucitopia Artist Residency (Figure 1) in the Zixi Qingliang Mountain valleys of Jiangxi Province. The residency experience catalysed Kimvi's exploration of authenticity, integration, and, in turn, the embodiment of topophilia. The artist entered a place where she is a foreigner in a foreign environment to establish the artist's sense of place is described by Burgin (1996) as "to encounter the other in one's own space is to confront one's alterity to that others's space" (p.119). To understand the foreign environment, Kimvi invited local villager Auntie Luo with whom she developed a working relationship during the residency (Figure 2), to perform a simple 20-minute action of constructing a traditional tiled roof on the Artist's back whilst the artist was lying face down on the concrete ground, outside Auntie Luo's home in the countryside of Zixi near to C-Platform residency (Figure 3). The Artist, dressed entirely in black, appears motionless. The sound of running water from a nearby artificial stream, hidden from the viewer's eyes, is audible in the background. The Artist waits for Auntie Luo's roof tiling to begin, in which her body acts as the foundation for construction. Auntie Luo places the tiles from her piggery onto the artist's body until fully covered and merged with its environment.

**Figure 2**

*Auntie Luo Traditional Tiling Roof Demonstration on her abandoned Piggery. Image by Kimvi. 2022.*



In her collaboration with Auntie Luo, the performance focuses on the aunt practicing a craft in her environment, shifting the focus away from the artist. Kimvi highlights the critical role of kinship bonds, the nurturing labour traditionally undertaken by women, and the shared knowledge intrinsic to local customs informing our perception of the environment and community. As described by Juagdan (2023), the Mandarin term āyí, denoting an aunt, carries profound cultural resonance, symbolising the esteem and warmth extended to relatives and respected elder women within the broader community, underscoring the communal ethos prevalent in Chinese society. The environment, with its domestic markers present in the background of the performance, includes a closed wooden door, walls of uncovered bricks, and simple, open yet barred windows. The domestic setting of a tiled wash basin, a broom, and various large, shining ceramic pots tells that the household is integral to the quotidian. It helps us contextualise the specificities of the location and observation made by International Performance Artist VestAndPage during the 'Cine+Perfo' Performance Art Festival in Buenos Aries, Argentina (2022). Combined with the meticulous tile placement from Auntie Luo, it gives the viewer a heightened sense of presence and an intimate relationship with space. Kimvi's integration with the tiles embodies the house, the traditions, and the environment. Covering Kimvi with tiles showcases Auntie Luo's mastery and metaphorically shelters the Artist, creating a vernacular and cultural bridge between the performer and her space.

**Figure 3**

*Screenshot of Filmed Performance Auntie's Tiles - The Initial Tiling Stages. Image by Kimvi. 2022*



The filmed performance of Auntie's Tiles transcends the material realms, presenting a holistic vision of place as a kind of humanity that one understands from the position of an

insider. Place, according to Lucy Lippard (1997) is the “external world mediated through human subjected experience”, a sense of place as a therapeutic remedy: a sense of place is "the geographical components of the psychological need to belong somewhere, one antidote to a prevailing alienation" supporting Kwon (2007) reflections on locational identity (p.7). The performance, *Auntie's Tiles,* creates a dynamic tableau that bridges the physical and metaphysical realms, encouraging viewers to engage in a contemplative journey. It explores the intricate connections between nature, culture, and traditions, highlighting how places shape our identities, cultural values, and visual perspectives. This journey is enriched with cultural dialogues and a deep sense of topophilia, or the love of place, inviting an intimate exploration of our spaces.

## Vernacular Place-Making

The discussion of "Topophilia" extends to its manifestation in vernacular architecture, fostering a deep connection with the environment, emphasizing the importance of place, local specificity, and cultural authenticity. Architecture protects our bodies and provides a space that accommodates our behaviours. The Artist attempts to embody "vernacular architecture" and to embrace the sense of topophilia through the Chinese rural tradition of roof tiling and using only materials from the area. The term "vernacular" in design typically refers to a method of construction that uses local materials and traditional techniques. Vernacular design is developed through local knowledge and practices, often passed down through generations "rather than through formal architectural or design education" (Brunskill, 1971, pp. 27-28). The Artist employed a vernacular approach to understand the culture unique to the region's people and to forge a deeper connection. Athena Steen, Bill Steen, and Eiko Komatsu (2003) comprehensively explore buildings crafted from local materials and constructed through traditional methods passed down through generations.

The Artist's rural vernacular observation and experience calls for a slower, more sedentary mode of existence, which M. Kwon (2004) describes as the "non-urban sociality of small-scale spaces and face-to-face exchanges" (p.159). This perspective emphasises the importance of place, local specificity, and cultural authenticity, focusing on the particularities that inform many contemporary site-oriented art practices. Kimvi actively collaborated with Auntie Luo, a non-performer, to create a vernacular dialogue. This choice reflects what Victor Papanek (2006) terms in Design for the Real World as questioning prevailing narratives and appreciating local craftsmanship. Papanek suggests that "the border between different techniques or disciplines is where most discoveries are made, and most action is inaugurated" (p.322). The Artist embodied this collaboration, focusing her physicality on an action that revolved around Auntie Luo and the material of salvaged traditional tiles from Auntie Piggery. These tiles, no longer

used and emblematic of the rural Chinese ethos of reuse, became central to sustaining the humble everyday living activities depicted in the performance. This work celebrates cultural identity, sustainability, and human creativity in adapting to diverse climatic and environmental conditions. Steens and Komatsu (2003) demonstrate that these buildings are functional and inherently sustainable, utilising available materials and designs tailored to specific environments.

The imposed collaboration between the Artist and non-performer allows for the “performance” in which there is scope for chance and improvisation. For example, the unexpected encounter with Auntie Luo's brother-in-law punctuates the action, casually walking past and asking: "Why do you need to put tiles on?" (Figure 4). Focusing on her task, Auntie Luo calmly responds: "to cover one tile after the other". From this casual conversation and observation of the passerby, the participants together produced the performed space. "The quality of this space is therefore not predetermined but arises during the performance" (Verstegen, 2009, p.9). The appearance of the chickens and the passerby add layers to the narrative, emphasising that while the performance is a moment in time, life continues around it. The performance becomes an allegory as Auntie Luo meticulously covers Kimvi. There is a resonating sentiment of protection and shelter and the transient nature of human existence, emphasising that while cultures, traditions, and humans may be ephemeral, their spaces continue to thrive, pulsating with past, present, and future stories.

**Figure 4**

*Unexpected Encounter of Auntie Luo’s Brother-In-Law. Image by Kimvi. 2022*



The Artist's intention within Auntie’s Tiles is to create a structure that embodies and resembles a form of traditional tiled roofs recognisable within Auntie’s landscape. It is not only the physical aspect of the human body parts that resemble architecture but the extension of human emotions, sensorial impressions and human psychology. As Victor Burgin (1996) mentions, “It is our positioning within space, both as the point of perspectival access to space…. that gives the object any inherent identity” (p.129), underscoring the significance of how bodies inhabit spaces. It argued that spaces intertwined with emotions, perceptions, and memories do not merely exist as physical realms. Using Kimvi's body as a canvas for Auntie Luo's traditional tiling practice transcends mere performance, melding person and place. This act challenges traditional architectural notions, as discussed by Gottfried Semper (2010); rather than a shelter built around a person, the shelter is integrated into the being, highlighting the intrinsic connections we form with our surroundings, forming a “hearth” that is a “sacred focus around which the world took order and shape” (p.109). Kimvi, adorned with tiles that reflect the surrounding environment, illustrates how Semper's influential discourse on the selection of construction materials becomes evident: Choosing the most appropriate material for its realisation will inherently boost the building's aesthetics and significance through the material's natural representation, highlighting the significant between the internal and external worlds. In this performance, the Artist personifies the Chinese philosophical emphasis on harmony with nature. The performed metamorphosis to which both parties are integral becomes emblematic of a forming cultural bridge, as the performance attempts to merge "the inherent value of design as the primary, underlying matrix of life” (Papanek, 2006, p. 322). Vernacular practices and the embodiment of topophilia through art and architecture play a crucial role in defining our relationship with the environment. It suggests these practices offer insights into how cultural settings realize, experience, and express embodiment, intertwining deeply with our inclinations towards topophilia. Ultimately, "Vernacular Place-Making” presents topophilia as essential in creating meaningful and valued places. It emphasizes the role of personal experiences, cultural traditions, and vernacular architecture in enhancing our sense of belonging and identity through a deep, affective connection with the places we inhabit.

## Chinese Spatial Imagination

The performance was filmed by carefully positioning a static mobile phone camera. The intentional use of a camera phone rather than professional filming equipment allowed intimate access and closeness to the villagers, as the camera phone is a commonly seen device and is viewed as less intimidating, allowing for natural and holistic human interaction. The chosen perspective allowed us to observe the bodies in their surroundings for the entire duration of the 7:30-minute performance video; the intentional positioning of the camera and chosen

environment presented a fusion of traditional Chinese spatial elements with contemporary performance art, drawing compositional elements from traditional Chinese hand-scroll landscape paintings. The performance captured a continuum of narrative that mirrors the left-to-right or right-to-left flow of these paintings in a continuous sequence, creating a rhythm as it progresses, where the perspective is not limited to a fixed viewpoint, but allows the viewer to traverse the scene. The aesthetics of such paintings derive from a cultivated interaction between viewer and space, allowing the narrative to unfold progressively. A form of traditional Chinese landscape painting called "Shan Shui" (Bruni, 2020), meaning "mountain water." involves or depicts the scenery of natural landscapes. Shan shui painting is more like a "vehicle of philosophy" (Maeda, 1970) to connect with the mountains, forests and streams surrounding the Xi Open Air Museum. In Shan Shui, the artist's imagination produces the painting. Traditional religious beliefs, especially the 'Taoist love of nature and the Buddhist principle of emptiness" (Shaw, 1998, p.183), influence this perspective. Ancient Shan Shui prioritises a conceptual representation of nature over a visual one, aiming to convey the experience of "being in nature" rather than simply "seeing nature". This philosophy actively engages the artist on a human scale, making their body the primary instrument for exploring the surrounding environment.

As the performance progresses, questions about presence, absence, and interplay within a defined space arise. 'Does Schrödinger's cat analogy apply here—is Kimvi present or absent beneath the tiles?' (Stenke & Pagnes, 2022) (Figure 5) reflects the traditional Chinese conception of space as tangible and intangible—the tangible being represented by the tiles and the intangible by the artist's spirit. In the Chinese context, Xiaodong and Kangshua (2003, pp.112-113) mentioned the "Chinese Conception of Space" : the aesthetic appeal of Chinese architecture is not exclusively found within its spatial arrangements or physical edifice. Instead, one discovers it in the nuanced interrelation between architectural spaces and their defining enclosures, such as rooftops. The comprehension of these enclosures possesses a characteristic of provisional adaptability rather than a conclusive disposition, necessitating an emphasis on their responsive correlation with the demarcated spaces. The strategic manipulation of these enclosures emerges as a distinctive and critical element in elucidating spatial interpretations. Consequently, architecture transitions into a transformative conduit, embodying tangible spatial enclosures into perennial representations of cultural transcendence. Auntie's Tiles vividly illustrates the interplay between Chinese spatial imagination and topophilia through a contemplative engagement, valuing the spirit of a scene over its literal depiction and fostering a genuine, intimate connection with the village and its inhabitants. The performance's framing, drawing from the narrative flow of traditional scroll paintings, invites viewers to traverse the space mentally. The Chinese spatial conception regards space as physical and spiritual, which aligns with topophilia's integration of emotion,

memory, and spirit in one’s experience of place. The artist's body as a medium for exploring the environment underscores a physical, personal engagement with space essential to the topophilia experience. In essence, the statements underscore a holistic, intimate, and philosophical engagement with space that embodies the principles of topophilia, transcending mere visual representation to foster a profound, affective connection with the environment.

**Figure 5**

*The Artist is Completely Covered by the Roof Tiles, With Auntie’s Chicken Passing Through. Image by Kimvi. 2022*



## Conclusion

The essay's discourse centred on humans' intricate and profound relationship with their environments, exploring these interactions' emotional and cultural significance. It uses the lens of Topophilia to elucidate how personal and collective memories, experiences, and identities become entangled with places. Invoking the scholarly works of Tuan, along with the performative art piece *Auntie's Tiles*, the essay illustrates the depth of connections people forge with certain places—a symbiosis of environment and self that transcends simple attachment, pays homage to the authenticity and place identity that are pivotal in shaping these human-space interactions. It underscores how genuine connections to place are integral to fostering a true sense of belonging, exemplified in Kimvi's performative act of constructing a traditional roof during the C-Platform Lucitopia residency, steeped in vernacular architecture and cultural remembrance. Such acts of authenticity are crucial for the creation of meaningful spaces. Moreover, the *Auntie's Tiles* discussion encapsulates the melding of discipline and

improvisation, mirroring the dynamic relationship between life and art. It resonates with Semper's view that architecture is a fundamental organising force in life, highlighting the internalisations of architecture and shelter within one's identity. The performance serves as a testament to the role of materiality and the Chinese philosophical pursuit of living in harmony with nature. The essay's contemplation extends to the performance's alignment with traditional Chinese spatial principles, akin to the artistry of Shan Shui painting, promoting an affective engagement with the landscape. The portrayal of the performance, as captured by a static mobile phone camera, advocates for a contemplative interaction with the environment. Through such engagement, an emotional and spiritual bond with the place is fostered, central to the concept of Topophilia. In essence, *Auntie's Tiles* emerges as a physical act of covering and a layered allegory for the multifaceted rapport between humans and their spaces. The performance embodies and enacts topophilia, transforming it from a mere concept into a vivid experience. It offers a compelling viewpoint for examining our connections to the spaces we consider home. Performance art emerges as an indispensable medium for exploring and understanding the nuanced relationships between humans and their environments. It breaks through the barriers of traditional expression, allowing for a tangible examination of the spaces we dwell in and the meanings we impart to them. The essay concludes by asserting that performance art, through its intrinsic versatility and interaction, is an intimate journey into topophilia, the love of place.

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# “Lifting One’s Head Up”
# Two Cases of Public Nomadic Interventions

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## Abstract

The present paper discusses the key findings and implications of the author’s homonymous master’s thesis, a comparative study which aims to develop as a system of overlapping associations between two cases of public nomadic art interventions. Specifically, the study examines the performance of the action *Le ballon ρoζ or six ways* by the author, on the one hand, as well as a sample of five independent works by performance artist Regina José Galindo, on the other. By analysing these interventions, the study aims to enrich the discourse around issues of embodied experience, political claim, and the production of identity and spatiality within a multiple public sphere.

The elaboration of the main performative act, the aforementioned performance piece by the author, occurring following an unprompted urban route in Athens, is utilised as a place of production of this associative system. The distinction of six thematic categories within it are set as an axis of the study’s development, which is achieved through the juxtaposition of corresponding textual units approaching examples from the work of Galindo. This method allows for a deeper understanding of the shared concerns and themes that emerge from the interventions.

The primary texts of the first case, *Le ballon ρoζ or six ways,* acquire characteristics of a performative reading during the original presentation of the research, creating an embodied expression, while the juxtaposed analyses function as interpretations of the primary texts. By utilising this perspective, a degree of distancing from the personal practice is obtained, allowing for a dialectical approach to emerge. At the same time, an associative process is implemented within textual research, in direct correlation to the aforementioned embodied expression, leading to the creation of a multifaceted analysis.

Acknowledging of the ingoing subjective factors or coincidences within the described process is taken as a key assumption in the context of a nomadic view, allowing for transitions and lines of flight between ideas, mental journeys, and the activation of the imaginary.

Overall, a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the two cases of public nomadic art interventions is accomplished. By utilising a performative reading of the primary texts and a juxtaposition with corresponding textual units, the study provides a unique and innovative approach to examining issues of embodied experience, political claim, gendered identity, and spatiality. Through its intricate analysis of the interventions and their impact on the public sphere, it contributes to the exploration of spatiality through performative practices, highlighting the centrality of political implications.

*Keywords:* Nomadism, performativity, site-specific performance, gendered embodiment, public sphere, spatiality, public space.

## Lifting One's Head Up

> Hasn't it ever happened to you, while reading a book, constantly pausing your reading, not out of lack of interest, but, on the contrary, due to a flow of ideas, stimuli, associations? In other words, have you ever found yourself reading lifting your head up? (Barthes, 1970/2005, p.13)

This study's title is referencing the former phrase by Roland Barthes. To the author's perception, it appeared devastatingly beautiful; the notion that one can pause time, let ideas and images flow within their own head, all deriving from written language, and this can be considered as reading.

Throughout the current paper's condensed discussion of the findings and key elements of the original extensive research (Kordomenou, 2021), a reading of a similar manner will be attempted, leaping from one idea to the next in a fragmental and almost impulsive way, focusing on two cases of public nomadic interventions.[6]

First case, *Le ballon ρoζ or six ways* (Kordomenou, 2018). The action was carried out by the author and consists of a walk in the centre of Athens, during which passersby were offered pens and markers, along with the request to write on the author's skin. Within the current study, textual units written to be uttered vocally and evoke a performative reading serve as reflection on the action's different aspects. These units are introductory to each section of the following elaboration and are placed in brackets, aiming to signify the transition to a vocalised form of writing, as well as the transition of reference to the specific case.

The second case is a series of interventions by Guatemalan performance artist and poet Regina José Galindo, which will be approached and presented in juxtaposition to the first case, so as to create a dialectical relation between the two. These interventions include the works

[6] As such, we can understand "practices of public art that are capable of establishing dialogic places, within the context of a perception of location as a nomadic informational and social site" (Daflos, 2015, p.191).

*¿Quién puede borrar las huellas?* (*Who can erase the traces?*, streets of Guatemala City, Guatemala, 2003), *Perra* (*Bitch*, Prometeo Gallery di Ida Pisani, Milan, Italy, 2005), *Piedra* (*Stone*, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil, January 17th, 2013), *Caminos* (*Roads*, Concepción 41, Antigua Guatemala, 2013) and *La Verdad* (*The Truth*, Centro de Cultura de España, Guatemala City, Guatemala, 2013). The works are approached within the context of specific characteristics, selectively chosen and correlated with the main case, in order to most effectively contribute to the transitions and transfers among the cases.

Regina José Galindo's work draws from the unique socio-political context of Guatemala, in order to highlight issues of violence, racial and gender inequalities, as well as violations of human rights stemming from the distribution of power in contemporary societies. Her public performance *Presencia* (*Presence*, Elpidos str., Athens, 2017) functioned as a conceptual link leading to the aforementioned selections from the artist's work in the context of the present research, due to the conditions of spatial proximity, if not overlapping of the spatial aspect of the specific work (*Presencia*) and the action under study (*Le ballon ροζ or six ways*). These conditions, to some extent, also serve as a means of addressing the same public sphere, albeit not included among the examples approached. It thus operates exclusively as a stimulus for the production of new associations and enhances the element of accepting the random as a necessary and predestined expression of the elaborations that follow.

The result will be research within a context of a nomadic perception of location, creating overlapping associations and lines of thought, in a conceptual as well as a structural level. The research is organised into six thematic categories of approaching the cases: *Writing*, *The Skin*, *Walking*, *Play*, *The Text* and *The De-territorialised Context*. These categories, product of in-situ data collection concerning interaction with passersby, the structural aspects of the process, the factor of randomness and a level of signification during the performance *Le ballon ροζ or six ways*, are reflected into five units, namely *Literature I*, *The Body*, *Nomadism and Encounter*, *Literature II (Reading)* and *Space,* each opening with the performative reading texts of the first case and proceeding to the juxtaposed analyses of the second case. The method as described allows for the emergence of intangible, fragmental, unmeasurable or even poetic aspects of location and informs our understanding of space within the specific view.

## Writing - Literature I

> [Of all that has been written, I love only that which one writes with their own blood. Write with blood, and you will feel that blood is spirit. (Nietzsche, 1883/2010, p.60).

In the first reading, writing as an act of communication. You can write onto me. Consequently, choose what you will tell me. You towards me. When this barrier of freedom of

choice is overcome, writing as a gesture. Where do you choose to write? How close or far do you stand from me? Do you touch me? How much time do you need?

The materiality of the process. Marker-pen, the colour. The marking. You said you didn't want to, the pen hurts.

The semiology of the process. Writing beyond language, the conflict of an object that is simultaneously language but also coercion, the expression and transmission of a purpose that transcends its linguistic substance. The emergence of language as anti-communication (Barthes, 1970).

Did you write with your own blood?]

**Figure 1**

*Dimitra Kordomenou,* Le Ballon Poζ or Six Ways*, 2018. Photo by P. Geralis.*



In 2005, Regina José Galindo, as part of the performance *Perra* (*Bitch*, Prometeo Gallery di Ida Pisani, Milan, Italy), carves the word “bitch” into her right leg with a knife, condemning, as she herself states, the crimes committed against women in Guatemala, where female bodies that had suffered torture were found with inscriptions made by knife blades. The performance takes place within the gallery space, in contrast to the majority of her actions, which are directly related to public spaces. Focusing on the theme of writing, which dominates this particular action, one can discern both its materiality or mode, writing as a gesture, as well as the generated text, its reception within the framework of the meanings it initiates, writing as reading.

**Figure 2**

*Regina José Galindo,* Perra*, 2005.*
*Regina José Galindo Website: https://www.reginajosegalindo.com/perra/*



Two years earlier, in 2003, during the action *¿Quién puede borrar las huellas?* (*Who Can Erase the Traces?*) on the streets of Guatemala City, Galindo walked a path from the Constitutional Court to the National Palace, holding a basin of human blood in which she periodically immersed her feet, leaving behind a trail of bloodstained footsteps. The action took place the day after the announcement of Efraín Ríos Montt's candidacy for the presidency. Montt, a military officer and former dictator, was associated with one of the bloodiest periods of the civil war in Guatemala and was later found guilty of war crimes and acts of genocide.

Galindo carried out this specific action to honour the memory of the victims of armed conflicts in Guatemala and as an expression of opposition to Montt's candidacy. As she has expressed, she distinguishes this action from political protest, characterising it as a performance. Within this framework, she also interprets the success of her endeavour, as she was not arrested during the process of the action, despite moving in such a manner and carrying these specific political positions in an evidently policed area. “You don't confront them with violence or insults, as you would lose this battle. You confront the situation through poetry, which is a language they don't understand.” (Galindo, 2014).

During this action, with a less overt approach compared to the quite literal *Perra*, the inscription is made in the public space. Both its materiality and the trace as the generated text can be perceived as elements of writing.

**Figures 3, 4**

*Regina José Galindo,* ¿Quién puede borrar las huellas?*, 2003. Photos by: V.* Pérez.



## The Skin - The Body

[Facing writing as a process of two parts, an act of writing and a passive surface that receives the writing, we begin to discern an intertwining of activeness and passiveness through the choice of the specific surface.

The skin is not dead. The skin is the boundary and the membrane of breath and the sensory organ of touch and the regulating organ of the body temperature of the wandering woman. The surface that receives the writing is active, vital, sensory, sensual. It is sensitive.

The act of writing is requested by the woman whose skin is offered. The activeness of the subject performing the process of writing is only relative.]

**Figure 5**

*Dimitra Kordomenou,* Le Ballon Poζ or Six Ways*, 2018. Photo by P. Geralis.*



“I always described my poetry as carnal; my body has always been present.” (Galindo, 2014).

The documentation of the performance titled *Piedra* (*Stone*, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil, January 17, 2013) is accompanied by a poem in which the artist describes herself as a stone that doesn't feel the blows, the humiliation, the lustful gazes, the hatred, and the bodies upon her. She is a stone that encapsulates the history of the world within herself. During the performance, Galindo appears in front of the audience with her skin covered in charcoal and wraps herself in the ground, embracing her knees in a posture that evokes both embryonic and devotional imagery, with her shins, arms, and forehead touching the ground. Her position remains closed and inward, creating a sense of adherence rather than deposition. She remains motionless as three volunteers (two men and one woman) urinate on the stone body.

Structurally, we can discern three main sections of the performance: the transformation, the reception of the action, and the (non) reaction.

By transforming her body into stone, examining the poetic metaphor in contrast to the biological approach, Galindo conceals the body’s characteristics of sex. However, this very transformation simultaneously strengthens her gendered identity. The transformation allows the external-woman to exist as an external-stone. In this way, the external-stone becomes the surface on which social experience is inscribed, the surface on which, in this particular case, the degrading act is performed. As a result, the gendered internal is protected by the

transformed external, embodying the development of a strong resistance to inscription. When the act is completed by the three volunteers, the artist, now standing, leaves the scene, restoring the woman. From that moment on, she can exist as a woman with her skin covered in charcoal and urine solely because she existed as a stone.

**Figure 6**

*Regina José Galindo,* Piedra*, 2013. Photos by: J. Pantoja, J. & M. Ramirez-Cancio*



## Walking and Play - Nomadism and Encounter

The woman marked by the balloon moves. She walks in the city. In this way, using her as a reference point, considering that action takes place in an immediate area surrounding her, the urban space flows. Is the woman marked by the balloon moving?

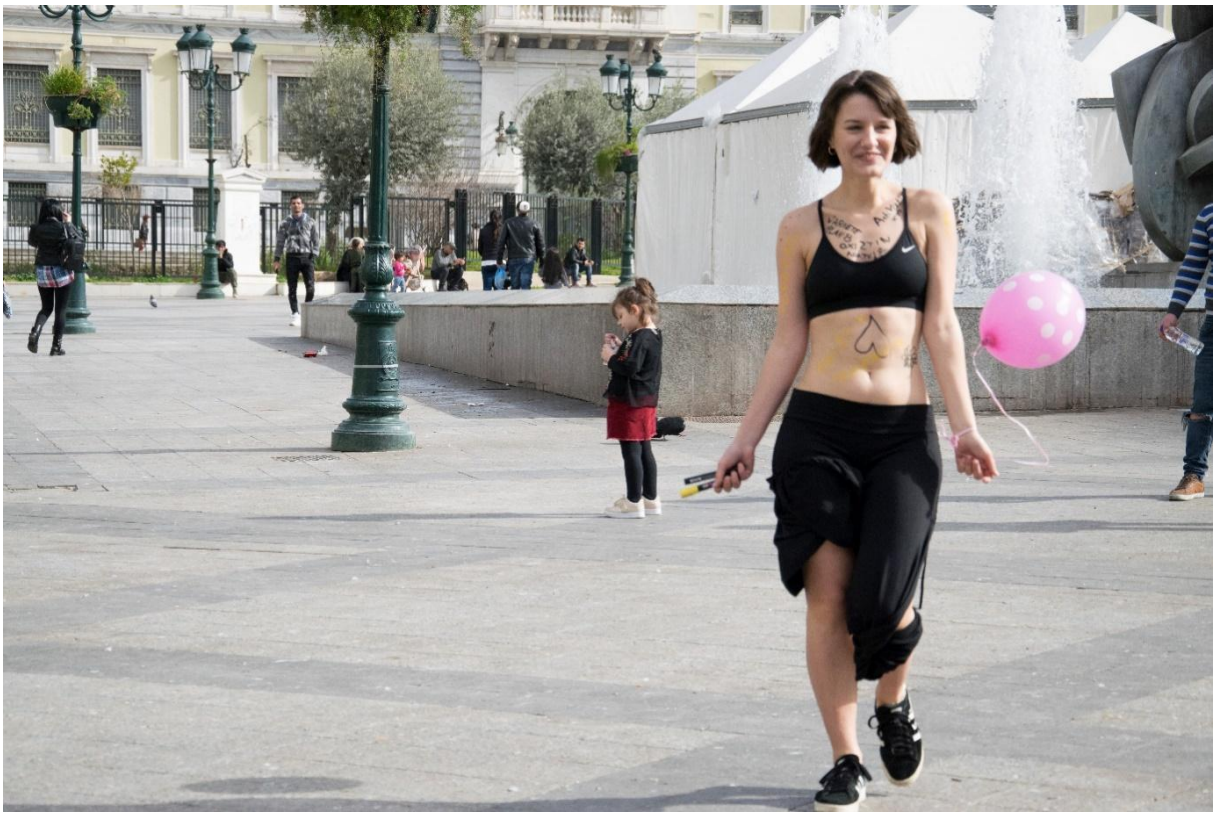
Walking and encountering the passerby create points of intersection in the process. The spaces of the subject who inscribes and the subject who is inscribed momentarily coincide. Their shared space, the space that holds both subjectivities at the same time, is ruptured with the end of the inscription, but the trace of the first is carried into each new space. The memory of the shared space and time is carried into each new encounter.

Encounters and passersby are expressions of chance. The play is random. The path is random. The selection of the passersby is random. Thus, passersby can, statistically speaking,

constitute a sample. The documentation is merely visual and to some extent personal, as those who rejected the invitation to play do not appear. However, the question remains. Who needs to play? Who expresses the intention to play? Who rejects the opportunity to play?]

**Figure 7**

*Dimitra Kordomenou,* Le Ballon Poζ or Six Ways*, 2018. Photo by P. Geralis.*



We have already discussed the action *¿Quién puede borrar las huellas?* (*Who can erase the traces?*), which we approached through the theme of writing. However, a foundational element of the action is walking in public space. Without excluding possible cathartic qualities on a subjective level for the artist, it is the targeted selection of the starting point and destination, which prevail, due to their political implications as described in a previous phase of the text. This is not, therefore, a wandering, a walk that surpasses its time and destination, as it operates on a symbolic level exclusively as localised, with this exact localisation functioning as its structural centrality.

Walking is utilised by the artist as a method in the performance *Caminos* (*Paths*, Concepción 41, Antigua Guatemala, 2013), where her body, resembling a corpse, remains hidden in a bushy area outside the city of Antigua Guatemala, wrapped and bound with four ropes. Four women lead the ropes, taking them away from the location and intertwining them within the city. The audience must follow the ropes to find the artist's body. With clear references to the reality of femicides within the specific socio-political and historical context of

Galindo's home country, where most of her actions with this theme take place, she attempts a metaphorical transfer between life and death. As she explains (Galindo, 2013), the paths are four, as are the lines of the hand, so the longer these lines are, the greater the chances in favour of life. However, according to the artist, the important element is not the body at the end of the lines, but rather the process of the audience's decision to deviate from their everyday path and follow the ropes into a challenging area.

**Figure 8**

*Regina José Galindo,* Caminos*, 2013*



## The Text - Literature II (Reading)

[-You can write whatever you want on me.

-What should I write? / What am I supposed to write? / I don't speak Greek; do you mind if I write in another language? / We don't write onto humans.

Hesitation towards absolute freedom? Perhaps towards seemingly absolute power? After all, in the spoken time, the time you have to respond, do you truly grasp what you want?

We don't write onto humans.

The declaration of identity and the political text. You wrote freedom. But you wrote I love you in Farsi as well.

The group text, the collective text, the awareness or lack thereof of collectivity. Let's leave space for others to write.

Indirect speech, language and collective configuration.

But specifically, what is the text? Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2017) refer in their *Nomadology*, to the runic script, which in its early stage has limited communicative power. It primarily consists of signatures as signs of possession or construction, and short warlike or amorous texts. It is a notation that is more emotional than communicative, a decorative and of limited utility text, a substitute for writing. The connection between this primary impulse of writing and the examined text of the action becomes even stronger when one focuses on the choice of symbol over words. I write “love” or I draw a heart. The text, from this perspective, emerges as an illustration of the endolectic nature of communication (Austin, 1962/2003), a shaping of the correspondence between speech and actions, if one considers the written word as the form of speech and the symbol, projecting as a primordial impulse, as the form of the action.

“To write means to have the passion of origin”, writes Jabès (Derrida, 1967/2003). Derrida (1967/2003) describes this eternal return as a circle, Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2017, p.101) seek language in something that “always goes from one saying to another”, perceiving it as a map and not an imprint. I draw a person with a balloon on a person with a balloon.]

Within the framework of the explorations surrounding the theme of writing, in the first unit, we approached the performance *Perra* (*Bitch*, Prometeo Gallery di Ida Pisani, Milan, Italy, 2005). As writing is inseparable from reading, we can identify the potential reception of the text as a traumatic utterance (Butler, 1997), but also the liberating power of reversing the meanings of this reading. In this section, the focus will be placed on the complementary aspect of writing, namely reading.

Within the context of the investigations surrounding the theme of violence during the civil war, which constitutes a significant part of Galindo's work, and more specifically focusing on the actions designed and carried out in Guatemala, we will approach the performance *La Verdad* (*The Truth*, Centro de Cultura de España, Guatemala City, Guatemala, 2013) as a case that prominently offers itself to the study of the theme of reading. The artist accompanies the description of her performance with a short poem that describes the resistance of truth to the intense effort of silencing.[7] Additionally, she provides an extensive description of the

[7] “It does not matter how much they try to silence us.
The truth is there, no one can silence it.”

conditions and practices during the 36-year-long civil war, which include acts of genocide, rape of women and girls, torture, scorched earth strategy, and executions. She also references the trial of Efraín Ríos Montt and Mauricio Rodríguez Sánchez, which began in April 2013 and, after two weeks of harrowing testimonies and evidence proving the genocide, was suspended due to threats from the defence and interventions by the President of Guatemala, General Otto Pérez Molina, who himself had been identified by a witness as involved in torture during the war. The outcome of the trial was the conviction of Montt to 80 years in prison for crimes against humanity and acts of genocide, but it was overturned a few weeks later. In the performance, Galindo reads the testimonies of survivors of armed conflicts in Guatemala for one hour, while simultaneously a dentist attempts to force her into silence by administering seven local anaesthesia injections in her mouth.

**Figure 9**

*Dimitra Kordomenou,* Le Ballon Poζ or Six Ways*, 2018. Photo by P. Geralis.*




## The De-territorialised Context - Space

[With the memories of encounters and traces of passersby accumulating, the skin of the wandering woman transforms into a wandering collage. The notion of collage takes on different expressions depending on the focal point of each reading. The woman with the balloon becomes a collage of memory fragments, a spatial collage, a collage of subjectivities, a collage

of the combined encounter of past encounters, of which the skin is the sole space and consequently the space where the inscribed skin leaves its own traces.

**Figure 10**

*Regina José Galindo,* La verdad*, 2013*



The woman with the balloon is photographed. The skin of the woman with the balloon is photographed. The collective wandering collage becomes integrated into the urban context and momentarily immobilised. The structured space is inscribed by the spatial point zero of the action, the active manifestation of the inscription, the skin as the medium of subjectivity, or subjectivity as the utterance of the active skin.

The image as a memory. The image as new production. The literary image. The image as a collage. The image as a connection of different spatiotemporalities. The image as a memory of passages. The image as a rupture. With what?]

The actions that have been analysed within the framework of this study do not appear in a chronological or possible internal organisational order, but are presented associatively concerning the thematic units that emerged during the sub-text analysis of the action *Le ballon poζ or six ways*. Nevertheless, they all fulfil a condition of public intervention, regardless of which the performing space ultimately is.

The processing of theoretical perceptions of space has found fertile ground in artistic practices centred around performance since the 1970s. RoseLee Goldberg's article, *Space as* Praxis (Goldberg, 1975), informed by the exhibition and publication of *A Space: A Thousand Words* (London, Royal College of Art Gallery, February 1975), sheds light on the attempt to

expand the discussion concerning the production of space, incorporating elements derived from direct experience.

Erika Fischer-Lichte (2004/2019), in her study of a performance experience, recognises it as both an aesthetic and a social process, characterising it as liminal. She situates the subjects participating in an intermediate space, opening up the field of experience to transformation possibilities. While, therefore, geometric space is described through its geometric characteristics as a kind of container that receives the action of the performance, and its existence remains intact after the performance, spatiality is produced for Fischer-Lichte within the performative space. This space is perceived as a field of potentiality for developing relationships between actors and spectators, as well as for organising movement and its perception. In contrast to geometric space, it is characterised by instability and variability, maintaining a reciprocal relationship of mutual influence with the action that geometric space receives.

**Figure 11**

*Dimitra Kordomenou,* Le Ballon Poζ or Six Ways*, 2018. Photo by P. Geralis.*




The distinction between literal and functional location appears in a similar way in the work of James Meyer (2000). The first refers to a specific geographic location, which serves as the natural constraint within which artistic intervention is shaped, often referred to as “in situ” art. The second, in contrast, can encompass a physical space but not necessarily in an absolute manner.

For the action *¿Quién puede borrar las huellas?* (2003), the space of performance is the specific route followed by the artist. For the performance *Perra* (2005), the space is the gallery. For *Piedra* (2013), the external space of the University of São Paulo etc. This enumeration though provides us with limited information about the specific spaces of performance for each action. It essentially lists locations in their physical sense, as material places with specific geometric characteristics. The corresponding performing spaces emerge as expressions of these locations, temporary and fragile. They are created during the performance and dissipate afterward. These performing spaces can only be approached in terms of temporality and transformation.

Building on the addition of the social factor as an integral layer of understanding space, perception of space as a product of interconnections is, according to Massey (2005/2008), linked to identity politics. By rejecting a pre-established self, these politics engage in the formation of identities and social relationships through which they are constructed as a central concern of the political sphere. Within this particular line of thinking, space also emerges as the product of a reciprocal implication of social relationships and identities that do not exist *a priori*, resulting in the formation of a relationship of mutual constitution between spatiality and identity.

Sheikh (2004), basing his thinking on the assumption of a fragmented public domain, addresses the issue of creating any specific public sphere or space and the ways in which artistic intervention can be achieved within it. He liberates his reasoning process from the idea of the neutral spectator and the concept of public art as the installation of a specific work in public space. He recognises that artistic work is produced within a heterogeneous and ever-changing field, significantly shaped by the identity of the audience, their experience, and intentions. Sheikh believes that Habermas's (1964/1974) model of a homogeneous and regulatory public sphere[8] fails to respond to the fragmentation of contemporary reality. Instead, he refers to the approaches of Negt and Kluge (1972/1993[9]), drawing upon the concept of multiplicity and raises questions about the potential emergence of the artistic world as a public sphere and the strategic possibilities of utilising it for interaction with other public spheres.

[8] Jürgen Habermas defines the public sphere as the domain of social life in which public opinion is formed, and to which all citizens have access. According to Habermas, the public sphere is external to state authority, and its role is to exercise political control, both informally and formally, through the formation of the public body and the exercise of the electoral right.

[9] The need to reconsider the concept of the proletarian public sphere arises for Negt and Kluge as a result of the exclusion from the dominant narratives of the urban public sphere of two significant aspects of life, as they argue, the entirety of the industrial mechanism and socialisation within the family. In contrast to Habermas's normative understanding of the urban public sphere, their quest focuses on the differentiated experience of individuals and the negotiation of their unequal access to the public sphere. These aspects involve the incorporation into the perception of the proletarian public sphere of terms like multiplicity, difference, and fragmentation.

## Epilogue - Conclusions

Completing this nomadic research project, the concluding thoughts naturally follow the structure of the individual investigations, focusing on two overlapping paths. The research findings represent a comparative attempt, involving juxtaposition and dialectical confrontation.

So, to begin with, *Paths*: In its essence, the research method itself broadens the way public space is read, allowing for the emergence of associations and the possibility of approaching/studying the specific and particular through the lens of the other. This also gives rise to an almost necessary practice, if we conceive it in its entirety, namely the implementation within a multifaceted public sphere, which the body of performance enhances/increases through action. At this point, it should be noted that the establishment of a temporary space that disintegrates upon completion of the performance, is exactly where the public character of the actions lies, which are therefore considered public interventions, regardless of the characteristics of the physical space that accommodates them.

*Who can erase the traces*: Galindo's “inscription” in public space is not an “inscription” within the framework of Barthes's (2005) distinction and the recognition of an internal intention[10]. It is writing with a marker. It is the hand that caresses. And it caresses with blood. In contrast to this writing, in the performance *Perra*, the desire for penetration (Flusser, 2007) is evident in the action that repeats acts of violence - desires for penetration - while its poetics comes as an integral expression in public space, caressing it, speaking in a language they do not understand. The traces in the action *Le ballon ροζ or six ways* are carried on the body. The function is exactly the opposite, and the choice of the mode of writing is freely available to the participating audience. In this way, a common space is established on the surface of the skin, claiming its existence in public space as constantly in motion, as a promise of escape. This moving world remains exposed to violence, but maintains control through its own self-determination.

*Stone*: The body as an object highlights issues of gender as well as social/economic class, proposing a re-evaluation of the “classification system”[11] (Douglas, 1966/2002) that produces

[10] Examining the topic of writing as a gesture, Barthes distinguishes two kinds of it, which he separates based on the nature of the tool used. Thus, on the one hand, he recognises the writing that uses a stylus (chisel, reed, or quill), to which he attributes “the hand that presses”, and, on the other hand, that which uses a brush (ballpoint or marker), to which he attributes “the hand that caresses”. In this analysis, Barthes presents a schema of a dual gesture, for the expression of which intention is imprinted on the tool, resulting in the emergence of two different kinds: the gesture of *inscription*, expressed with tools that scratch and symbolise the incision, the contract, and memory, and, on the other hand, the gesture of *description*, expressed with the brush, the slanted hand, and the drawing, to which he attributes greater inwardness and tranquillity.

[11] The approach of anthropologist Mary Douglas to the issue of purity comes from a comparative perspective. In the essay *Secular Defilement*, using the caste system of the Brahmins and their perceptions of purity as a starting point, she attempts an analogy with contemporary perceptions of

disposable bodies (Butler, 1993). Galindo's body is not a dystopian or utopian body. It is not a heterotopic body, at least not more so than any other body in performance. Galindo's body is a displaced body. Displaced bodies, in the first case of this research, are equated in terms of the new wandering common world. They gain equal rights of inscription and participation. They are located and re-territorialized within its mobility.

Finally, *the truth*: The second part of the sections, the development of the themes with reference to Galindo's work, essentially fulfil the function of reading the first parts. Returning, therefore, to the main intervention case - the sub-text (Genette, 1982) of the study, *Le ballon ροζ or six ways*, having taken the necessary distance that allows criticism to appear as outwardness, but also the enrichment of the gaze through dialectical juxtaposition with the work of a performance focused artist, the range of experience, as well as the recognition of the simultaneity of these multifaceted experiences, are emerging as a centrality of every political claim. The same line of thought that allows for an action focused on the sharing of play and movement as an “exhalation of joy” (Bachelard, 1943/2011, p.239) also allows for the approach of a breath almost stopped from the pain, yet continuing reading. The actions clearly express different moments of the spectrum of human experience. Their common ground: the mere fact that they momentarily existed in *dialogue* within a head lift up.

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# Posthumanist Performativity in Heiner Müller's Play *Despoiled Shore Medea-Material Landscape with Argonauts*

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## Abstract

In the present paper, Heiner Müller's 1982 play *Despoiled Shore Medea-material Landscape with Argonauts*[12] is explored through a *post-human* interpretation of the myth, where Medea *performs* her mythical story of destruction and loss by means of the landscape itself. In this framework, Medea *becomes* the 'despoiled shore', the polluted anthropogenic landscape that *acts* against its perpetrators, the 'Argonauts' of capitalist society. In the theatrical triptych images of environmental degradation bring to the fore the *non-human* and the *geological,* as components of the myth in Müller's post-modern version. Medea, appearing as Nature herself, becomes the protagonist of a drama that stretches from mythical space to the landscapes of late capitalism. How can Müller's play, and by consequence the myth of Medea, be interpreted through a *non-anthropocentric* notion of performativity; one that focuses on non-living things and landscapes rather than on human subjects? What messages do these entities convey as they act upon our lives?

By examining excerpts of Müller's text, the essay focuses on a renewed understanding of performativity through the lens of new materialist theory and more specifically through Karen Barad's term 'post-humanist performativity'. Working within the theoretical framework of agential realism, Barad offers "an elaboration of performativity—a materialist, naturalist, and posthumanist elaboration—that allows matter its due as an active participant in the world's becoming". (Barad, 2003, 803) In the essay, Müller's *Medea* is associated with such notion of

[12] The current essay is part of my PhD research titled "Medealaboratory. Mappings and Survivals of the Myth of Medea in Contemporary Times. Towards a Redefinition of the Relationship Between Nature, Geology and Culture" conducted in the Architecture Department of the University of Thessaly. The research is conducted in the operating framework of the Center of Research Innovation and Excellence of University of Thessaly (Invitation to submit applications for the grant of scholarships to doctoral candidates of University of Thessaly) and was funded by the Special Account of Research Grants of University of Thessaly.

the performative. The analysis thus focuses on lyrics that reveal transformations in space, composite materialities, human-non-human alliances and the mediating role that inorganic entities play in the production of knowledge. This shift towards the 'post-humanist performativity' of matter ultimately aims to convey a renewed understanding of the contemporary environment as an active agent, rather than a passive space for appropriation.

*Keywords:* Heiner Müller, Medea, post-humanism, performativity, materiality.

## Posthumanist Performativity in Heiner Müller's Play *Despoiled Shore Medea-Material Landscape with Argonauts*

Heiner Müller's 1982 play *Despoiled Shore Medea-material Landscape with Argonauts* is a post-modern version of the myth of Medea and the Argonauts, unfolding in three interrelated parts: two expansive descriptions of landscapes devastated by pollution and war and a dialogic part between Medea and Jason. In the essay, the play is explored through a *post-human* interpretation of the classical myth, where Medea *performs* her story of destruction and loss by means of the landscape and the material entities that comprise it. In the theatrical triptych images of environmental degradation bring to the fore the *non-human* and the *geological*, as components of Müller's version of the myth. These images, taking a variety of forms, follow a climactic structure that culminates in the catastrophe of the final scene. In the first part of the play, Medea *is* the "despoiled shore", the polluted coastal landscape that *acts* against its perpetrators, the Argonauts of capitalist society. In the second part, "Medea-material," the anti-heroine *performs* the murder of Glaece through her mythical poisonous gown—a *cyborgian* entity between an object and a body. Finally, in the last part of the play, she *manifests* herself as both the atomic bomb and the nuclear landscape that follows it. Through these ontological and material transformations, Medea becomes the protagonist of a drama that stretches from mythical space to the landscapes of late capitalism.

By which means could these performative aspects of the play be explored a new through a "non-anthropocentric" perspective? Could – beyond her traditional definition as a subject – Müller's Medea be understood as a *place*, as *material entanglements* or as a *techno-scientific* version of "Nature" in the era of the Anthropocene? After a brief overview of the term "performativity" and its genealogy, the essay focuses on its understanding through the lens of new materialist theory and more specifically through Karen Barad's concept of "post-humanist performativity". Departing from the fields of physics as well as feminist and queer studies, Barad offers "an elaboration of performativity—a materialist, naturalist, and post-humanist elaboration—that allows matter its due as an active participant in the world's becoming" (Barad, 2003, p.803). In the essay, aspects of Müller's text are associated with such notion of performativity, with a focus on excerpts that reveal transformations in space, composite

materialities and human-non-human alliances. What the essay ultimately argues for is a renewed understanding of the environment as an active agent in the "world's becoming" (Barad, 2003, p.824) rather than a static scenery or a passive space for appropriation.

## Heiner Müller's *Despoiled Shore Medea-Material Landscape with Argonauts*: Nature, Materiality & the Body

*Despoiled Shore Medea-material Landscape with Argonauts* is an amalgamation of the ancient myth of Medea and the Argonauts, 20th century history and the landscapes of capitalism. The three-part play, written by Heiner Müller over a period between 1950 and 1982, portrays "the catastrophes, on which humanity is working" (Müller, 2002) in the aftermath of WW II, colonialism and the realities of the Cold War division of Germany between the Western and Eastern bloc. Much has been written on Müller's post-modern approach to the myth as well as on the dramaturgical and performative[13] aspects of the text. Less examined, however, is the play's function as an environmental metaphor of an era defined by pollution, mass industrialization and nuclear war. If the textual tradition of antiquity illustrates the passage from the God-like status of Medea in Hesiod's Theogony and Pindar's Fourth Pythian Ode to the anti-heroine's human status in the play of Euripides, Müller follows here another path, pushing the notion of the human to its boundaries. In the new setting of the story—in the era of the Anthropocene—the idea of humanity is shaken from the ground. As the essay argues, Medea while retaining her human voice in the middle part, ultimately *becomes* the landscape herself through a series of material transformations. The analysis thus moves away from the notion of subjectivity and the human and towards the triptych of "nature, materiality and the body" (Barad, 2003, p.812) as a new interpretative lens in order to explore the performative aspects of the text. If "nature" is placed here in quotation marks, understood as the techno-natural landscape that surrounds us, and the "body" refers to both human and non-human as well as inorganic bodies, it is the notion of "materiality" that binds those terms together. Seen from such a perspective performativity does not entail the representation of subjects or characters. Rather, it involves the expressivity of matter and its capacity to act *on* and *throughout* bodies and landscapes. It is through this non-anthropocentric framework that the essay examines the performative aspects of Müller's play.

## Barrad's Post-Humanist Performativity: From Language to Matter

The term "performativity" was initially conceived as the capacity of *language* to effect change. Introduced as "performative utterances" the concept is first described by philosopher of

[13] As the author himself states: "The simultaneity of the three parts of the text can be portrayed any which way", Heiner Müller, Introductory notes *Despoiled Shore Medea-material Landscape with Argonauts*.

language John L. Austin (1979) when he refers to a specific feature of language: the capacity of speech and communication not only to describe the world but to act upon it or to consummate an action. In the years that followed it has come to define a wide range of principles ranging from anthropology, social studies, economics, linguistics, philosophy, and theatre studies, as well as in the domains of science studies and feminist and queer studies. Most known is the term's later use in philosophy by Jean-Francois Lyotard (1979) as a means of legitimation of post-modern knowledge and also in post-structuralist theory by Jacques Derrida, who reinserts performativity in the very act of writing. In the field of gender studies, performativity became "a central practice for thinking about resistant identities in the feminism and queer theory of the 1980s and '90s" (Nealon, 2021, ix). Philosopher and feminist theorist Judith Butler introduced the concept of "gender performativity" in her analysis of gender development while Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick's (2003) term "periperformative" describes queer performativity as an ongoing project for transforming the way boundaries to identity are defined.

What the above approaches have in common is a privilege of the discursive, even when the body is part of that discourse or even its main referent. A different reading of the term, one that primarily focuses on matter, invite the insights of new materialist theory and more specifically, the seminal text "Post-humanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter" by theoretical physicist and feminist theorist Karen Barad. In her article, Barad offers "an elaboration of performativity—a materialist, naturalist, and post-humanist elaboration—that allows matter its due as an active participant in the world's becoming" (Barad, 2003, p.803). Barad departs from what she calls a "diffractive" reading of the term that combines insights from the fields of science studies as well as feminist and queer theory in order to focus on performativity's association with both human and non-human worlds. She thus proposes a non-anthropocentric understanding of performativity—one that "relates to "all bodies" and "incorporates important material and discursive, social and scientific, human and nonhuman, and natural and cultural factors" (Barad, 2003, p.808).

For this purpose, in her essay Barad examines the term's origins in the writings of Foucault and Butler, in order to critically engage while moving beyond their primarily anthropocentric perspective. While Foucault does not mention performativity directly, he nevertheless reveals in his writings, how the body becomes the locus of power that shapes the political subject. According to Barad, however, he fails "to offer an account of the body's historicity in which its very materiality plays an *active* role in the workings of power" (Barad, 2003, p.809). For Barad, it is not simply the contours of the body, but rather "the very atoms" (Barad, 2003, p.810) that constitute it that become active factors in further materializations. This assumption of matter's passivity is also criticized by Barad in Butler's notion of "gender performativity." In her seminal works, *Gender Trouble* (2006/1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Butler urged us to rethink gender not as an innate essence or natural quality, but as something that "proves to be

performative" (Butler, 2006/1990, p.33). As Barad (2007), however, observes:

> Butler's concern is limited to the production of human bodies […] and her theorization of materialization is parasitic on Foucault's notions of regulatory power and discursive practices, which are limited to the domain of human social practices. (p.145)

Barad's emphasis on "performativity" thus goes beyond the construction of gender and its socio-political implications and also beyond the linguistic turn that seems has dominated theory for several decades. Reality and the body cannot be defined by language. Instead, what needs to be articulated is the active role *materiality* plays in the body's historicity.

An intellectual precursor to Barad's "post-humanist perspective" on performativity, is the notion of the "material-semiotic", introduced by feminist science studies scholar Donna Haraway. It is there that a new non-anthropocentric framework is first reiterated; one that breaks with the Nature / Culture divide that characterised contemporary discourse up to that point. As Haraway argues "the material-semiotic thinks the material, bodily fleshiness and the discursive-linguistic together" (Barad, 2003, p.810). In this theoretical framework, boundaries do not pre-exist in individual entities. Rather, if the latter are perceived as objects of knowledge "their boundaries materialize in social interaction" (Haraway, 1988, p.595). It is through Haraway's "material-semiotic" that Barad, 2003) will elaborate the idea of "material-discursive":

> There is a host of material-discursive forces—including ones that get labelled "social," "cultural," "psychic," "economic," "natural," "physical," "biological," "geopolitical," and "geological"—that may be important to particular (entangled) processes of materialization. (p.810)

Furthermore, inspired by Haraway's concept of "situated knowledge" – that is a partial, located and embodied form of knowledge – Barad proceeds with her own critique of representationalism, that is the artificial tripartite separation between knowledge, the known and the existence of a knower. In Barad's posthumanist account the "knower" does not stand in a relation of absolute externality to the natural world being investigated. Rather, she argues: "We are not outside observers of the world. Nor are we simply located at particular places *in* the world; rather, we are part *of* the world in its ongoing intra-activity" (Barad, 2003, p.828).

Critically engaging with the genealogy of theorists mentioned above, Barad's thesis arises in the theoretical framework of agential realism. Crucial to this framework are two interrelated terms: "phenomena" and "intra-activity". For the first term, "phenomena", Barad takes the lead from Niels Bohr's account in order to expand its meaning. If Bohr understands phenomena as "entanglements of objects and agencies of observation" (Barad, 2007, p.309) within the context of the laboratory, for Barad they exist independently of human action and things. She argues that:

> the primary unit is not independent objects with independently determinate boundaries and properties but rather... "phenomena." In my agential realist elaboration (…) *phenomena* are the *ontological,* inseparability of agentially intra-acting components (Barad, 2003, p.815).

And here Barad introduces another key term, the neologism “intra-action” that the author uses in order to distance herself from the notion of “interaction” with presumes the existence of distinct entities. The term implies that there are no separate entities (x and y), but rather entities arise from intra-actions. As Levi Bryant discusses, “The concept of *inter*action suggests pre-existent entities that then enter into interaction with one another, whereas 'intra' signifies 'within' or 'inside of', and therefore captures the sense of a unitary event or process in which the components do not possess discrete existence” (Bryant, 2016, p.4)[14]. How do then the terms “phenomenon” and “intra-action” relate or emerge from one another? According to Bryant it is through the notion of performativity that the two terms manifest themselves: “A phenomenon, then, would be the unity of intra-acting components produced in a performance” (Bryant, 2016, p.4).

How can—using the concepts above—Barad’s notion of “posthumanist performativity” be summarised? The immediate consequence of an agential realist approach to performativity is that:

> All bodies, not merely “human” bodies, come to matter through the world’s iterative intra-activity—its performativity. This is true not only of the surface or contours of the body but also of the body in the fullness of its physicality, including the very “atoms” of its being. Bodies are not objects with inherent boundaries and properties; they are material-discursive phenomena. “Human” bodies are not inherently different from “nonhuman” ones (Barad, 2003, p.823).

Or, as Levi Bryant summarizes Barad’s concept, “Far from denoting *fiction* or *representation*, performance denotes a series of material intra-actions that produce real and material qualities in things” (Bryant, 2016, 6). Post-humanist performativity thus invites for a new epistemological and ethical paradigm. Knowledge is not limited to individual things themselves but in their relation to the wider world in which they occur and with which they interact. At the same time, if the observer is understood as part of the phenomenon observed, there is always a degree of ethical responsibility involved. Knowledge and meaning are thus produced not only through words, but also collectively, through “material (re)configuring” (Barad, 2003, p.819) of both human and non-human bodies that play a mutual part in the “ongoing performance of the world” (Barad, 2003, p.821).

[14] “A performance, in Barad's (2016, p. 4) sense, is just such an intra-action among internally related components.”

## Posthumanist Performativity in Heiner Müller's Medea

If Barad's project aspires "to acknowledge nature, the body, and materiality in the fullness of their becoming" (Barad, 2003, p.812) how can it help us re-examine Müller's 1982 theatrical interpretation of Medea? As we already saw "post-humanist performativity" moves beyond the traditional context of theatrical performance where *x* represents something as *y*, that is beyond the articulation of a role and towards a material reality. In this sense, the notion of performance does not entail the idea of performers, that is of individual, pre-existing entities. It is not the individual body of the actor or the body of society, but rather the world as whole that performs. By focusing on phenomena and the primacy of matter, Barad's idea of performativity is thus expanded to include "all bodies", making no distinction between the *human*, the *non-human* and the *cyborgian.*[15] In the analysis of Müller's play, I interpret the three parts of *Despoiled Shore Medea-material Landscape with Argonauts* as instances of interaction between these states of being that compose what we name as "the environment".

### *Despoiled Shore*

> Sea by Straussberg Despoiled shore Trace
> Of flaxen-haired Argonauts
> Bristles reeds Dead branches
> THIS TREE SHALL NOT GROW OVER ME Fish-corpses
> Shine in the mud biscuit-tins muck-piles
> FROMM'S ACT CASINO
> Shredded tampons the blood of the women of Colchis
> (Müller, 1982)

From the opening lyrics of "Despoiled Shore", liquid substances such as water and menstrual blood, human hair, vegetal organisms, animal corpses, industrial waste, mud, and excrement introduce the landscape of the first part of the play. Rather than the *human* occupying a privileged and clearly delineated position in respect to the other elements, all entities seem to 'float' on a horizontal plane, composing the common pool of *matter*. This matter, however, is not passive. As Barad (2003) observes:

> Matter is not a support, location, referent, or source of sustainability for discourse. Matter is not immutable or passive. It does not require the mark of an external force like culture or history to complete it. Matter is always already an ongoing historicity (p.821).

[15] The *cyborg,* first introduced as a term by Donna Haraway (1991, p.150) "is both a condensed image of imagination and material reality, the two joined centers structuring any possibility for historical transformation."

Seen from such a perspective, Müller's text reveals another aspect of the materiality of landscapes, one where life and death pertain everything; they are perceived as mobilizing forces in a process of composition and decomposition of substances and continuous chemical activity. The Earth is an active compost where traces of human civilization are devoured by geological forces only for new materialities to emerge. These materialities form the landscapes of the Anthropocene.

> On the ground however Medea
> […]
> She who is skilled
> In poisons
> (Müller, 1982)

In the midst of such a landscape and only in the final lyrics appears Medea. She is "On the ground". Müller, acknowledging Medea's chthonic origins, places her on a despoiled terrain, part of the components of the Earth. He introduces her as the one who is "skilled in poisons". The "poisons" mentioned here are not other but the substances occupying the first part of the play; by-products of industrial activity, of capitalism and colonisation. Such reference could be understood as a faithful reproduction of the ancient myth's association of Medea with witchcraft. But it can also be interpreted as a lyric that brings forth the *performative* aspect of Medea; her existence as a "phenomenon", a material manifestation of the world's "intra-actions", rather than a human being. From such a post-human perspective, it is not Medea herself that is the bearer of alchemist knowledge. Rather it is through the "intra-activity" of these different elements—Medea, the living and non-living elements of the landscape and the anthropogenic substances in the ground—that poisons *materialize.*

### *Medea-Material*

The second part of the text "Medea-Material" has the form of a dialogue between Medea and Jason. However, rather than engaging in an analysis of the two characters or the extended monologue of the anti-heroine, the essay focuses on the *non-human* and non-linguistic element of the story, Medea's bridal gown. This hybrid entity, by means of its composite, active materiality *performs* the violent act of killing Jason's new bride.

> The garb of love my other skin
> Embroidered with the hands of the plundered
> Out of the gold of Colchis and dyed with the blood
> Of the wedding
> (Müller, 1982)

The entity is presented as natural (“my other skin”), it is however a man-made (“embroidered”) construct, a mix of inorganic substances (“gold”) and traces of human fluids (“blood”). The gown is not a passive object, a dress that can be easily manipulated by its user. Rather, it is animated through its contact with human skin, acquiring an agency on its own. Seen from Barad’s agential realist perspective, however, agency “cannot be designated as an attribute of “subjects” or “objects” […] is not an attribute whatsoever—it is “doing”/“being” in its intra-activity” (Barad, 2003, pp.826-827). What Barad thus maintains is that agency has more to do with enactments of matter rather than with human will or subjectivity.

> The bridal gown of the woman-barbarian has a way
> Of fatally binding itself to a stranger’s skin
> Wounds and scars yield strong poison
> […]
> Now the gold of Colchis closes her pores
> Plants a forest of knives in her flesh
> (Müller, 1982)

The title *Medea-Material* alludes exactly to this type of agency (“has a way”) of something that is neither a subject nor a delineated object, but a sort of composite materiality—animated, unstable, dependent on impermanent assemblages. The properties of the dress do not pre-exist but are activated and defined through the “intra-action” with the victim’s body. New substances emerge from it, poisons that are transfused by means of the scars it creates on human flesh. This follows a new understanding of the mythic gown’s properties closer to a post-human notion of performativity. As Levi Bryant (2016) observes:

> We cannot think of properties or qualities as *fixed features* of individual entities that they possess inherently independent of their relations to other things. Rather, the properties of an entity are the result of a *dynamic genesis*, a becoming, in tandem with the world about them that produces these properties (p.7).

Next to the categories of the “human” and the “non-human’, the gown can be better understood as the “cyborgian” form of agency that Barad also refers to when speaking of performativity. Neither a subject nor an inanimate thing, it is rather a material body somewhere between the human and the artificial. A composite skin that manifests itself differently—as inert matter or animated entity—according to the “intra-actions” with its environment.

### *Landscape with Argonauts*

In the third part of the text, “Landscape with Argonauts”, a new voice occupies the play. It is a collective ‘I’, that through the personification of Jason, represents humanity itself, or rather, its

end. Subjectivity is articulated here as the collective (male) voice of human civilization. A civilization that finds itself in the face of extinction, in a hostile environment where death pertains everything.

Thin between I and 'No longer I' (Müller, 1982).

Throughout this part of the play Medea remains silent. She finally makes her appearance in the end of the text, not through spoken word but by means of an all-pervasive atomic blast. She becomes the ultimate catastrophe that Ivar Kvistad names as a *dea ex machina*, the atomic bomb that eradicates civilization. Müller's Medea is a product of her times: a combination of nuclear energy, technological apparatuses and the violence of men, that she returns back as a large-scale explosion. She manifests herself both as a techno-scientific body[16] and as the landscape of catastrophe that emerges from the ruins. Medea as a "phenomenon" demonstrates how material bodies—humans, animals, inorganic matter and technological apparatuses—performatively materialize at sites of the Anthropocene. "Landscape with Argonauts" is such a site "where techno-logical, biological, technoscientific, (bio-)political, and economic forces intra-act" (Barla, 2019, p. 10) in "dynamic relationality" (Barad, 2003, p.820).

I felt MY blood draining from MY veins
And MY body transformed into the landscape
Of MY death
(Müller, 1982)

In Jason's account of his death and transformation into the landscape, we thus see the ethical repercussions of Barad's theory. The perpetrator dissolves into the landscape of his own device ("blood", "body", "landscape", "death"). As Levi Bryant (2016) remarks:

> Insofar as the observer is not independent of the observed but is a component in the phenomenon generated in knowledge production, there is a dimension of ethical responsibility in inquiry. The manner in which we choose to 'actualize' phenomena involves a dimension of choice in which we are complicit. After all, we could always choose to actualize phenomena differently. (p.10)

This sense of responsibility in relation to the world that surrounds us is crucial in Barad's concept of post-human performativity. In Müller's Medea it is the lack of any ethical questioning from the side of the "Argonauts", that is human civilization, that culminates in the play's tragic ending.

[16] As Josef Barla (2019, p.10) argues "bodies as always already technologized bodies and technology as always already a part of 'us'".

## Conclusion

In Müller's version of the myth Medea manifests herself as a "phenomenon" in Barad's sense, that first appears as all-encompassing coastal pollution, then as a toxic veil and, finally in the last part of the text, as both an atomic bomb as well as the landscape of destruction that follows it. Merging mythical elements together with apparatuses and materials of the Anthropocene the play creates a vision of the world where 'Nature' and 'Culture' are inseparable, one devouring, merging into the other in ever-evolving combinations and states of dissolution. Medea, appearing as a techno-natural force, becomes the protagonist of a drama that stretches from mythical space to the landscapes of late capitalism.

What environmental metaphors can the ontological transformation of the anti-heroine from an insurgent subject to a revolting landscape convey? And, what messages do these types of contemporary landscapes reveal as they act upon our lives? Barad's emphasis on the relation between entities, human and non-human, and their "intra-action" has fundamental political and ethical repercussions when it comes to understanding landscapes and the environment in general. It argues for a sense of responsibility in a world within which we *perform* together with other entities in the drama of life. Reading Müller's *Despoiled Shore Medea-material Landscape with Argonauts* through such a *non-anthropocentric* notion of performativity invites a new understanding of Medea's tragic story. If myths can activate new knowledge practices it is through their entanglements with the materiality of contemporary spaces; through these they can transmit the reality of the destroyed landscapes of the Anthropocene.

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# Metafeminism and Subjectivisation
# Performing the Matrixial

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## Abstract

In this essay, I propose to consider the connection between performance and a feminine form of subjectivisation by indicating the *borderlinking* between contemporary performance and psychoanalysis. Performance will be approached as an event of co-becoming through the filter of the metafeminist theory of Bracha L. Ettinger. My intention is to contest the hegemonic model of a singular and autonomous subjectivity and undermine the phallocentric thinking that reproduces the binary logic of self/other to suggest that an alternative model of subjectivisation, rooted in the feminine, can be energised through performance-based practices. To do so, I will argue that performance is an embodied *encounter-event* that suggests a feminine model of *becoming-with* in order to contest the phallic logic of identity and desire that follows the paradigm of castration anxiety. The Ettingerian theory illuminates the constitution of a *being-together* and offers a feminine vision in the field of desire, subjectivity and art by opening the space of visibility with *transconnecting* and *co-affecting* qualities via artworking. Stressing the levels of malleability and jointness of the performing bodies, subjectivity will be approached as a participatory and ongoing process of performing and reforming the self to inform the oedipal model of identification, gendering and sexualisation. The matrixial sphere will be first analyzed and, on a second level, activated in practice by examining Tino Sehgal's performance *Kiss*. Antigone will be revisited as a paradigm of subject-Woman which radically contests the phallic structures to shed light on another complex, a feminine supplementary perspective to Oedipus imbued by the mother-daughter relationship towards the emancipation of desire and the construction of new trans-connected worlds

*Keywords:* Bracha L. Ettinger, meta-feminist theory, psychoanalysis, performance, Antigone.

## Metafeminism and Subjectivisation: Performing the Matrixial

In a world that remains under the phallus' symbolic power the hegemonic model of subjectivity is linked to structures of separation, rejection and domination signified by castration (Pollock, 2006). Raising the question of the feminine in relation to subject formation, I wish to explore the potentiality of performance practices to produce *co-affecting transsubjectivities* contesting the phallic model of subjectivity. My proposition is to approach performance as a *matrixial borderspace* (Ettinger, 2006) which transconnects subjective elements: an *encounter-event* of *co-poeisis,* where the performing "I" is not fully individuated from the others performers/spectators. The main argument will be grounded on the *matrixial theory* introduced and developed by the artist, theorist and psychoanalyst Bracha L. Ettinger. The matrixial theory transcends the phallic mechanism of identification and castration anxiety (Ettinger, 2003) resisting to reproduce dichotomies such as self/other, male/female embracing a mechanism of a continuous subjectivisation. My intention is to discuss performance in the Ettingerian psychoanalytic context of *subjectivity-as-encounter*: (a). to rethink the subject through the feminine so as to enable a critical cogitation on the relationship(s) between subjects, performance, space and co-becoming and (b). approach performance as an act of *metramorphosis*, which can generate feminine-matrrixial kinds of relations, where no *hero(ine)* can claim the possibility of becoming creative alone (Ettinger, 2006).

The conceptualisation of the matrix is not an opposition to the traditional psychoanalytic approaches, but a supplementary theory to the Freudian and the Lacanian symbolic claiming possibilities for subjects to be rebirthed discerned and discerning each other, transcending oedipal sexual difference and gender identification (Ettinger, 1993). The feminine subjectivity (Ettinger, 2006) is not another version of feminine identity. Lyotard commenting on Ettinger's oeuvre will argue that the feminine is a sphere which is not accessible exclusively to women (Lyotard, 2004). According to Judith Butler, Ettinger creates her own vocabulary to "reformulate the very relation between the subject and its other, and to ask what precedes this encounter in which the phallus seeks to confirm its status, where the feminine acts only as a faulty mirror" (Butler, 2006, Foreword). By offering a symbolic relied to the feminine dimension, Ettinger calls us to think of the I as within a contact zone of affected sensibility, a stratum of co-emergence (Ettinger, 2006).

Throughout the matrixial subjectivisation, the "I" (structured subjectivity) is becoming de-centered becoming in joint-ness-with via affectively invested *communicaring* acts (Ettinger, 2004). Approaching the human through the matrixial is to forget the dynamics of identity, separations, and cuts imposed by the phallic symbolic promising the entering to a cosmos of fluidity and trans-connectivity that is rooted on the prenatal borderlinking between the *I* and the mother. Becoming matrixially aware is to activate *metramorphic bordelinking* capabilities by

remembering-performing what has been forgotten, what occurred before the subject became a subject—before the "I" became named, recognised, and capable of performing (norms). The matrixial theorisation prioritises the role of *severality* and *encounter* (towards a *becoming-in-severality*) pertaining what happens to subjects before they enter the taken-for-granted reality and the symbolic, introducing the potentiality to re-experience through performing-as-remembering the prebirth encounter of *borderlinking* with the *(m)Other* (Ettinger, 2006).

Shifting our thought to pre and subsymbolic levels, Ettinger connects the feminine to the female body in the final stage of pregnancy to propose an enlarged paradigm of subjectivity (Pollock, 2006). She insists on the many-sidedness of the self; subjectivity is something partial and multiple: "we are at the same time both one and several" as the "I" of the mother and the "non-I" of the infant, not fully distinguishable, are being linked on a physical and psychic level, being *co-emerged* and *co-emerging* (Ettinger, 1993, 71). The matrixial refers to the psychic life or "the activity of the erotic antennae of the psyche", which generates a desire to connect with the other (Ettinger, 2001) recognizing the human capacity to attach. The *matrixial borderspace* is a humanised space of being towards birth and towards birthing (not alone). Its ontological foundation is the *borderlinking* between the "I" and the *(m)Other* engaging with the procreation stage of the subject. A stage which Lacan considered ''belated, phantasmatic and untrue'' since it is positioned before the *Mirror Stage* and the entrance of the child-subject into language and the symbolic order (Ettinger, 2006, 81). For Ettinger, the "I" comes into being before it learns how to speak as the subject-formation begins before the separation of the child from the mother (Ettinger, 2006). Following Ettinger, as we have been through the process of being born, it is impossible that we have lost this capacity of/for connectedness with the other, we just choose to ignore it. It is this un/conscious memory that can cultivate psychic capacities for *shareability* and *transconnectivity* through aesthetic events with others (Ettinger, 2020).

Thusly, subjectivity arises as a plural project of intersubjective transactions enabling a freedom of circulation between partial self-fragilised subjects that participate affectively with/in a shared subjectivity that is "no longer one's own" questioning the singular perception of the subject. In this line of thought, identification becomes an impossibility: the psychic levels of the *(m)Other* affect the "I" in a frame of compassion that has been developed in a pre-birth state and reappears with the function of *anamnesis*. Thusly, transsubjectivity is being engendered through performing the prenatal *borderlinking* within a *borderspace* where the other is acknowledged as an active part of the self through an act of self-fragilisation (Ettinger, 2006).

It is the act of *metramorphosis* that articulates the praxis-as-performance of *borderlinking* between the "I" and the other which implies a mode of openness and connectedness, the weaving of trans-subjective links (Ettinger, 2004). *Metramorphosis* is a notion that has in foundations the Greek word *metra* (μήτρα), which means the womb and is also linked to Greek word *mother* (μητέρα). *Metramorphosis* proposes the emergence of a creative space of unity

that in contrast to metamorphosis that leads to a new fixed form, enables continuous possibilities of engaged and engaging changeability and shareability (Ettinger, 1992). It is a space of constant movements, where everything is in flux; what Deleuze and Guattari would call *a body without organs* or *a figure without centre* designating a *topos* that questions the logic of identity featuring intra-actions not just between, but with/in. In the act of *metramorphosis* nothing is opposed to the other: "sometimes the margins are in the centre, and sometimes the centre is an outer limit." The matrixial subject seems to be "marginal, and, at the same time, in the centre" (Jabès and Ettinger, 1990, 19), what has been described as the exile of exile, an inside outside, where distinctions are becoming invisible. The matrix proclaims a locus-space of subjectivisation that enables new movements-webs of relations (Ettinger, 1993b, 1993a) that do not allow the erasure of the self, symbolic death or any form of melancholy and victimisation of the woman (Ettinger, 2006), and the self appears as a project to be performed and reformed with others beyond the neoliberal imaginary of autonomous subjectivity.

## Performing the Matrixial: No Hero(ine) Can Become Creative Alone

The matrixial sphere is itself a performative encounter-event, so, the question now is: How can artistic performance practices be related to the matrixial stratum of subjectivisation? Or to state it differently: how can the act of *metramorphoses* be experienced and visualised in contemporary art aesthetics? The performing subjects will be discussed as participating subjects in a co-subjectivity via intimate sharing, weaving *subjectivity-as-ecounter*. The central assumptions are that performance can animate the matrixial potentiality for *shareability* (Ettinger, 2004) as the borders of the performing subjects blur as they trans-connect (in the case of collective performances) actualizing the *matrixial impossibility of not-sharing*: a *co-eventing* between two bodies that appear together in a "sensationally intense co-emergence" (Pollock, 2006).

Tino Sehgal's performance *Kiss* (2010) can help us provide a matrixial understanding of performance practice. In this case, there is not a dominant "I" performing a sovereign subject (a protagonist), but there is *an acting-together* which suggests an ethical sphere of co-being. The performers reverberating with one another, are being affected and *borderlinked* within a continuous play of co-affection (Pollock, 2006) making possible an event of co-emergence. It is the imaging of *a moment of jointness*: a performative togetherness that presents the matrixial desire for connection, an image-as-encounter beyond representation, which resists to phantasies of sovereignty, separation and violence. Throughout the performance, the "I" cannot be thinkable without the other and the performing bodies become self-fragilised together, carrying the other.

**Figure 1**

*Tino Sehgal,* Kiss, *2010.*



The performing space in *Kiss* arises as *co-poiesis* between the "I" and the other as the "I" is yearning for the other abandoning their oneness and composing a *partnership-in-difference*. It is an intimate moment that is at the same time public, strangers-spectators can pass by and look at the performers who remain close, touching, kissing, performing in a slow manner that offers the capacity for the development of a matrixial attachment. The separation means the end of the performance and the disconnection from the matrixial conceptualisation. Performance presents itself as an image which does not correspond to the phallic paradigm of identity and thus to that of representation. Sehgal's *Kiss* is not a pure representation like Gustav Klimt's famous *The Kiss* or Auguste Rodin's famous *The Kiss*. Sehgal's *Kiss* is a collective live action, a co-activity invested with affection and desire for connection suggesting an artistic paradigm of performativity that is not pure representation. Performance appears as an *encounter-eventing* based on inter-relations played on a *borderspace* where the "I" co-exists with the stranger and the subject of action is at the same time the object of desire and spectatorship.

The phallic structures of separation and division are being questioned as the bodies continue moving together producing a system of a co-affective sharing of thinking-feeling-knowing the other. In this way, a shared body-space is being created where the limits of one's body are no longer ends but links that connect the one with the other engendering a *metramorphic borderlinking*. As a result, within and throughout this process of change and exchange without domination, there is not a dominant "I" but a performing we that

transconnects the psychic with the corporeal, representation with performativity. In this context, performance as a practice (of psychoanalysis) can activate the possibility of beginning and becoming again. In other words, matrixial performing can be understood as what the philosopher Slavoj Žižek calls *authentic act* as that which allows one to question the power of the superego by redefining their own identity enabling a process of birth: ‘‘you are born again not in a religious sense but you redefine what you truly are.’’ (Žižek, 1999, online).

Performing on the floor, kissing in front of strangers, creates a vulnerable condition of resistance to what the phallic logic of hegemony, meaning and reason impose. Another logic is being activated that of a *different difference*, that of art, the feminine and the matrix. Becoming matrixially aware is to perform a desire for connectedness with a world that is unknown (Ettinger, 2006). The Matrix is a compassionate beyond empathy sphere of transference that is linked to an elsewhere which has not yet been felt-thought, as it is to be emerged, it is that which has not yet been born. As a result, performance can enable birthing possibilities that reveal the truthful self of the performing subjects undermining their superego in a framework of inter-connectivity, while embracing difference and the unknown.

The matrixial model of subjectivisation can emerge through aesthetic encounter-events that are not experienced individually. There must be at least two subjective agents: the viewer and the artwork or the viewer and the performer or the performer and the performer. This encounter between the “I” and the other enables a becoming together through the practice of mutual sharing and *communicaring*. Performing appears as an open space of changeability and shareability through the continuous movements of reorganisation and transformation between the psychic and *corporeal* dimensions of the performing bodies. Performance appears as a space of birthing within a pregnant space-time of *feel-thinking*, *see-knowing*, *feel-knowing* with the other indicating the transition in contemporary aesthetics from phallic structures to the matrixial.

## Antigone: A Paradigm of a Matrixial Heroine

In order to strengthen the main argument that relates the matrixial subjectivity to the field of performance we will revisit Antigone from the Sophoclean tragedy as a heroine, which can be a paradigm of matrixial subjectivity that questions family politics and phallic structures by performing *metramorphic borderlinking*. In this case, the assumptions are that (a). the position of the brother is recognised as the *Other* with whom the “I” of Antigone co-emerges and (b). Antigone is acting in a matrixial sphere under the unconscious dynamic of a mother-daughter relationship. Antigone will be discussed as a heroine whose act of resistance is connected to the matrixial questioning the structural logic of desire and visualizing the capability of the subject to enter an inter-subjective zone with no fixed positions.

Levinas and Ettinger agree that in terms of the matrixial, there is a level of debt, a *responseability* for the other. Levinas will emphasise that this thought is at the heart of human ethics. For the matrixial subject the life of another becomes more important than the life of the "I" (Levinas and Ettinger, 1991). The moment of ethics in Ettinger's theorisation derives from archaic foundations, which unconsciously produce the desire for a shared event (Pollock, 2009). This idea refers to affective-psychic connections that function as resistance towards Oedipus' theoretical rules (the symbolic). Antigone by defying Creon's law defied the law of the "Father" condemning herself to death. She knew she would die, but she would have done the ethical deed of burying her brother. Antigone's criminal act can be read as a feminine act of humanisation: the feminine cannot always be found in every woman, but it should be looked in the human (Levinas and Ettinger, 1991).

Levinas in a conversation with Ettinger (1991), claims that the feminine is understood as a difference with the powerful capability of giving value to the Other and coming after them. The matrixial subject can accept that ''the world can have a meaning without me,'' because of this ethical relationship (Levinas and Ettinger, 1991, 9). Antigone is dying to *borderlink* with her br/Other. This argument is seen as a symbolic principle of creation giving back to the woman an ethical moment. The disappearing potential of the woman (to a future-death) can be understood as a possibility of expanding the space of being, creating a new space "on the outside like in the inside" (Levinas and Ettinger, 1991, 17).

The concept of the matrix is based on a (platonic) love-eros relationship that is beyond sexuality. Antigone says: "I wasn't born to hate; I was born to love". (523) To love the other is to constitute the "I". Antigone's act of resistance (insisting to bury her brother going against the law) towards Creon is related to the relationship with her brother, to whom she is referring as *"ομόσπλαγχνος*" (the one who has come from the same womb) and "*τὸν ἐξ ἐμῆς μητρὸς*" (the one coming from my mother). Judith Butler acknowledges that Antigone is not going against the law for Polyneices himself, but for the one who holds the position of her brother, because of this relationship of kinship. The position of the brother is that produces her desire (Butler, 2000). The word brother declares and affirms this relationship: in Greek, "brother" is "*αδελφός,*" and derives from "*δελφύς,*" which is the "womb" or the "matrix".

Antigone's act of resistance demonstrates a subject to be joint, a *co-fading* which leads to the end of (her) identity as oneness and the beginning of her/their transsubjectivity. Antigone under this spell cannot be regarded a singularity, her subjectivity is partial and plural through sharing. Ettinger brings new information to the theoretical discourse on Antigone, ethics and politics by indicating that Antigone's radical act occurs because of the mother-daughter relationship as a responsibility to the mother (Ettinger, 2000). The love of the brother is translated for Antigone as an ethical duty to act in order to defend her bother Eteocles-her father Oedipus-their mother Jocasta. Her father is also her brother having shared the same

body-space in the same womb. Antigone is taking care of her brother(s). Her grief is not singular as Butler underlines: “The brother is no singular place for her, though it may well be that all her brothers (Oedipus, Polyneices, Eteocles) are condensed at the exposed body of Polyneices” (Butler, 2000, 79).

But, what about Ismene? Antigone has her sister, Ismene, who is in life, but she chooses her brother(s) instead of her sister. An answer to that could be that Antigone asked for her sister to join her action, but she didn’t. On the other side, Ismene considers herself *alone* without Antigone understanding Antigone as a partial subject that co-constitutes her subjectivity. Ismene cannot exist without Antigone; Antigone cannot exist without Polyneices. Ismene didn’t follow Antigone as her deed could not be done by a woman, but only by a man. The kinship and gender trouble found in the Sophoclean Antigone can help us claim the queerness of the feminine matrixial subject.

According to the phallic paradigm of Oedipus, the heteronormative organisation is being reproduced through its symbolic structures (laws) normalizing heterosexuality and sameness and not recognizing difference. Every child born according to their biological organ/sex is given a specific position towards their desire and place in the family and identity is being structured. The law of the “Father” imposes specific gender positions and regulates sexual relations by producing a codification-repression of desire. Thus, definite positions emerge for the role of mother, father, brother, sister, imposing sexual difference through the heterosexual organisation of the family environment (Butler, 1997). Antigone by acting out her desire towards borderlinking she radically questions the symbolic law. Throughout the play, for this reason she is referred to as man. Questioning the limits of the symbolic, she expands the limits of the political engaging in the life of the city as a man: Creon: Now I am not a man, the man is she. (484) / Guard: A man buried a dead body. (245) / Creon: Who was the man who did that deed? (248)

For Lacan, Antigone’s praxis of resistance and desire means her displacement from the symbolic and her placement into social death. The subject enters the symbolic sphere through the “Name of the Father”, a power that shapes the subject through prohibition. The “Name of the Father” functions as a necessary Law that imposes a specific order through the incest taboo. The acceptance of the specific Law (signifier) becomes necessary for the introduction of the subject in the symbolic, the language and the social world defining what can culturally become recognised (Butler, 2000). The Lacanian symbolic defines the liveable. Antigone by rejecting the symbolic law of the “Father” becomes socially dead.

An Ettingerian reading could claim that by going out of the Lacanian symbolic, Antigone is entering the matrixial zone. Antigone performing “a centre outside the limit” expands the space of action becoming an ethical agent-heroine that is heading through her death towards the subject-object of her desire, a praxis of resistance to the hegemonic and phallic values of

inhabiting the world. Ettinger suggests a way to enter the symbolic from a back door, or to remain in it by expanding its limits activating a non-phallic space of co-being. The matrix appears as the place where one cannot become a heroine without their relation to a special other refining the transsubjective dimension of the human subject, whose performances are of love and eros beyond sexuality.

Rethinking subjectivity through the matrixial can empower possibilities concerning the reformation not only of the self but of reality as well towards the emancipation of desires. Accordingly, a form of viewing and relating is being embraced, which does not exclude difference, acknowledging the outside as an inside. Ettinger offers us a feminine viewpoint on subject formation to overpass precarity and abjection and foster aesthetic and ethical landscapes as immersive sensorial images-events of compassion suggesting the actualisation of an enlarged subjectivity. Performance practices can thus, generate an opening to the humanised borderlinking and co-birthing capacities, and contemporary aesthetics can manifest the transition from phallic structures to the matrixial stratum of ethics and aesthetics.

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# Tragic Space in Site-Specific Productions of Aeschylean Tragedies: *Prometheus Bound* (2010) by Terzopoulos and *The Persians* (2010) by Pearson

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## Abstract

Our aim is to analyze the notion of tragic space, using as examples two site-specific performances based on Aeschylean tragedies, both staged in 2010: Mike Pearson's *The Persians*, and Theodoros Terzopoulos' *Prometheus Bound*. In both cases, the tragedy was chosen in the context of highlighting specific historical sites. We will examine these performing spaces and the extent to which they are used to highlight, in turn, the textual tragic spaces. To better understand how the notion of a tragic space can intermingle with the dramatic and theatrical space, we look into the groundbreaking works of Foucault, Wiles, etc. Moreover, our method's tools are the recent studies on the branches of the theatre space and theatre topology, as well as site-specific theory. One of the most important site-specific principles, also used for our selection of the Aeschylean productions, is the differentiation of Transforming and Augmenting Found Space (Bowditch, 2018). More specifically, we have two main types of space: those that are transformed for the sake of the staging idea and those spaces that are utilised in order to preserve their image as it is, which include spaces that are similar to the one in which the action of the play is set, e.g. an Elizabethan palace for a presentation of a Shakespearean play. In our chosen productions, even these barriers are turned down, showing the spiral of tragic space.

*Keywords:* Aeschylus, Mike Pearson, Site-specific, Theodoros Terzopoulos, Theory of Tragedy, Tragic, Tragic Space.

## In Search of Tragic Space

Reader, can we project Disney movies onto the walls of Auschwitz? I ask you right off the bat so that we can clarify the concept of tragic space. Do you think we can? If your answer is no, then you already know in you what tragic space is. While the other elements of the tragic fade away, the tragic space remains. Such a space, charged with the notion of suffering and chaos, is Auschwitz, and perhaps the ultimate tragic space of modern times, with the traces of the people who passed through it preserving it as such forever. Even if we considered the neo-Nazis, it symbolises the end of their empire. It is, therefore, universally recognised as tragic.

The first to deal with *Space in Performance* and introduce us to these concerns was Gay McAuley (1991), according to whom all spaces have their own significance, among them, for example, even the rehearsal space. His work was presumably inspired by the projects of Richard Schechner and his contemporaries during the period when the avant-garde theatre flourished in the post-Grotowskian era. After all, Schechner (2003) mentions the lack of study of unobserved spaces as spectators enter and exit a theatrical space. We should not, however, exclude formal theatres because they, too are capable of mental associations with the surrounding area and all history. In other words, it is of particular importance whether these are codes of socio-cultural influence on theatre and, conversely, codes of theatre's influence on the community (Fischer-Lichte, 2013).That being said, the reception of the theatrical phenomenon should not be confined to the given theatrical space. The spark of this thought was ignited by Michel Foucault and his famous lecture “Of Other spaces” (1967), in which he speaks of a tripartite formation in the history of space: emplacement - *res extensa* - site. It revolves around the position of the building in space, which, on the one hand, we have the extension of space since the localisation of the position is differentiated by the introduction of the concept of infinity, and, on the other hand, the relationship of the building with the surrounding space. The last phase of history to study a site, according to Foucault, opens up spaces, re-creates others, which brings us closer to the concept he introduced, that of heterotopia.

Although Carlson will bring Aristotle into the discussion of *Places of Performance* (1989), we already notice in Foucault an Aristotelian tone, if we take as an example the "division of cities" that the Greek philosopher identifies in the urban planning of Miletus by Hippodamus in his *Politics* (1267b-1269a). The Hippodamian distance (and union) of sacred, public and private space (changing here the Foucaultian order to *res extensa* - emplacement - site) is of catalytic importance in the history of urban planning and also of the theatrical super code which, according to Walter Puchner (1985), can also encompass all cultural systems of meaning production.

Having grasped the importance of the Foucaultian triptych of space, we can see its usefulness in theatre as well. David Wiles (2003) was the first to transfer it to the analysis of theatrical space, by relating it to the notion of the location of the place where performances take place and the surrounding buildings that are special places of worship for the audience-followers of Dionysus. He even proceeded to expand space in the sense of the infinite through the analysis of places where people gather. In this regard, he argued that they were set in convenient locations for people to gather, and that the theatre buildings were erected according to the laws of perspective.

Hence, we see the evolution of theatrical staging as a constant attempt to convey better and better a sense of continuity, invisible to the spectator, and therefore capable of being a passage to infinity. Finally, the chosen site is linked to the dramatic space or distinguished from the space of the theatrical act. As a result, nowadays we are seeing an explosion of site-specific performances, whose local sites are more open to interpretation, while the dramatic space is treated more and more as the "pending space" (Pefanis, 2012, p.513) that it is in its core.And so, we turn our gaze from Foucault and Wiles to George Pefanis (2012) and his analysis of *Theatre and Symbols*. He states:

> Space as symbol is placed between the world and chaos, organisation and disorder, since it represents at the same time a) the type of possibilities, b) the place of the fulfillments of these possibilities, and c) the synthesis of the two previous places in a symbolic field of impermanence and perspective[17] (p.513).

This triptych of space is crucial to the perception of theatrical space and any potentially tragic space.Clearly, it is more difficult to select details of the *mise en scène* to confirm or refute a proposed interpretation, as Patrice Pavis (1982) rightly points out. According to him, the interaction of textuality and iconisation in a theatrical product, but not their perfect blending, allows their elements to remain not exactly autonomous, but not compositional, but parts of a "continuous interaction."

For the interaction of signs, we will turn this time in more detail to spatial signs, which concern *where* an actor A plays a character X in front of someone S (Fischer-Lichte, 1992). Consequently, spatial signs determine the relationship between A-X-S, and each of them individually, based on the place where their connection develops. Therefore, we have to be very observant of the stories the theatrically used buildings can tell us about the individuals in them and even the society as a whole, since these buildings are a part of it. As she points out: In such cases, I am understanding space not as a sign for the practical function that can be

[17]Translated from the Greek by the author.

fulfilled in it, but rather as a sign of symbolic functions which have in one way or another been performed there" (Fischer-Lichte, 1992, p.94).

## Designating a Tragic Space through Site-Specific Productions

Inspired by the above scholars, we chose to turn to two site specific performances, both staged in 2010, by a Greek and a non-Greek director, in order to place more emphasis than usual on the chosen site of a tragedy, which may be *a priori* tragic. Such spaces, thanks to the theories of site-specific theatre, are increasingly used and the whispers of their walls are included in the performance and by extension contribute to the perception of the tragic nature of the scene.But before we move on to the performances under consideration, we should mention that each site can appear as tragic depending on our experiences. It will be recognised as such in the process if a tragic event penetrates the collective unconscious and becomes a common experience, bringing back within us the essence of *amor fati*. Returning to Immanuel Kant (2008) and his definition of *a priori* knowledge that is, knowledge that is independent of all experience, we could say that every place is tragic from the outset if there is the knowledge of the futility of everything as we step only on a surface that separates us from the chaos of existence.From this perspective, his position that man is gestating his death, or that his very existence represents its end, coincides with the philosophical thought of Martin Heidegger (2008), who saw man as a "being-towards-death", of Albert Camus (2018), of Aristotle, but also can be traced in the work of George Steiner (1996), the author of *The Death of Tragedy*.

For Steiner, of course, the end of tragic consciousness has come with the death of tragedy, after the unbearable burden of the presence of God has been lost. Also, the tragic element of tragic heroes and language are gone insofar as in the present age heroes are presented as expendable with decisions being made by power blocks (Lehmann, 2006), and as the ability of language to convey intact messages is not strong anymore (Ficher-Lichte& Riley, 1997). The irreplaceability of death does not, however, stop the knowledge of the absurd freedom of the individual to create regardless that brings us closer to death (Camus, 2018) and to never stop pursuing the Aristotelian *eudaimonia* (bliss[18]).

The ability to "live tragically" is present in all historical transitions of the tragic, as Christos Malevitsis (1992) states. For him, as of any of Steiner's followers, "the place where the tragic event took place is the field where the ultimate cosmic battle occurred, and where the human was crushed" (p. 86). This place will be recognised as tragic just after the crushing of the individual. There the viewer will be able to recognise that place, ultimately defines everything. Time, simply, reveals it.

[18] For a closer look on the Aristotelian term of "*eudaimonia*", see Ross, W.D. (1993, pp.271-272).

In this regard, to carry the thought of Jean-Marie Domenach (1976), who, it should be noted, is at the opposite end of the Steineric “death of tragedy”. He believes that in the 20th century we experienced “the rebirth of tragedy” through the violence and atrocities of the two World Wars, which brought a shift of the tragic from the theatre to that of everyday experience and history. It becomes clear to us when our very culture has become a source of misery.

This source is starting to overflow, if we recall Sigmund Freud (2010), because of man's irrational need to create a psychic past, filling for example, as he points out, an ancient space with meanings to find answers to his psychic quirks, unable to reject, despite of the psychoanalyst's suggestions, the *double* filling. Given this, space as such is more than enough to take us beyond mythical spaces and to function, already since the Theatre of (chthonic) Dionysus, as a channel of the other world.

By analyzing the tragic nature of the scene in the study of two illustrative performances that follow, we hope to inspire an aspiring director to bring such a space to the theatrical forefront and to rejoice over the Dionysian marriage of disorder and order. A marriage that Aeschylus knew too well, linking the Apollonian text and the staging of the *monstrous*.

## Mike Pearson's *The Persians:* Highlighting a Modern Tragic Space

Let's start with Mike Pearson's *Persians* (2010) in a mock-village at Brecon Beacons. This is the first tragedy to be staged by the National Theatre of Wales, and was selected as part of a project of ‘theatre mapping' in Wales. Coupled with this, given that Xerxes appears here in a Scottish kilt (or resembling Saddam Hussein in Peter Sellars' 1993 version), we could be discussing a political targeting that was already present in the first reproduction of the *Persians* at Syracuse (470BCE).

More extensively, the reproduction was used to show the connection with a mythological past and the common victory against the barbarians, Persians - Carthaginians (see Eratosthenes, *First Pythian*), with the result that Himera is embedded in Salamis as the site of this “victory,” which is a euphemism, for the enlightened viewer, for shared defeat. Rightly, then, in Pearson's view this tragedy can function as a “work of reportage,” which was utilised multiple times in its staging with constant coverage of the events of the war being carried by the Messenger as a correspondent in the battle or the intrusive close-ups of Atossa by a small camera on the hand of a Chorus’ member as she learns of the disaster. The director's note also clarifies that the tragedy is well suited for the age of 24-hour media, which presents faraway places and nameless people in a context of constant invasion.

What is more essential in this performance is the place itself, which ultimately tarnishes the history of the “winners”. The fake German village, which is rarely seen by citizens, was built to deal with the aftermath of WWII and to this day there are still military exercises by the

British army, during which there have been deaths due to the harsh conditions. More specifically, it is a site that functions as a battlefield, which, however, is constantly changing its name and becoming a different part of the world. And the presence of those who have passed through there “haunts” the place. This modern conflict space is essentially a constructed village that looks half-built or long decayed. A village in which there are no traces of women and children, except, perhaps, in the half-destroyed church that dominated the village that existed in the area before the inhabitants were driven out to set up the military unit. At the same time, the viewer, who takes a tour of the site from the outset, with loudspeakers playing war marches mounted on side tanks, sounds intermingled with the orders of soldiers drilling behind barbed wire, inside a fake tunnel or cemetery in which the tombstones have no names (Rees, 2010).

The place where military tests and exercises on battle scenarios are carried out, in short, in a performance space, was considered the appropriate place to present the tragedy. It is a place where the anxiety and fear that someone will attempt to kill you is apparent everywhere. And the presence of military personnel in the constructed village validates these fears in that it creates a “siege mentality”, to recall Turner's term in *The Forest of Symbols* (1970). At the same time, it is crucial that the place is constantly giving birth to other places and we are transported from Salamis, to Nazi Germany, to Afghanistan and wherever else expansionist policies have left their marks forever visible. For the director, however, the show does not attempt “to function as a mirror of contemporary events but to highlight the timeless issue of human arrogance through the conflict between ancient and modern, in the friction between drama and site.” (Pearson, 2010, p.6).

Here, Pearson revisits the question he addressed, together with Michael Shanks, in their book *Theatre/Archaeology* (2001). They argue that the exposure of structures of the past and the reconstruction of performances that inhabited, reshaped or challenged those structures’ symbolisation, is controversial because it shatters the line of continuity *by exposing history of conflict*. In this respect, his influence of the architect Bernard Tschumi's (1994) theory in relation to site and performance can be seen. The union of site and performance can result in either conflict or indifference. The ambivalence of performance to emphasise the importance of the chosen site or to disengage from it can be equally and mutually revealing.

Thus, we move into the final space of the performance in a building, like an unopened, perishable doll's house that will mentally transport us back to the Persian palace, whose glory will vanish after the outcome of the war. The existing building of the designated performing space is called a host by its team and the one constructed for the performance is called a ghost. It may also be that these two types coexist without a relationship to each other and function autonomously, bringing the site and the drama into further ramifications of the tragic.

Moreover, we notice another important spatial sign, if we turn to the wooden seats-benches of the spectators, placed on a hill opposite the host building, which take us to the first

performance of *Persians* opposite the ruins of the Acropolis hill and the possibility that the wooden seats of the spectators came from the wrecked ships.

In conclusion, this site-specific performance, or site-based to be exact, seems to enrich the history of tragic staging with new meanings through the choice of that specific site, for which its architecture and natural environment play an essential role. And when the site, in general, is inherently tragic and connects or extends the tragic background of the scene, then we can speak of osmosis of the tragic sites.

## Terzopoulos' *Prometheiade*: Absorbing the History of a Tragic Space

And let us now turn to our second example of tragic space used in performance, that of Theodore Terzopoulos' *Prometheiade*, staged in Elefsina, the city where Aeschylus was born, and in two of the three European Capitals of Culture 2010[19], Istanbul and Essen. In such places or their equivalents, in a world without gods or their imitations, the director wonders whether, after all, "the world [is] a prison" (Terzopoulos, 2000, p. 81).

All three spaces are indeed reminiscent of a prison yard:

a) The Eleusinian Olive Factory takes us back to the recent past, during one of the biggest economic crises that Europe and especially Greece have experienced. This was the place where the Orwellian God could be targeted and his modern helpers, derivatives of Capitalism and Technology as they distanced themselves from the fate of common mortals. The Chorus' revolutionary call for change did not seem to be heard even so many years after the performance. In addition, to recall the theatrical supercode, we are in the poet's birthplace and the place of the (Eleusinian) Mysteries, which transport us to a past that is inevitably compared to the current decline. A decadence that starts from the Greek Civil War, when the building of the Oil and Soap Factory was in the making, and goes all the way to the economic crisis, when the cracks of the "Greek dream" became visible. During the production, the ships from the port outside the theatrical space could be heard and smokes from the nearby working factories could be seen, as if Hephaestus was playing tricks on us.

b) The Rumelihisari Castle takes us back to the Asia Minor Catastrophe, which will be discussed further below. But let us mention here the significance of the name of the castle, recalling the name given to a province of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans and a large part of occupied Greece. Furthermore, the castle in question was built a year before the Fall of Constantinople for that exact purpose, intercepting aid to the Byzantine Empire

[19] The third European Capital of Culture for 2010 was Pecs, Hungary.

from the sea. From the millennial Hellenism of Turkey, broken glass remains behind, which awakens chaos within the production's Io and begins the dirge (v. 566- 575).

c) Lastly, the Zollverein Coal in Essen mine takes us back to the *ghetto-isation* of innumerable people under the supervision of the Nazi machine, as it was a stop for the trains leading to the extermination camps.

Having briefly talked about the found spaces of *Prometheiade*, let us convey here the director's words about his "anti-Prometheus", the hero whose gifts were abused by the people, as the selected, unconventional theatrical spaces of Prometheus prove:

> Prometheus seems current by all that promise that was made and contained everything and contains science, poetry, art, medicine. All this light that was misused to get us where we are. Fire burns, medicine poisons, science disorients. Where is the real knowledge? And what is above all the need. That is the most important definition in this tragedy[20] (Rigoutsou, 2010).

We see how the tragic space is used as an element of cruelty, without the existence of at least one such element at the base of any spectacle, theatre is not viable. To recall Antonin Artaud's theory in *The Theatre and Its Double* (1938)[21], the degeneration of everything prevails, and to bring metaphysics back into our minds, we must tap into our senses.

Let us turn to the variations that were made in the stage realisation of *Prometheiade* in its three theatrical spaces. First of all, the specificity of the performance in Elefsina also results from the ruins of the olive mill, on which hang a thousand stones, like masks, like severed heads, like rocks to be used at chores imposed by the Nazis on the prisoners. For others, it has the feel of a biblical landscape. In conclusion, some ropes with stones that were part of Jannis Kounellis' stage installation[22] were placed on the side wall of the staircase leading to the audience seats in the Attis Theatre. The spectators pass them by to find their seats, just as, presumably, they passed the statue of Atlas outside Shakespeare's Globe, ignoring the symbols that testify that we too, with a slip, will find ourselves in chaos again. Terzopoulos, of course, offers his own interpretation of the symbolism of the installation: "(it is) a thousand stones like the Caucasus to stone Zeus, the infinite or the spectators" (Loverdou, 2010).

[20]Translated from the Greek by the author.

[21]Artaud's book was first published in 1938 by Gallimard, and translated into English 20 years later.

[22]Kounellis (1936-2017) was an important artist and frequent collaborator of Theodoros Terzopoulos at his Attis Theatre. Associated with Arte Povera, in the early 1960s he started to introduce found objects and other unconventional material into his artworks. Combining paintings, sculptures and unusual materials like a street lamp or a piece of a newspaper to paint on, he wanted to reflect on the experience of living. From 1980s onwards, the element of performance was never missing from his exhibitions, at times giving a meaning to the space of the exhibition, the gallery itself.

With these words in mind, we will move on to the next stop, Istanbul. There we will find a different stage installation by Kounellis with up to 60,000 eyeglasses on the round stage of the site-specific theatre, and the actors will step on them as another dangerous barefoot-walking ritual of the Anastenarides.[23] However, the aggressive and chthonic atmosphere of the previous staging, here progresses into a fear for the actor's body as well. The horrific atmosphere is felt by the spectators as the gates of the castle close behind them and war sirens and gunshots are heard. In the war soundscape, which Pearson also utilised, sounds of the city and the Bosporus may signal life again, or still.

And so, we arrive in Essen and the open theatre of the old mine complex, where the spectators were confronted with the decadent technology of a bygone era, defeated by a newer version of it. Analogically, Prometheus represents the mine itself, as symbolised by the Olive Factory, with the olive branches now rotting.

In that Coal Mine we see the retired old trains behind the actors, and like the previous stops of the tour, their clothes are filled with smoke marks, while the lead creates on stage a black void on his belly with charcoal – yet, the meaning of charcoal here becomes darker than before. There is even meat hanging from the trains. The whole picture gives us the horror of a Nazi event, to which we have to witness till the end. In addition, this installation takes us back to the ropes and hanging stones that lined the entire façade of the disintegrating Oil Mill. That atmosphere of anguish and captivity, present in the Istanbul performance as well, ends in an atmosphere of panic. Symbolically, we might say, the stones of the ancient past, the broken glass of the more recent past, and the charcoal with meat of the even more recent past are a sequence, historically linear. The charcoal, moreover, and the raw meat show that this is a recent change of matter, whose decay is not yet complete.

Each installation, guided by the specificity of each performance space, activates a part of memory that evokes human pain. Stones and Civil War, glasses and Uprooting, charcoal and Holocaust. In the meantime, the members of the Chorus of Oceanides are the defeated ones, corpses of the sea.

## Conclusion: Marking the Tragic Space

The tragic space, as we have seen, presents itself when we discover within ourselves the inner chaos, which tries to harmonise with that of the universe. Let us remind you here a fitting aphorism from Friedrich Nietzsche (1974): “he who looks into himself as into a vast space and bears galaxies within also knows how irregular galaxies are; they lead into the chaos and

[23] *Anastenarides* are people initiated into the ritual of passing through fire and stepping on coals. This custom originates from Eastern Thrace and the initiation may take years till someone is chosen to do the ritual. This society is known for its deep faith, which possesses them during the *Anastenaria* and its members, the “sighers” seem to be at that very moment in trance.

labyrinth of existence" (p. 238). Categorisations, like in this paper, and differentiations between spaces serve the ones who are trying to find order in this world, even if we are all within the spiral of the tragic.

In conclusion, space exists as a container for the production of meaning and as a nest of memory. The use of e.g. an outdoor space in a performance aims at another reflection, that of historical continuity, with the authenticity of the space benefiting the seamless presentation of plays (Fischer-Lichte, 2013). Space, ultimately and unlike the tragic figure, is not simply given but gives the new decisions of fate, representing tragic truth (Lehmann,2006). Consequently, the tragic nature of space in such site-based performances is revealed - or, more correctly, reveals the chaos that lies only one step beyond.

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# De – form to Re – form. Architectural Preservation as Safekeeping of the Performative Structure of Space: An Experimental Study for the Temple of Apollo Epicurius at Bassae

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## Abstract

The paper discusses how classical Greek architecture can be and has been used as an example of a primordial ontological structure founded on dynamic relationships between the acting human beings and their environment. In this frame we characterize classical Greek architecture as “performative” as its rationale can be described as an articulation of scenes that resonate cultural narratives through the bodily experience of its material presence in a similar sense with the scenes in a performance. Although such an ontological structure was largely articulated and discussed in the philosophy of the 20th century, the paper attempts to identify traces of such conceptions in the 18th and 19th century architectural discourse, especially in the design principles of English gardens and the notion of picturesque. Following texts by Choisy and later Eisenstein we study how classical Greek monuments are used as examples to represent architectural space as a dramatic / performative sequence. From there we move on to show how the common preservation practices (anastylosis) and policies concerning ancient monuments in Greece conceal this dimension and contribute, along with other aspects of modern culture, to the reduction of monuments to mere objects rather than vibrant storytelling material entities. The research concludes with a brief presentation of an experimental design project that takes as a case study the Temple of Apollo Epicurius at Bassae. The project attempts to reconcile the practices of preservation with the scenographic/performative character of classical architecture discussed in the paper. To support this objective, it prioritizes the “anastylosis” of articulated scenes that occur as visitors experience these spaces, rather than solely focusing on the “anastylosis” of the material form.

Simultaneously, it investigates the possibility of monuments reclaiming a vivid place in contemporary culture and everyday life, aiming to engage with active users rather than passive tourists / visitors. The project draws inspiration from the very practices of anastylosis in order to create spatial conditions that can allow the reception of contemporary uses.

*Keywords:* Performative, picturesque, preservation, anastylosis, classical architecture, Temple of Apollo Epikourios.

## The Shift towards the Moving Body in the 18th and 19th Century Architectural Discourse

During the 18th century, a significant shift occurred in landscape and architectural design, particularly evident in the transition from French to English gardens. The French formal gardens emerged as a type during the 17th century following the ideals of the Italian Renaissance gardens emphasizing symmetry and geometric clarity to create visually harmonious compositions. The elements and structures of the gardens were aligned along central axes to create a sense of order and balance. The English garden emerged during the 18th century and signified a departure from the previous formal and geometric designs culminating in the French garden. These gardens created a seemingly natural landscape with gently rolling lawns, curving paths, and strategically placed trees and shrubs. The design principles of English gardens not only represented a new approach to landscape architecture but also signified a shift from the abstract mathematical and geometrical world-structure of the Renaissance, which referred to a divine and absolute order of Creation, to a more anthropocentric, empirical, and relative perspective. This transition led to a heightened emphasis on the role of the body and movement within the architectural discourse of this period.

The composition of an English garden can be described as a carefully curated sequence of scenes that a stroller encounters as he/she moves through the landscape. The material and symbolic arrangement of these scenes resembles the structure of a theatrical performance. One of the first scholars who contributed to the development of such ideas in architectural discourse was the English architect Robert Morris (1701-1754). While Morris's writings primarily focused on the prominence of the site as the primary source of creativity, his design principles and emphasis on context can be seen as an early contribution to the broader understanding of architecture through bodily movement. Morris used the term “situation” to address the identifiable character of a place that design must respond to (Morris, 1736). He provided a series of design principles that guide the form of the architectural and landscape elements in order to respond to various “situations” based on studies of perspective views following possible routes of visitors. The predominance of eye-leveled perspective scenes aligns with the idea that the experience of architecture is deeply connected to our spatial bodily

existence. David Leatherbarrow (1985, 53) comments that “garden design was seen by Morris as the business of structuring controlled views of specific situations. The idea of prospect is implied in the idea of the situation, and situation should be experienced through prospect”.

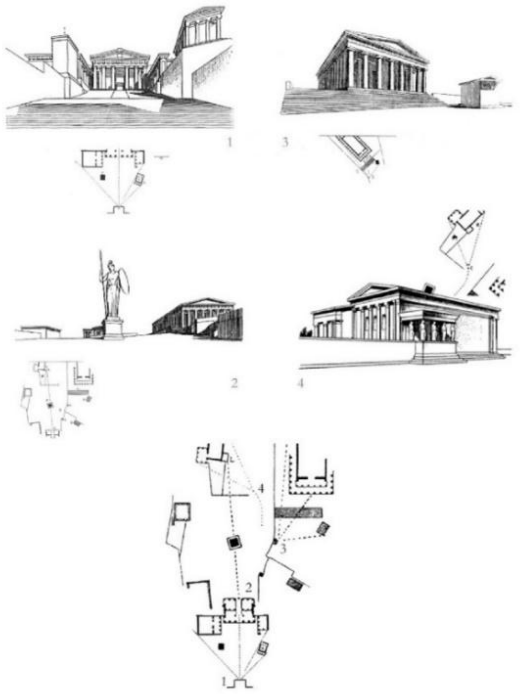
This transitional epoch for design can be briefly described as a shift from the conception of space through plan to the conception of space through perspective, section and elevation which reflect more the embodied experience of space (Bois & Shepley, 1984, 37). This transition is related and discussed in parallel with the notion of “picturesque” which was introduced in English literature by William Gilpin. Gilpin (1792, xii) defined picturesque as "a term expressive of that peculiar kind of beauty, which is agreeable in a picture". The connection between the emergence of English garden design as a series of carefully studied scenes and the notion of the picturesque is elucidated by Bois and Shepley (1984), who note that the picturesque primarily emphasizes “the importance accorded to the movement of the spectator” (p. 42).

## Auguste Choisy's Analysis of the Acropolis

After the establishment of the independent Greek state in 1830, the access to Greek antiquities from Western researchers became easier, facilitating more extensive and detailed studies. During the Renaissance, classical Greek architecture was considered the perfect example of order and balance. However, the closer studies during the 19$^{th}$ century revealed a series of irregularities and asymmetries, particularly evident in the general layout of the structures on a site. Alexis Paccard ([1845] 1982, p. 351) writes about the layout of the Acropolis of Athens that “one can . . . certify that there never was a general aesthetic arrangement either to relate the buildings together or to arrive in a worthy manner to the different levels on which the temples are built”. Even more unsettling was the discovery that the buildings had no straight lines; instead, their form was defined by convex curvatures. This raised questions about the attribution of principles such as symmetry, balance, and order to classical Greek architecture within the 19th-century architectural discourse.

The discovery of irregularities in classical Greek architecture coincided with the development of the “picturesque” discourse in England. The notion of the picturesque, with its emphasis on human perception, provided alternative definitions of balance and symmetry based on perspective views, opening the possibility for irregular geometric forms to be conceived as harmonious and intentional. The Scottish architectural historian James Fergusson was one of the first who related the irregularities found in classical architecture with the concept of picturesque. Richard Etlin (1987, p. 268) notes that “according to Fergusson, “picturesque irregularity” provided the “true principles of design” and constituted the basis of Egyptian, Hindu, Persian, Greek, and Gothic architecture. Irregularity, through articulation of form and massing, asymmetrical grouping, and nonalignment of axes, was a principle common "to all true styles of art”.

The most distinctive and influential attempt to relate the irregularities of classical Greek architecture with the notion of picturesque is Auguste Choisy's analysis of the Acropolis of Athens. Choisy (1899) writes, "the apparent asymmetries are only the means for enhancing the picturesque and making the most skillfully balanced architectural composition that ever was", (p. 413). Choisy demonstrated that approximately 7.5 meters to the left of the central long axis of the Parthenon, the curved geometries of the steps leading to the temple appear straight due to perspective distortions. Subsequently, he argued that there are four points along the path to the Acropolis that similarly provide a visual balance for the irregularities of the forms and layout when viewed in perspective (Figure 1).



**1.** Point in front of Propylea, **2.** Point in front of the statue of Athena Promachos right after Propylaea, **3.** Point left of the central long axis of the Parthenon, **4.** Point in between the Parthenon and the Erechtheion.

**Figure 1**

*Auguste Choisy's Analysis of Acropolis. Choisy (1899, pp. 414 – 418)*

## Eisenstein's Contribution

Less than half a century after the publication of Choisy's *Histoire de l'Architecture*, somewhere between 1937 and 1940, the Soviet film director Sergei M. Eisenstein wrote a text that would later be discovered and published in 1989 under the title "Montage and Architecture". In his text, Eisenstein discusses examples from the history of art and architecture through the lenses of cinematography and the technique of montage. He argues that genuine perception of these compositions requires an understanding of the sequence of scenes through spatial movement rather than a static, abstract, and geometric analysis. The main two examples he uses are the Acropolis of Athens and the ciborium of St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City.

In the case of the Acropolis Eisenstein does not provide any original comments on the matter and he quotes uncut Choisy's analysis. The contribution of his text is rather concealed in the point of view and the context that he uses the Acropolis and St. Peter's ciborium as examples of montage theory. By placing these examples in this heterogeneous context, outside the institutional architectural discourse where they have commonly been discussed, Eisenstein implies a swift understanding of the guiding forces behind such compositions.

Despite the performative dimension of the perspective views of a stroller as presented in Morris' design principles and Choisy's analysis of the Acropolis, the concept of the "scene," as discussed by these authors, was nevertheless determined by geometric and mathematical principles rooted in the modern science of optics and perspective. Although Eisenstein does not discard the significance of the geometrical structure of scenes, he mainly focuses on the formation of a narrative that emerges from this sequence within a specific spatial and cultural context. In the introduction of the publication of Eisenstein's text, Bois notes that "Eisenstein's interest in contextualization should be stressed, for it was certainly not a common feat at the time. Until quite recently, art history was content to analyze individual works of art without checking the signification their spatial placement in an ensemble could entail: again, Eisenstein's heterogeneous approach led the way" (1989, p. 115).

The key idea in Eisenstein's text is displayed in his closing paragraph. Eisenstein (1989, p. 129) writes that the examples he uses "link montage technique with architecture [and] they vividly underline the even closer, immediate link, within montage, between *mise-en-cadre* and *mise-en-scène*". *"Mise-en-cadre"* as a term refers to the framing and layout of a single shot. It describes the arrangement of the objects that are visible in the scene thus it can be perceived as its geometric structure. "*Mise-en-scène"* is a broader term and refers to the overall visual design and staging of a scene. It encompasses not only the framing of the shot but also other visible or invisible aspects such as lighting, the atmosphere, the storyline etc. Thus, *mise-en-scène* is the complete "situation" in which the meaning of a scene emerges.

Choisy's perspectival analysis of the Acropolis following the notion of picturesque led to the reconciliation of the irregularities of the form and layout of classical architecture with the abstract principles of geometric determinism instead of proposing an altogether different compositional model. Consequently, in 1936, the Greek architect Konstantinos Doxiadis published his doctoral dissertation entitled *Die Raumgestaltung im Griechischen Städtebau* [Spatial design in [ancient] Greek urban planning] where under the influence of Choisy he suggested a general geometric determinism that guides the design of all cities and acropolises of classical Greece. Here we need to identify a tension between the mathematical explanation of Choisy and its dogmatic expansion by Doxiadis on the one side and Eisenstein's narrating interpretation on the other. The argument of the predominance of mathematical structure of classical architecture falls into an anachronism as it presupposes a modern ontological view as many scholars have pointed

out. Konstantinos Tsiambaos (2021, Ch. 3) discussing Doxiadis' theory notes that "the very construction of the subject / observer that Doxiadis introduces presupposes a clear distinction between subject and object, which, Gérard Simon (1988, p. 32) points out, is not found in antiquity, but is introduced first time with Descartes and his *Dioptrique.*[24]"

Eisenstein's text and Doxiadis' dissertation, written about the same time, can be seen as opposites. Eisenstein provides an alternative compositional model of classical architecture that Choisy missed because of his anachronistic use of modern optics and his insistence to abstract mathematical perspectivism. In contrast to the implied neutral eye obedient to the mathematics of optics, Eisenstein's model renders as the driving force of design of classical architecture the narrative which emerges through the bodily movement and action in a physical and cultural environment. In this frame, the design can deviate from norms and embrace "irregularities" to respond to the "situation" without being driven by mathematical reasoning. Ultimately, we suggest that it is more appropriate to perceive classical architecture through a more primordial ontology founded on dynamic relationships between the acting human beings and their environment. This is an ontology closer to contemporary theories of phenomenology and philosophical hermeneutics where space is articulated within a play.[25] In that sense we will characterize the latent ontological structure of classical architecture as "performative" as its rationale lies in the articulation of scenes that resonate cultural narratives through the bodily experience of its material presence.

## The Tension between Preservation and Performativity

Moving on, we will examine the extent to which our contemporary preservation practices enable a performative/scenographic interpretation of classical architecture. In Greece, the general approach towards the preservation of monuments follows the principles of "anastylosis". "Anastylosis" is a term used in the field of architectural conservation to describe a specific method of restoration of historic structures. It involves disassembling and reassembling the original elements of a ruined structure in order to reproduce its original form.

[24] Translation from the Greek original by the author.

[25] In the 20th century a dynamic ontology was introduced mainly within continental philosophy, going beyond the traditional ontology of substance and objective being. According to Martin Heidegger's "hermeneutic phenomenology" in *Being and Time* (1926) the articulation of world emerges primarily through the interplay of the purposive openness of human existence towards the material environment of life. Ontologically, both the self and the external things, are established inseparable, in mutual interdependency, through the performative acting of (human) life, establishing as primary relation the being-in-the world. In *Building, Dwelling,Thinking* (1951) Heidegger sets dwelling as the prototype of such performative action of being-in-the world. H. - G. Gadamer also demonstrates in "Truth and Method" (1960, part I, Ch. 2.1) how the performative nature of a play can serve as a model for a dynamic material articulation of space.

The goal of anastylosis is to reconstruct the physical structure accurately using its original materials or accurate replicas of the lost parts.

The evaluation of anastylosis as a legitimate method of preservation is beyond the remit and interest of this paper. What matters here is to unpack its impact over our perception of architecture and space. Dimakopoulos (1985, p.16) notes that the generic meaning of the word “anastylosis” corresponds “to an attempt to put an end to heretical views and to oblige all to return to 'correct' beliefs, espoused by the majority”. In the context of architecture, anastylosis is searching for the “correct” formal reconstruction of a monument.

The practices of anastylosis are responsible for a lasting transformation of monuments to construction sites. The necessary interventions, intended to temporarily alter monuments, often become rather “permanent” due to the complexity of the required endeavors, making completion within a lifetime unlikely. Additionally, as historical research progresses, new opinions about the “original form” emerge, sometimes evincing errors in anastylosis projects. We should not omit also that this promise of the original is always under the control of modern aesthetics and its discomfort for example about the discovery of the use of color in classical Greek architecture.

Overall, the discourse developed around monuments in the context of anastylosis promotes an institutional discussion of form and style and thus the monuments progressively become dead objects referring only to their past life. To claim a performative understanding of our monuments we need to be able to develop much more vivid relationships with them. It is interesting that today the main archeological sites in Greece that remain more actively parts of our everyday life are the theaters. The reasons behind this cannot only be related to their structural preservation but most importantly to the “preservation” of their role in our culture. In cases where the function of the sites is not ingrained in our culture, we face challenges in reimagining a connection between form and meaning that can resonate with our everyday life, fostering a vibrant, performative interaction and experience.

## Policies, Commercialization and Monuments

Archeological sites can be “rented” for the accommodation of “cultural events” with an application to the Greek Archaeological Service of the Ministry of Culture (LAW No. 4447, Article 27). Based on the law that describes the specifications of these events, the general guidance is that there must be no interaction with the artifacts on site and thus the material presence of the monuments is outlined as just a backdrop, an inert object in space. Even though hosting events in archeological sites is becoming an opportunity of experiencing a more vibrant relationship with these spaces, the “renting” of monuments as venues along with the implementation of entrance fees in various archaeological sites and the overall tourist

exploitation, is manifesting not only a shift in the perception of monuments as mere objects through their preservation practices, but also their political transformation into commodities. It is worth mentioning the debate opened in 2017 when the fashion house Gucci offered 2 million euro to hold a fashion show on the Acropolis which was rejected by the Central Archaeological Council. The main argument of the council was that the Acropolis “cannot be the subject of commercial transactions” (Nazif, 2017). However, there were many voices against that argument supporting that our monuments have already been commercialized and this is a pointless and retrogressive resistance that further disconnects them from the everyday life.

## Conclusion: A Design Response

We will conclude our analysis by discussing an experimental design project that we developed as part of the Fall 2022 option design studio “Subverting Heritage” in Cornell University. Taking the Temple of Apollo Epicurius at Bassae in the Peloponnese as a case study, our project attempts to reconcile the practices of preservation with the scenographic/performative foundation of classical architecture, as suggested in this paper following Eisenstein's thinking. To support this objective, the project will prioritize the “anastylosis” of articulated scenes that occur as visitors experience these spaces, rather than solely focusing on the “anastylosis” of the material form. Simultaneously, we investigate the possibility of monuments reclaiming a vivid place in contemporary culture and everyday life, aiming to engage with active users rather than passive tourists / visitors. The project draws inspiration from the very practices of anastylosis in order to create spatial conditions that can allow the reception of contemporary uses; mainly following the timid attempts happening in Greece today to use archeological sites for performances and events.

## Temple of Apollo Epicurius at Basses: History & Design

The Temple was constructed around 420 BC under Iktinos, the architect of the Parthenon, at the slopes of Kotylion Mountain at 1.131 meters altitude. Due to its unique architectural characteristics and its good preservation, the Temple was the first site in Greece that was included in UNESCO’s world heritage list in 1986, one year before the Acropolis of Athens. The Temple was well-preserved because of its remote location. Throughout the Byzantine and the Ottoman period, the Temple was abandoned. In the 18th century, the discovery of the site from European travelers brought new attention to the Temple. This resulted in significant raiding and looting of the Temple most importantly the abduction of its frieze, now part of the collection of the British museum.

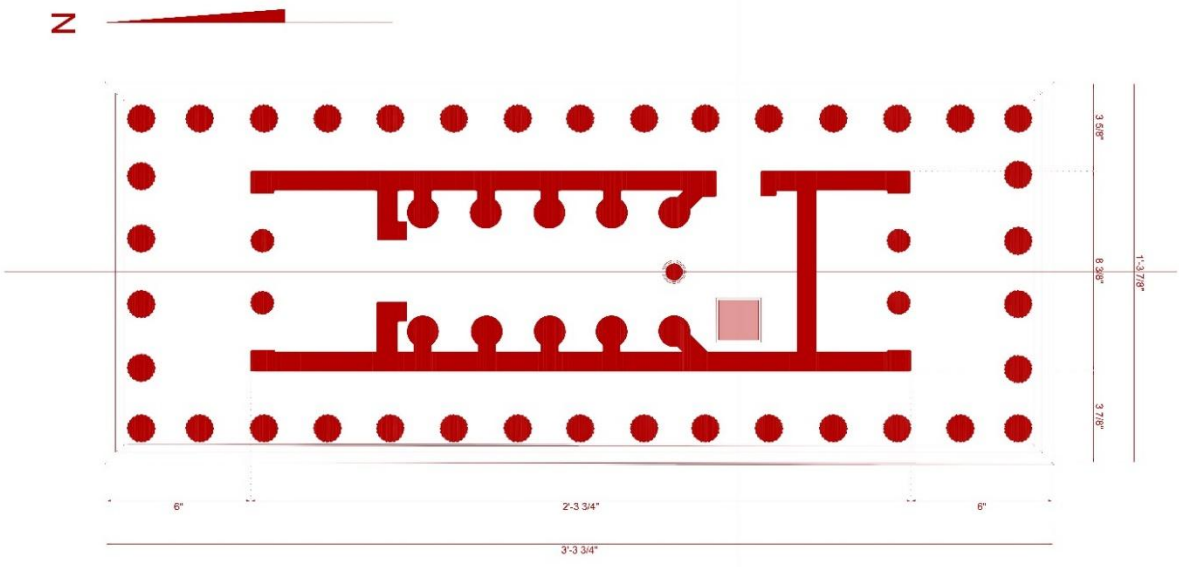
**Figure 2**

*(left) Exterior View of the Canopy (right) View of the Temple Under the Canopy. (Photographs by the authors)*



**Figure 3**

*Plan of the Temple Apollo Epicurius at Basses. (Author's drawing)*




The anastylosis of the Temple began in the early 20th century and had to face numerous challenges including the high altitude, intense weather conditions and the frequent seismic activity. These led to the installation of a metallic anti-seismic system in 1985 and the construction of a canopy in 1987, completely covering the Temple to provide protection from

the weather (Figure 2). These interventions fundamentally altered the experience of the monument by significantly disrupting its compositional integrity. Even though the Temple today is open to the public with a rather small entrance fee, its remote location and diminished aesthetic value due to the canopy, have hindered its touristic appeal, making it a relatively obscure monument of Greece.

The temple of Apollo features a series of “irregularities” in its design that go against the standard principles of classical architecture. The Temple has a doric peristyle of six by fifteen columns not following the common rule of 2N+1 (N = the number of columns in the short side of a temple) (Figure 3). The Temple also deviates from the typical east-west alignment found in most Greek temples, instead being oriented north-south. The floor plan adheres to the standard three-section layout (pronaos, naos, and opisthodomos). However, its design implementation incorporates numerous distinctive elements. The temple is a rare example that combines all three Greek orders: doric (in the exterior arcade), Ionic (for the interior semi-columns), and one Corinthian column at the central axis on the south side of the naos, the earliest example of the order found to date, standing where the statue of the god was usually placed; while, the statue of Apollo was placed on the west side of Adyton facing a large opening on the east wall.




**Figure 4**

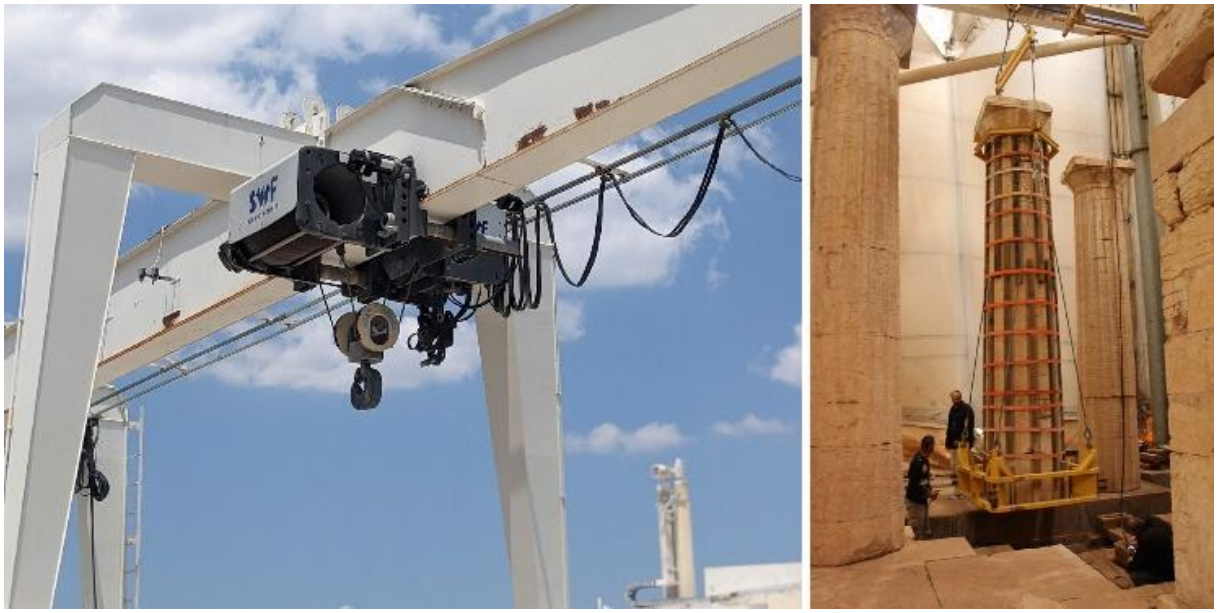
*Etching of the Temple of Apollo Epicurius Interior. Cockerell (1860, p. 59)*

Using Eisenstein's idea of montage, these irregularities of the design will be interpreted as deliberate spatial decisions that structure a narrative whose meaning emerges from the life, setting and the bodily experience of the Temple. Apollo was the god of sun and thus the interplay of form and light is key to unpack the meaning of the "scenes" of the Temple. The architect staged a spatial performance in which the morning light, entering from the opening in the east wall, illuminates the statue of the god, which is rotated to face the opening instead of the long axis of the temple (Figure 4). The presence of a new type of capital in the Temple supports this interpretation, with many scholars suggesting also that the Corinthian order emerged as an abstract symbolism of Apollo, following the architect's attempt to reconcile the traditional placement of the statue on the long axis with the staging of the scene of the statue facing the east opening.

Antonios Thodis (2018) who thoroughly studied the lighting conditions of the Temple in his chapter insightfully named "Apollo and the solar drama" proves that even the debate concerning the existence of an opening on the roof of the temple would not have a significant impact in the "staged" lighting of the Statue. Moreover, following the drawings of his study we can see that the most direct light towards the statue from the east opening takes place between the summer solstice and the fall equinox coinciding with the period that Apollo was celebrated in the region. The integrity of this main "scene" was dissolved along with the collapsing of the roof, the walls and the columns of the temple; however, since the construction of the canopy in 1987 the "solar drama" has been officially ended as the temple is permanently shaded.

**Figure 5**

*(Left) Crane and Pulley System Used in Anastylosis of Acropolis. (Author's photograph)*
*(Right) Anastylosis Works in the Temple of Apollo. Giotis (2020)*



## De-form to Re-form

Our speculative design for the Temple is inspired by the crane systems used in anastylosis to dismantle structures into parts allowing the position of newly discovered pieces in their original place (Figure 5). We envisage a large-scale crane system consisting of four cranes based on large pillars, that constantly suspends the temple's columns and walls slightly above its plinth (Figure 6). These cranes allow for the vertical movement of the columns and walls, while a grid of I-beams creates a rail system for horizontal movement, enabling the columns and walls to be shifted to the sides and slide inside the designed arcade surrounding the temple. The thick rectangular prism covering the Temple follows the outline of the original and now missing roof providing light and shade conditions similar with these of the original structure while providing partial protection from the weather (Figures 7-8).

In antiquity, the magnitude of the Temple was extended beyond the nearby village of ancient Figaleia as the fests for Apollo taking place in August attracted pilgrims from many major cities of Peloponnese. The idea of an annual event that attracts visitors to the Temple is used to help us reimagine a liveliness of the site today despite its remoteness from modern cities. Following the timid contemporary intention of using archeological sites as performing spaces, we are proposing a summer festival held on site that climaxes in August.

The abundance of spatial alternatives and layouts enabled by the movement of pieces from the cranes and rails system open the possibilities of hosting a plethora of events. The polyvalence of form liberates the space from symbolic burdens and provides a "bridge" between the conflicting aspects of cultural heritage and commercialization. The movement of pieces allows the creation of new spaces that can facilitate uses where the material dimension of the temple’s elements overcome their inherited cultural one (Figures 9 - 10). Ultimately, the temple is not imagined only as a space for hosting performances, but as a performer itself. The movement of pieces is empowered by additional pulleys that extend the possibilities of movement under a vogue fantasy of a “dancing temple” (Figures 11-13).

**Figure 6**

*Hybrid Drawing of the Proposal (Author's drawing)*



**Figure 7**

*Exterior View (Author's drawing)*

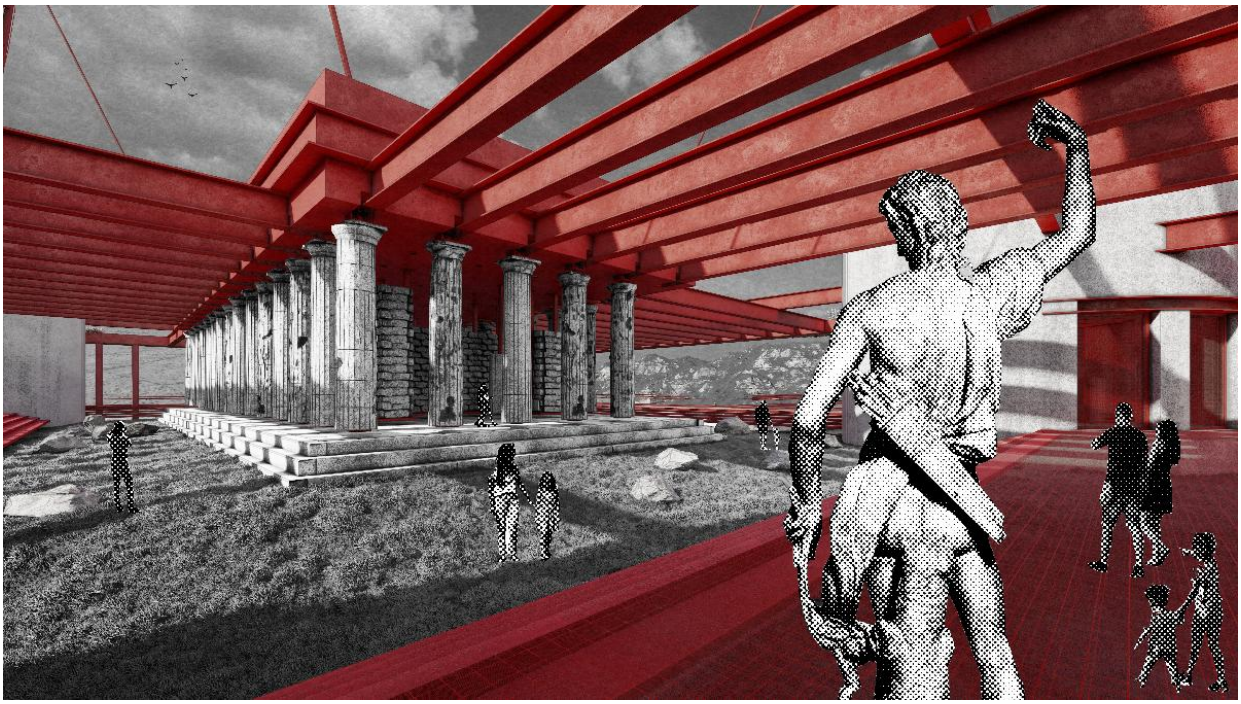


**Figure 8**

*East Opening of Adyton – Recommencement of the Solar Drama (Author's drawing)*

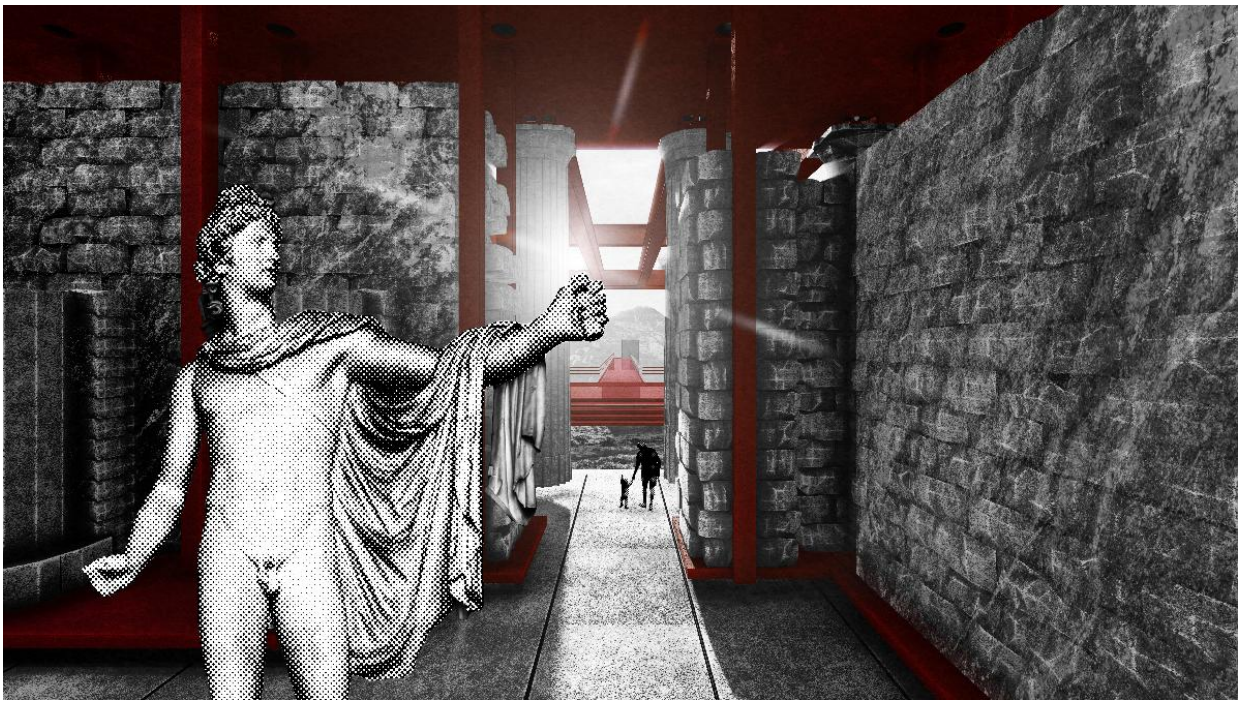


**Figure 9**

*Runway at the Perimeter of the Temple (Author's drawing)*



**Figure 10**

*Art Exhibition at the Arcade Surrounding the Temple (Author's drawing)*



**Figure 11**

*Concert at the Temple of Apollo & The Dancing Temple (Author's drawing)*



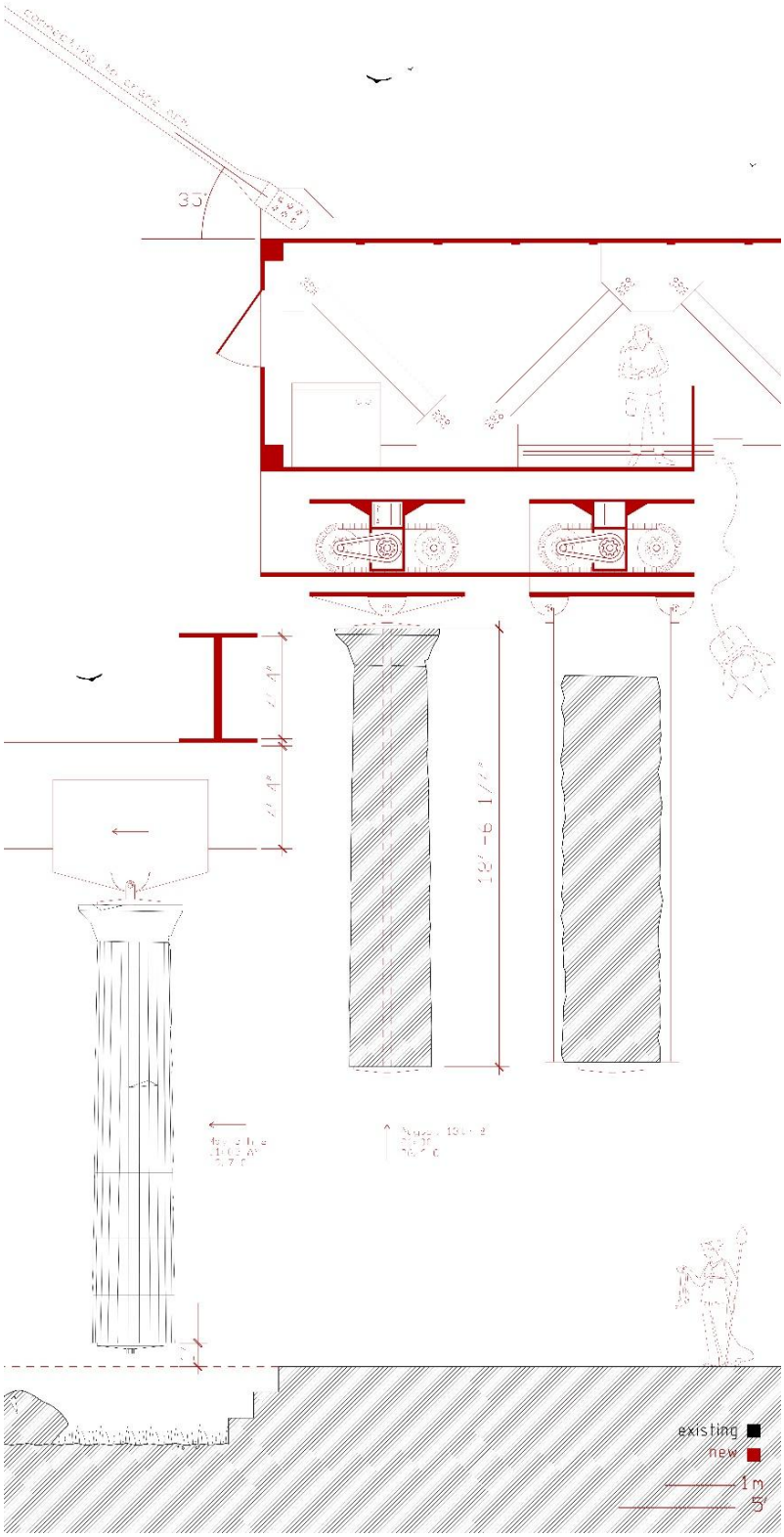
**Figure 12**

*The Temple as a Performer (Author's drawing)*



**Figure 13**

*Detail of the Pulley and Crane System for the "transformations" of the Temple (Author's drawing)*



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# Farms, Libraries and Adventure Playground spaces for Orwell, Hardie, Carroll and Fry. James Martin Charlton's Site-Responsive Productions of James Kenworth's Plays in Newham

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## Abstract

From 2014 to 2022, I directed a series of site-specific plays by James Kenworth in East London's Newham borough, funded by The Royal Docks Trust. Each production was staged at a non-theatre site. My role as a director was to facilitate productions that respond to the site's possibilities and uncover congruencies between the site and the content of the text.
My process is site-responsive, using Wilkie's taxonomy of site-based theatre; it involves exploring the site, allowing its form to meld with the story and text of the performance, and creating a deep synergy between site and text to create a unique meaning.

The productions were *Revolution Farm* (2014), *A Splotch of Red: Keir Hardie in West Ham* (2016), *Alice in Canning Town* (2019), and *Elizabeth Fry: The Angel of Prisons* (2022). *Revolution Farm* was a promenade production at an inner-city farm. *A Splotch of Red* toured community halls and libraries, while *Alice in Canning Town* was a promenade production over a vast children's playground. *Elizabeth Fry* was staged in a library space that aligned with the play's prison settings.

This paper offers a case study of my practice in staging these plays in these environments, drawing on public and critical reactions and theories of site-specific, community, and immersive theatre. I argue that as a director, it is my job to imaginatively excavate and collaborate with the sites to reveal a production which has always potentially been there, awaiting discovery. In this way, these sites become the site of a rough magic, which a responsiveness to space and its ever-existing potential as theatre can reveal.

*Keywords:* Theatre, site specific, drama, directing, Newham (London).

## The Newham Plays

From 2014 to 2022, I directed four productions in an ongoing project with the playwright James Kenworth, The Newham Plays, performed at non-traditional sites and venues in the London Borough of Newham, funded by the Royal Docks Trust. The plays were *Revolution Farm* in 2014, a free adaptation of George Orwell; *A Splotch of Red: Keir Hardie in West Ham* in 2016, about Labour Party pioneer Hardie's campaign and victory in the 1892 West Ham South by-election; *Alice in Canning Town* in 2019, freely adapted from Lewis Carroll; and *Elizabeth Fry: The Angel of Prisons*, on the 18th century prison reformer. For Kenworth (2022), these plays put into practice what he defines as a pro-localist approach to production:

> It is in the fusion of the aesthetics and the economic and social impact of a Pro-Localist approach that a small but significant space might be found in widening access and deepening participation in the arts among young people from low or under-represented socio-economic backgrounds (p. 42).

The plays have been produced with casts that mix professional performers with local young amateurs. They have been performed at a variety of spaces within Newham, none of which was ostensibly designed for or had previously been utilized as a performance space. Whilst Kenworth's practice has been around the development of spaces for "access and deepening participation" for local young people, my own practice as director on these productions has been around opening access and participation in and for the local spaces chosen for performance. I have worked to reframe these spaces, for the period of production and performance, as performing spaces. Given that the plays used this mixed economy casting and the funding model has meant that they have needed to be rehearsed in only two weeks, I have been required to develop a practice which both allows optimum collaboration with and within the spaces alongside a disciplined schedule to achieve a professional level of performance. These are theatre productions which have been reviewed favourably in such UK national publications as *The Independent* (Taylor, 2014), *Morning Star* (Wakefield, 2016), and *The Spectator* (Evans, 2022). This paper gives some account of the practice, with an emphasis on my collaboration with these spaces.

## Wilkie's Taxonomy

It is useful here to remind ourselves of Fiona Wilkie's taxonomy of site-specific theatre which draws a difference between three types of Site-specific production, which can be summarised as "site-sympathetic (an existing performance text physicalized in a selected site); site-generic (performance generated for a series of like sites); and site-specific (performance specifically generated from/for one selected site)" (Wilkie, 2002, p 150 quoted in Pearson, 2010, p.8).

*Revolution Farm* at Newham City Farm and *Alice in Canning Town* at Arc in the Park in Canning Town would, by this set of classifications, be site-specific. The *A Splotch of Red* tour of Newham libraries and the Community Links Hall in Barking Road made it more appropriately categorised as a site-generic production. Elizabeth Fry, performed solely within the Elizabeth Fry Room at Canning Town Library, was once again site-specific. For artists operating in a series of sites across a borough over several years, and on productions with different content – two literary adaptations, two historical biographies – flexibility of approach is required. There is never a one-size fits all. The importance is always to be responsive to the site, which is why I personally would prefer to call all of my practice site-responsive. This chimes with Eclipse Theatre Company's definition of the term, "Site responsive is when you find a space and have it reflect what story it wants to tell. It is allowing the architecture of the space to inform you of what should be experienced" (Eclipse Theatre Company, 2018).

## Revolution Farm

The first of my Newham Play productions was *Revolution Farm*, performed at Newham City Farm in Beckton. The venue had been chosen by Kenworth and Community Links (a local charity which both produced the production and at that time managed the farm) before I became involved. They had originally envisaged the play as taking place entirely in the large barn on the site. This would have made it a conventional black box production stuck in the middle of a city farm for novelty effect. When I visited the farm, I immediately saw that the area – including the barn but also including a children's playground, a fixed table tennis stand, a small open-air classroom, a field and a hut – offered possibilities beyond merely recreating a black box theatre-space performance in the Barn itself.

After visiting the site, I realised that this had the potential to be a promenade production, with the audience following the action around the various spaces in a performance area which was happily and usefully corralled from the rest of the farm by a fence. No animals were harmed or in fact used in this production, although the occasional sound of mooing and clucking came in useful as an aural backdrop.

This corral was not only practical, in that it delineated the performance site within the farm site, but also metaphorically useful. The audience, like the revolting animals in the story, were fenced within the performance space, as citizens of the former Soviet Union were fenced within a figurative iron curtain.

At the beginning of the play, the production put the audience into the barn as witnesses to a meeting in which the animals plotted the revolution. The revolt then 'happened' outside this barn, with the audience still in the dark inside but hearing various bangs, crashes, shouts and other sounds of violence in the world beyond. The human audience were immersed in the

situation of the humans on whose farm the animals were revolting. One critic wrote, “(…) the animals turn on the humans, branding us, ‘scum’, and confining us to the barn as they revolt, chanting and hitting the walls aggressively, with our imaginations left to rampage (…).” (Ginger Hibiscus, 2014).

Later in the play, I staged the exit of the play's Boxer character, renamed Warrior, as a long retreat along the pathway out of the farm towards the public road. The other animals waved him goodbye as the Clover character, Lil' Monster, shouted a warning that "they're taking you to the knacker's yard” (Kenworth, 2014, p. 63). Here the space allowed a long, distant retreat which compounded the poignancy of the situation.

Adjacent to the corral was a large field, which outside of performance time held a cow. We used this field for the building of the windmill, a contraption with a design inspired by some lines of William Blake:

> …cruel Works
> Of many Wheels I view, wheel without wheel, with cogs tyrannic,
> Moving by compulsion each other
> (Blake, 2004, p. 662).

Later the field was used for the play's final scene, an athletics event for which I drew some inspiration from North Korea's Arirang state-sponsored games in which individuals are reduced to specks in a mosaic celebrating worker's revolution whilst the tyrant looks on are a betrayal of individuality. The idea of a revolution which comes full circle and ends in a situation as bad if not worse than the starting place underpins William Blake’s poetic image of the Orc cycle in his epic poems (Frye, 1947). In summary, the figure of Orc in Blake’s mythic poems is the image of revolutionary energy. State-sponsored games in which individuals are reduced to specks in a mosaic celebrating worker's revolution whilst the tyrant looks on are a betrayal of individuality. The promising sunrise of the revolution, designed to free each individual animal, had failed. By happy coincidence, the final of the evening performances of our production coincided with the sun’s decent in east London, thus making the farm not only a performance space by the site of the re-enactment of myth, a ritual space.

## Alice in Canning Town

This same principle of letting the site shape the production came back into play when we used an adventure playground in Canning Town, Arc in the Park, as the site for *Alice in Canning Town*.

The Arc in the Park is dominated by large play structures. As a director, I realised that these offered unique opportunities. If the rabbit needs to disappear down a rabbit hole, he can do so down a slide. If a Hatter needs to freak Alice out, she can sway her on a rope swing. My

own favourite piece of staging was an argument between Alice and the Rabbit, set high on a structure at the end of a rope-bridge, the audience experiencing the shouting from a few feet below – the experience of many an inhabitant of east end apartment tower blocks, listening to the arguments of their neighbours. Alice and The Arc gave to us as creatives, to Alice as a character, and to the audience as promenaders a wonderland to explore.

Alice's encounters in the Canning Town wonderland were mirrored by each audience member's personal encounters with the various spaces within the Arc. The Arc is a site where children play, learn and socialise – precisely the things Alice does on her adventures. So, the Arc as site collaborated with us to tell the universal story of Alice, a child exploring, getting an education and finding out about others. The play on the Arc site offered a route for audiences to explore, encounter and get a brief education in different types of East End culture – cockney, bhangra, rave, grime, etc.

At the end of the play, we staged a council meeting, based on Carroll's trial scene, in which the various characters asserted their right to hold their kind of party. The rope swings and various levels allowed us to make this into a crazy bedlam of a council chamber, from which the idea that many different parties can exist in the same time and space emerged – the many times and spaces of the site mirror the many cultural times and spaces of the east end, all of which exists in the one time and space which is the performance at the Arc, Alice's Canning Town.

For *Farm* and *Alice*, the production planning began with a flâneur-like exploration of the space. For Federico Castigliano, "the flâneur craves a revelation that might change his life and destiny. He seeks to capture and eventually to preserve, through artistic or literary expression, a new form of beauty" (Castigliano, 2017, p. 17). I wandered, scrambled, explored, and intensely noticed every inch of the space, allowing it to speak to me as I thought about how the text might be manifested here, creating a production with its own sense of beauty.

## A Splotch of Red and Elizabeth Fry

The tour of *A Splotch of Red* demanded a different approach. The play was a piece of re-enacted East End history. The venues were disparate in terms of shape and size. The venues did, however, have one thing in common: the Newham libraries and the Community Links Hall were repositories of Newham history. The libraries contained books and archives about local events and people, including the 1892 by-election; the hall was a venue in which the play's main characters Keir Hardie and Will Thorne both spoke (Community Links, 2020).

On this occasion, I worked with the designer Maria Terry to create a production in which the performers would enact the tale using the simplest of means. Sets and locations would be created from a number of wooden crates, signifiers of the kind of menial manual labour carried out by the workers whom Hardie strove to represent. These crates would symbolise the cast,

as spiritual heirs of the voters of 1892, carrying the story of the by-election into the local spaces, retelling and reliving for contemporary audiences the history, politics, and working-class culture of the area. The crates became factories, dock yards, pubs and, of course, political soapboxes.

The venue for our most recent production, the Elizabeth Fry room at Canning Town library was, on first viewing, a distinctly uninspiring municipal meeting space. As I explored the room, the librarian guiding me explained how this Elizabeth Fry room, which opened into the larger Daisy Parsons room, could be closed off by means of an electric partition wall which slowly, mechanistically, sinisterly cut the space in two on the turn of a key. Given I was producing a play about a prison reformer, with scenes inside Newgate prison with turnkeys as characters, the opportunity to enclose and lock the audience in the play's space was ideal. The audience each night was marched from one room to the other, the wall close on them, and the play unfolded. It created the ideal claustrophobic site for the production. The Elizabeth Fry room had been waiting for this Elizabeth Fry play.

## Conclusion

These productions have allowed the spaces in which they were performed to shape and give meaning to the performances. The sites on each occasion seemed to be waiting for these productions, which emerged from exploration of and dialogue with the sites. The art historian Antony Blunt writes that, "For Michelangelo the essential characteristic of sculpture is that the artist starts with a block of wood and cuts away from it until he reveals or discovers the statue in it" (Blunt, 1962, p. 73).

For myself as a director, these productions have given me the knowledge that my job is to reconnoitre the sites in order to reveal the production which has always, in potential, been there, waiting for our rough magic to awake their sleeping, secret promise to be the performing spaces of these plays.

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# Reflecting on Four Performances in the Public Space of Athens

**Rania Kapetanaki**
Performance Artist

## Abstract

In this article I expound my work in public space through four performance pieces that I have presented over the last decade in several areas of Athens. I discuss these performances, focusing on the artist's experience and perspective regarding the underlying intentions, the methods employed, and the parameters that determine each piece. More specifically, the following works are studied:

*Errants* (Metaxourgeio, 2012): I invented a persona that would not trigger any sense of danger in those she encountered: a white, cisgender, well-dressed middle-class woman. She wandered the neighbourhood streets, dragging a wheeled suitcase behind her, looking for accommodation. The piece plays with the boundaries of the welcome or unwelcome stranger and attempts to intervene in the public sphere and to question issues such as racism and xenophobia.

*Unneeded* (Eleonas, 2018): In order to provide myself and others with an opportunity to release what they considered unnecessary and burdensome; I crafted a dress out of a plastic garbage bag. I wore this dress and along with the audience traced a long silent route in the Eleonas area after the Scavengers' Flea Market had been held. I asked people to leave whatever they deemed unnecessary on the dress. Arriving at Beton 7 gallery, I removed the dress and left it there, detached from all of us, as an exhibit.

*Reconstruction* (Lycabettus, 2020): This piece deals with the role of memory in constructing one's identity and the potential of actively intervening and altering it through the imprinting of photographs that depict moments of my personal life on my body. Ultimately, my body stood as an exhibit, a living and active archive, and the viewers bore witness to the intimate and transformative process that had taken place.

*Pou edy mou to kallos* (Lycabettus, 2022): It was a visual, abstract representation of Lili Zografou's novel of the same title. The text, the natural landscape, the performer's body, and

the dress were the axes that narrated the book's story and defined the performance. The sensory stimuli of the natural environment contributed to the overall experience of the performance.

Analysing these works, I realise that three main elements permeate them: the active participation of the audience, the element of ritual and the healing function of performance. To conclude, I reflect on the impact on performer's body, the fundamental role of space and time in public space performance, and the 'here and now' dimension of performance.

*Keywords:* Performance, public space, public time, audience participation, ritual, healing.

## Reflecting on Four Performances in the Public Space of Athens

In this article, I am going to expound my work on public space by examining four performance pieces that I have presented over the last decade. I am going to discuss these performances, focusing on the artist's experience and perspective (Robson, 2007[26]) regarding the underlying intentions, the methods employed and the parameters that determine each piece (Patton, 2002[27]).

Firstly, I will briefly introduce myself and provide some details that might be useful in analysing my work and linking it to my references and influences: I live in Athens. I am almost 40 years old. I have studied Psychology, Acting and Social Theory. I have long been interested in Physical Theatre and the intercultural dimensions of performance and I have attended relevant seminars. My mother was a seamstress, and I started sewing when I was 10 years old. I like walking in the city and go everywhere almost exclusively on foot. My mind works through images. My memories, feelings and inspiration are primarily visual.

Initially, I explored performativity in politics, within the repertoires of action of social movements in particular. During my postgraduate studies, I focused on performance as a form of collective action in Greece during the early post-dictatorship period (1974-1981). Drawing material and inspiration from performative actions of social movements in the 1960s in Europe and America, I sought to identify in Greek social movements similar practices of embodied ways to engage with politics and the public sphere beyond traditional methods such as marches, political texts and proclamations. In my artistic practice, I attempted an individual embodied intervention in the public sphere through the practice of performance.

[26] Corresponding to diaries and in-depth interviews as qualitative research practices, I support that the artist's experience and perspective can be conveyed by the artist herself.

[27] Patton organises the sampling possibilities in qualitative research into fifteen categories. Among them there is 'Criterion sampling', whereby the researchers can select their case studies with reference to a criterion.

## The Performances

### *Errants*

In 2012, Athens was grappling with the issue of migration and its residents were confronted with questions of how to manage the situation and interact with newcomers seeking shelter and work. It was at this time that I conducted a performance piece titled *Errants* in Metaxourgeio, an area in Athens where a significant portion of the migrant population had settled.

With the aim of exploring the sense of the welcome or unwelcome stranger, I invented a persona that would not trigger any sense of danger in those she encountered: a white, cisgender, well-dressed, middle-class woman. She wandered the streets of the neighbourhood, dragging a wheeled suitcase behind her, looking for accommodation (Figure 1). She approached passers-by, shop owners, and people on the balconies of their apartments, asking if they knew where she could stay that night. Eventually, she laid down on the steps of a building, along with her essential sleep accessories: a sleep mask and her moisturiser.

**Figure 1**

Errants*. The Invented Persona. Photographer: Dimitris Bampilis.*



A significant aspect of this piece was its integration into the residents' daily lives, seamlessly blending in, without the overt theatrical elements that would make it stand out as a separate event. Moreover, the intention was to communicate with the residents, involve them in the performance, and introduce them to a symbolic figure, a living embodiment of a different kind of stranger that contrasts with the perception of strangers as threats. By challenging

preconceptions and prejudices about immigrants, the performance aimed to initiate meaningful conversations and challenge the boundaries of acceptability.

### *Unneeded*

The second piece, titled *Unneeded*, was presented in 2018. It was part of an exhibition at the gallery Beton 7, which was called *Vision V-Ideas Performances* and was curated by Dimosthenis Agrafiotis and Rania Kliari.

In this work, my focus shifted from political issues to matters of personal identity. I attempted to bring a psychological process to the realm of experience through an embodied performance. I also aimed to experiment with the healing function of performance. More particularly, having found myself at a personal impasse, I felt the need to let go of what I considered unnecessary and burdensome. I wanted to discard the weight that had held me down. To fulfil this purpose, I created a ritual with therapeutic intent, which can be broken down into three stages.

**Figure 2**

Unneeded. *Route in the Elaionas Area. Photographer: Alexandros Gartzonikas.*



The initial concept was to create a space where individuals could dispose of things, thoughts, or ideas they no longer wished to carry. I aimed to provide myself and others with an opportunity to release the excess baggage. To symbolise this process, I crafted a dress out of a plastic garbage bag. The viewers here became witnesses and fellow travellers in this

experience, actively participating in the entire process. The element of participation continued to play a central role in this project too.

In the first phase of the performance—the initiation—we traced a long, silent route in the Eleonas area on a Sunday afternoon, right after the Scavengers' Flea Market had been held (Figure 2). The purpose was to share the experience of the place where the city's “double” waste is collected, what is thrown away by its inhabitants and what is left behind by the street vendors.

During the second phase —the act—I removed the paper tape I wore as a bracelet and the markers I wore in my hair. I wrote on pieces of the paper tape the things I wanted to discard and then stuck them on the dress. I invited each spectator, as well as the patrons of nearby coffee shops and passers-by to do the same and leave whatever they deemed unnecessary on my dress. Some chose to leave an object like a band-aid, while others wrote words such as “clocks”, “truth”, or “children” (the latter was written by an artist who expressed his desire to quit teaching and focus on his art).



**Figure 3**

Unneeded. *The Dress as an Exhibit Photographer: Alexandros Gartzonikas.*

Once this process was complete, we arrived at the gallery where the third phase of the ritual—the purification—unfolded. I took off the dress and placed it on a hanger in the centre of the room (Figure 3). Suspended there, detached from all of us, the dress stood as an exhibit, serving as a tangible record of an intangible process.

### *Reconstruction*

The subsequent work, titled *Reconstruction*, was part of the 2nd Lycabettus Festival in 2021. It carries on with the exploration of personal identity and the healing function of performance. It delves further into the element of ritual, while introducing the concept of the performance of self (Goffman, 1959). This performance deals with the role of memory in constructing one's identity and the potential of actively intervening and altering it.

In retrospect, this piece appeared to have emerged organically out of the preceding work, *Unneeded.* A self that has previously been purged of the unnecessary, now awaits reconstruction, using and rearranging the existing materials. The materials for the construction of this new self-narrative are life experiences in the form of memories. Elements which one can intentionally play with, deleting or highlighting aspects of them, finally resulting in a conscious creation of a renewed version of the self.

My aim was to reconstruct my personal history, as a conscious analogue to the mechanism of memory; to reconstruct my past by creating a new narrative of my own through a fragmented montage inscribed on my skin. The process of becoming this new self was performed live before the viewers. They stand as witnesses who validate this self-healing ritual, they are part of the healing process, and they are also invited to reconsider their own self-narrative and recreate their self-dramaturgy.

Photographs were employed as tangible records of memories in this process. They depicted moments from my life, including people, landscapes, and significant events that have shaped who I am. Standing almost naked, exposed and vulnerable, my body became a blank canvas ready for transformation. The photographs were laid on the ground around me like a personal archive, also exposed to the viewers.

From each photo, I carefully selected what I wanted to remember and determined how I wished to preserve those memories. I proceeded to outline my chosen memories as desired and to imprint them onto my body. The specific body part where each coloured image was imprinted was directly connected to the purpose behind reshaping the memory (Figure 4). For instance, a cherished childhood photograph, a family favourite, was placed over my heart. Moments from my involvement in social movements were outlined in purple and placed on my feet, as the foundations of my worldview. The imprints, resembling childhood tattoos, spread over the body and mark this journey, leaving me overwhelmed in front of the audience. Although the whole process was part of the plan, I was still surprised by the emotions it evoked and how hard it was for me to redefine each memory. Ultimately, my body stood as an exhibit, a living and active archive, and the viewers bore witness to the intimate, transformative process that had taken place. The private body, now exposed, became public, and personal memory

merged with collective memory. Upon leaving, one spectator recognised another and remarked, “Oh, I know you. I’ve seen you in a photo.”

**Figure 4**

Reconstruction. *Imprinting Photos on the Body. Photographer: Alexandros Gartzonikas.*



**Figure 5**

Reconstruction. *The Body Merges with the Background. Photographer: Alexandros Gartzonikas.*



The performance took place on Lycabettus Hill on a Sunday evening at the end of May 2022. It was presented at the cliff's edge during sunset, in order to serve the sense of liminality and the transition from an inadvertently shaped self to one consciously reinvented through the performance. Furthermore, the glow of the setting sun on the cliff paints it in colour tones that resemble the human skin, creating an image where the body merges with the background (Figure 5).

### *Pou Edy mou to Kallos*

My latest work is titled *Pou edy mou to kallos* and was created for the 3rd Lycabettus Festival in 2022. It is a visual, abstract representation of Lili Zografou's novel of the same title. This particular work introduced a shift in the tools and methods I use. Two essential elements were incorporated: the spoken word and the presence of a preconstructed narrative. Consequently, we transitioned from the "I am here and now" aspect of the performance, according to Marina Abramović[28], to the act of narrating another person's story. While the visual element remained prominent, it no longer seemed appropriate to categorise the piece as performance art, but rather as visual theatre or site-specific theatre, given its representation of a story.

The novel's title is a modified version of a line from the Greek-Orthodox Mass hymn sung on Good Friday. The original line, "Where did thy beauty go?" was transformed by Lili Zografou to "Where did my beauty go?" The novel revolves around the narration of a young Greek girl (Maria) and the love between her and a German soldier (Franz) during the German occupation of Greece. Their relationship is abruptly interrupted when the German troops depart from Greece. Maria is compelled to marry a man she does not love and grows old and unhappy alongside him. When Frantz returns from exile in Siberia thirty years later and seeks her out, she lacks the courage to meet him. Instead, she locks herself in her house and remains isolated for the rest of her life. Throughout the text we follow the journey of Maria, a young and beautiful woman, as she gradually ages and becomes isolated.

The text, the natural landscape, the performer's body, and the dress were the axes that defined the performance. A recorded reading of the text was incorporated into the installation,

[28] In March of 2016, Marina Abramović gave a series of lectures and ran several workshops in Athens, as part of the exhibition *As One*, at Benaki Museum. In her opening lecture (11.03.2016), she argued that the main characteristics of performance art are that it is executed at a specific time and space and that it anticipates the presence of the public. She also argued that the element that characterises and defines the performance is the presence of the artist 'here and now', at that particular moment. In her lecture on the history of performance (19.03.2016) she explains that that specific moment and time are the artist's only reality and (...) what matters is the process, not the result. In 22.03.2016 in a Performance workshop, Abramović explained that the difference between theatre and performance is that in performance everything is real: "you are not a character, you are you, a knife is a knife and blood is blood, it is not ketchup."

keeping the book's heroine at a certain distance from the viewers and the performer. The recording included the sounds of a double bass, the sole reminder of an absent male.

The performance took place on the hill of Lycabettus, on the iron staircase leading to the war siren. An imposing iron staircase consisting of 99 steps, adding an eerie beauty to the surrounding natural landscape, is directly associated with the war and the German occupation. During the painstakingly slow ascent of the staircase, lasting 22 minutes (corresponding to the duration of the text reading), the performer's body symbolically reenacted the heroine's journey. Initially, the performance unfolded with a young, light, open and fluidly moving body, full of vibrance and the juices of life. However, the body gradually hardened and withered, as her beloved departed and Maria was forced to live a life, she did not desire (Figure 6). It finally stiffened and contracted, as she grew old, all alone. At the beginning, the body was partially uncovered, but as the performance progressed, wounds were covered with gauze, until it was entirely concealed beneath a sheet, like a shroud.



**Figure 6**

Pou Edy mou to Kallos*. The Body Gradually Withered. Photographer: Nikos Katsaros.*

The costume designer Daphne Aidoni and I designed and crafted a white dress with an extra-long tail. It unfolded behind me, capturing different periods of the heroine's life. The fabric of the tail of the dress started out as organza, resembling mother-of-pearl, as Frantz once described Maria's skin. Then, when Frantz departed the fabric changed to gauze, then it became waterproof as Maria described the distance she maintained from her husband, it turned to satin when Frantz reappeared, and ultimately transformed into a shroud-like sheet when she decided not to meet him and to remain confined within her house. The body slowly climbing up the staircase carrying the weight of a 40-metre-long dress and the trauma of patriarchy, brings Jesus to mind - a reference alluded to the title - carrying on his back the cross of suffering and the weight of the sins of the world (Figure 7).

**Figure 7**

Pou Edy mou to Kallos*. The Body Climbing up the Staircase Carrying a 40-Metre-Long Dress. Photographer: Nikos Katsaros.*



The sound of the dress unfolding on the staircase, the wind lifting the fabric and creating folds, the birds flying low above me, were all sensory stimuli that contributed to the overall experience of the performance.

In this work the performer “hides” herself behind the role of Maria, while at the same time the sense of withdrawal is intensified by the voice that is recorded and the body that gradually and spatially fades into the distance. At the same time, the participation of the spectators who

are invited to delve into the trauma is reduced to their freedom to move in space and choose their position towards the spectacle.

The performance took place during two distinct periods: one in May, following Easter Time (the original text is rich in references to the psalms of Holy Week), when nature is in full bloom, and the other in September, when nature starts to wane. In the latter, nature proved a more suitable interlocutor as it intensified the sense of decay that also permeates the text. The sunset was chosen as the most appropriate time to witness the sunset of Maria's life and beauty.

Interestingly, the choice of space in this instance worked in a way that was completely different from the previous pieces. During the first COVID-19 lockdown, while walking at Lycabettus Hill, I stumbled upon this imposing staircase. Associatively, Zografou's novel came to mind and almost automatically the image of this solitary ascent and the white dress covering the staircase emerged. Thus, the intense landscape brought the text to my mind and gave birth to the performance's visual image. In a way, the natural scenography imposed the staging.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to focus on three elements that, to varying degrees, permeate much or all my work.

Firstly, the active participation of the audience (Schechner, 2005) plays a crucial role in the execution and accomplishment of each project's goals. From *Errants* and its dynamic engagement with the local community to *Unneeded* where the audience actively participates in the walk among the excess baggage in Elaionas and interacts with the performer and the dress contributing to its final version; to *Reconstruction* where the audience "binds" the performance through its presence. Even in *Pou Edy mou to Kallos* where spectators[29] need to go up the hill, following the white ribbons of the dress fabric in order to witness the performance (Goldman, 2017), and to choose where they will stand, whether they will be still or moving.

Secondly, the element of ritual (Schechner, 2013) in my work takes various forms. It ranges from the personal rituals of *Errants* -such as the invented persona's daily routines, even when sleeping on the street- to the shared rituals between the audience and the performer in *Unneeded* -such as strolling around the bazaar remnants, leaving on the dress whatever they find unnecessary or burdensome; to the slow, repetitive, and transformative rituals of memory

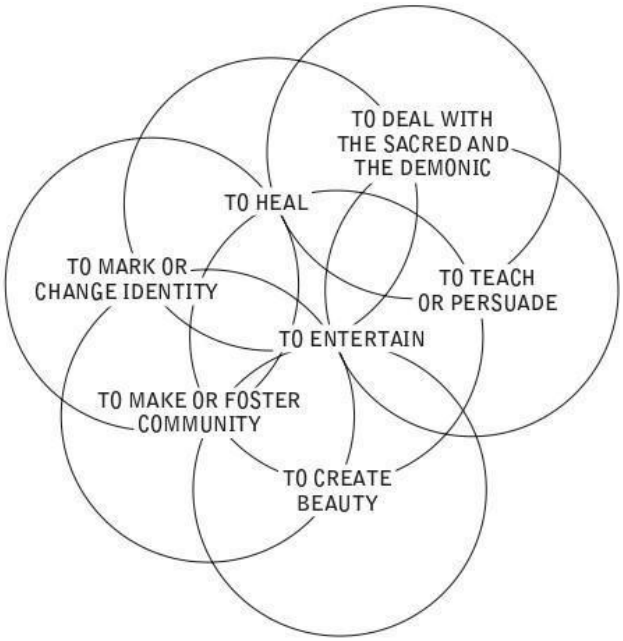
[29] Given J. Rancière's (2011) concept about *the emancipated spectator*, spectators participate in every performance. According to Rancière, the spectators also act. They observe, select, compare, interpret. They connect what they see with many other things they have seen or experienced. They make up their own poem with the elements of the poem in front of them. They participate in the performance by reconstructing it in their own way. They are thus both distant spectators and active interpreters of the spectacle presented to them.

and self-reconstitution in *Reconstruction*. Finally, there's the slow, mystical ascent of the performer up the hidden staircase into the evocative landscape, that contributes to the ritualistic experience of *Pou Edy mou to Kallos*.

Thirdly, a healing function (Schechner, 2013)[30] (Figure 8) seems to be the main reason for the creation of each work. In *Errants*, a collective therapy seeks to heal the community from prejudices that hinder coexistence with strangers. *Unneeded* fosters an individual healing process within a collective environment which integrates every person's experience. *Reconstruction* is, in itself, a personal healing ritual that leads to self-transformation and healing. Lastly, in *Pou Edy mou to Kallos* we return to the collective trauma of patriarchy, embodied in the form and movement of the performer, who confronts this trauma through the visual representation of the story of the book's heroine.

**Figure 8**

*The Seven Interlocking Spheres of Performance. Drawing by Richard Schechner (2013, p. 46).*




As a final point, I would like to shed light on the perspective of the artist and the impact that performing a piece in a public space has on them, based on my own experience.

When a body is placed in a public space, it becomes more vulnerable and at the same time more receptive to interaction. This experience becomes susceptible to the unpredictability of human presence and the natural elements -as in real life- and ultimately influences the performer at a core level.

[30] According to R. Schechner one of the seven functions of performance is "to heal".

The “here and now” of the performance is identified with public space and time. And the truth of the self is strengthened when it exists without the protection of the theatre or the role. In public space performance, space and time are of great significance instead of just being supplementary parameters. They become fundamental notions as essential as content and action (Goldberg, 2011)[31]. Not only do they contribute to the aesthetic dimension of a piece, but they are also dynamic foundations of the original design. They produce meaning and staging direction.

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[31] Goldberg (2011, pp. 134-138) discusses the element of place. She quotes Oldenburg “the place in which the piece occurs (…) is part of the effect, and usually the first and most important factor determining the events (materials at hand being the second and players the third). The place could have any extent, a room or a nation’. Referring to Robert Whitman’s piece *Prune Flat*, she also says that time and space become the central features of the work.

# Spatial Dynamics in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Huis Clos*: Otherness as Spatial Oppression

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## Abstract

This paper will be examining a practice as research project which focuses on the staging of Jean-Paul Sartre's modern classic *Huis Clos*, translated for the first time in Maltese as *Bil-bieb mitbuq*. Sartre's play presents the narrative of three unrelated persons, captured for eternity in hell. Through my participation in the process as director, I will analyse the spatial dynamics of this performance in relation with the theme of otherness. In this particular production, the notion of the space is presented in a reverse manner. In the first half of the play, where the three characters are attempting to comprehend why they have been placed together in hell, the actors are enclosed in a 3 by 3 metres enclosure made of gauze. The spectators observe the characters through these gauze walls in the same way how a clinical psychologist might observe the behaviour of a patient from a one-way mirror. In the second half, where the characters seek for an escape route, the gauze walls are suddenly lifted, and the characters use all the theatrical space, including the areas close to the audience. All of a sudden, unexpectedly, the audience become part of the action, and finds itself in hell as well. Hence, when Garcin shouts out his infamous line, the audience by this point has no other choice than to admit that even for them "hell is the other." The objectives of this artistic project are also juxtaposed against the reactions provided by nine audience members who were interviewed after the performance, as well as against the published reviews of the production.

*Keywords:* Otherness, performance, spatial dynamics, existentialism.

## Spatial Dynamics in Jean-Paul Sartre's Huis Clos: Otherness as Spatial Oppression

Adrian Van Den Hoven describes Jean-Paul Sartre's *Huis Clos* "as a perfect example of the unreality that is, according to Sartre, at the heart of all theater" (2012, p.66). This statement is reflected by the numerous times this play has been staged worldwide ever since it was presented for the first time in occupied Paris in May 1944. The entrapment in Hell of the main characters of the drama has intrigued theatre creatives, as much as audiences, for the last eighty years. This study will examine in depth a staging of the play in Malta. By focusing closely on the spatial dynamics of this performance, this paper will investigate to what extent the salient aspects of Sartrean philosophy can be embodied and whether this theatrical production managed to capture the oppressiveness experienced through otherness that *Huis Clos* depicts.

**Figure 1**

*Poster of* Bil-Bieb Mitbuq *(Photo credit: Deacon Xuereb, 2019; Poster design: Luca Azzopardi, 2022; Design Executive: Spazju Kreattiv, 2022)*




*Huis Clos* presents us with three characters escorted by an enigmatic valet in a room composed of three sofas and a mantelpiece with a bronze statue on it. They know they are in Hell but they cannot understand what connects them together. They are also hesitant to admit why they are damned but as the play unfolds the audience discovers that they are all guilty of heinous crimes. Garcin betrayed his wife, but is condemned for being a coward. Inèz is a lesbian who led her cousin and his wife (who becomes her lover) to suicide whereas the

flamboyant high-society woman Estelle kills her lover's baby. They are all attracted to the wrong person. Inèz attempts to seduce Estelle who in turn is attracted to Garcin. The gaze of the latter is addressed towards Inèz, who he hopes will confirm that he is not a coward. When none of them attains their object of desire, they realise that "L'Enfer, c'est les autres" (hell is Other People).

This play has been performed in Malta a few times in English since there was no translation available in the Maltese language. In 1973 it was staged at the National Theatre under the direction of the late Mario Azzopardi whereas in 2011, the play was directed by Albert Marshall, a Maltese veteran theatre practitioner, in one of the fringe theatres in the Maltese capital city. Kevin Saliba translated Sartre's *opus magnum* in Maltese for the first time in 2018, and produced it five years later, under the title *Bil-bieb mitbuq*, literally *The Closed Door*.

This paper will present an analytical case-study of this staging of the play in Maltese which was held over three nights from the 27th till the 29th January 2023 at the theatre of Spazju Kreattiv in Valletta. This intimate theatre-in-the-round, housed in the National Centre for Creativity, seats a total of 144 persons per performance. The limited number of persons watching the performance reflects the unfortunate and limited number of regular theatre goers in Malta. Even though the statistics in 2016 show that 32% of the population goes to the theatre once a year (Leone Ganado, 2017), this percentage incorporates the large number of people who watch the traditional annual Christmas pantomime. On average, performances are only staged twice in Malta (Cremona, 2019) and the capacity of the leading theatre houses ranges from 100 to 1000 seats. The Maltese population is of around 500,000 inhabitants, clearly revealing that theatre is still a niche market.

## Theoretical Framework

The main theoretical framework that informed influenced the artistic choices in this project is the framework of existentialist literature. Apart from the corpus of philosophical works written by Jean-Paul Sartre, this literature review delves into the writings of other important contemporary existentialist and phenomenological philosophers of Sartre. However, to provide a more comprehensive outlook on the subject of alterity, it also incorporates in its analysis other prominent philosophers who explored the theme of otherness.

At the core of the philosophical thought of Sartre on alterity is the tension between the "I" and the "you." Otherness is what defines us as human beings, and yet as Eco succinctly argues, this fundamental notion within human reality causes much fear and anxiety (1997). Richard Kearney develops the concept of alterity by denoting the other as the *stranger*. Kearney does not perceive this concept negatively. The stranger is a moment "of sacred

enfleshment when the future erupts through the continuum of time" (Kearney, 2011, p.7 ). This does not imply that it is not daunting or that it does not place the encounter within a framework of vulnerability. The Nietzschean analogy of the tightrope walker captures the perils of the terrain: indeed, the acrobat falls off the rope and dies (2005).

The fear of otherness is embedded in the power dynamics that ensue in the conflict between the "I" and the "you." The former, that is the subject, wants to assimilate the latter, the object, into its reality, resulting in the conflict that arises when the object does not identify with the subject and possibly hinders this process of assimilation from occurring (Sartre, 2003).

Sartre also denotes that in this dialectical tension, there is never a state of equality. The subject is either looking down at the object, that is the relationality is expressed through *trans-descendance*, or else looking up in awe and admiration, *trans-ascendance* (2003). We are never ourselves in our relational dynamics but in the role that these dynamics impose on us. Engrossed in these illusionary roles, we become victims of what Sartre calls *bad faith* (2003). In Sartre's (2003) own words, "I do not choose to be for the Other what I am, but I can try to be for myself what I am for the Other, by choosing myself as I appear to the Other" (p.550). Relationality, hence, could lead to an unhealthy state of dependency or possessiveness (Buber, 2004). Simone Weil (1997) compares this relational dyad to the Hegelian tension between domination and servitude. She warns that the dependency on another person can generate a sense of imbalance which subsequently transforms itself into hatred (Weil, 1966). Weil, unlike Sartre, believes that the only way forward is the loss of self, that is, ultimate detachment. Through this form of anonymity, the person prevents his or her identity from destroying the relationship (Weil,1966). Reconfirmed by Levinas (2009), the impersonal and the anonymous allows the person to concentrate on the other in the present moment whereas the personal carries all the experiential baggage of the past and all the anxiety of the unknown future, creating barriers between the I and the other.

Sartre considers these illusionary power dynamics inevitable. The use of language within human relationships makes the illusionary even more unavoidable and complex. Paradoxically, words are the source of communication within relationships, and yet are often a stumbling block in the development of these dynamics. Each subject uses signifiers (words) that are construed differently by the object, leading to situations where, despite the use of the same language (Lacan, 1989), problematic situations arise: what a person means is not necessarily, and very often might not be, what the other perceives. The expression of ideas, manifested through language, becomes the imposition of the self onto the other.

These illusions intensify in sexual relationships where the sexual act could often become a filling in of the void. The consequence is mutually destructive for the couple when the gratification of the self is the motivating factor for the sexual in the relationship. The female eats the phallus by allowing it to penetrate her body, and thus creating a form of castration,

while the male asserts his superiority through the act of penetration (Sartre, 2003). Yet satiation is never attained. As we gaze at our object of desire, we contemplate how we can engage further in these illusionary roles and power games with the aim of capturing our prey totally, but frequently, if not always, falling short of doing so, and experiencing deeper frustration and angst. The illusion is amplified by what Sartre (2003) refers to as the being-for-itself, the illusionary desire to reach completion by acquiring beauty, only to discover that this is unattainable. The more a person feels loved, or believes that he is feeling loved, the more his being is lost and being eaten by the other. Hence the other has the power to jeopardise the universe of the self, and of course, the self has the same power to do the same thing. Even if there were no power dynamic, which we have already established cannot be within the philosophical understanding of Sartre, the mere presence of the other hijacks the reality and the perception of my experience. The illusionary aspect that characterises relational dynamics highlights their absurdity: it poses the question whether they are so necessary and relevant in life.

Yet the solution of these relational dynamics does not lie in absence or annihilation. Relationships cannot be avoided. We may try to isolate ourselves and hide from others, but this only intensifies this existentialist crisis even further. Absence discloses being, and, indeed, not to be nevertheless entails the potentiality of being there (Sartre, 2003). The other exists, and we have a responsibility to this other. Indeed, “the individual is defined only by his relationship to the world and to other individuals, he exits only by transcending himself” (De Beauvoir, 1976, p.156). Of course, this responsibility is frequently also his condemnation. It is these perennial questions, this constant dialectical tension, that informed the artistic choices in the production of *Bil-bieb mitbuq* that will be presented in the next section.

## Methodology

The research approach that was used in this project and that will serve as the backbone to answer the research question is a practice-research approach. Hence, I will attempt to demonstrate how as a theatre practitioner commissioned to direct this piece, I ‘translated’ the key features of Sartrean philosophy present in this play into a spatial concept and into physicalised action. The outcome of the experimentation which resulted in the staged production will be examined by juxtaposing it against the two published professional reviews on this production, as well as the perspectives that emerged in the nine interviews that were conducted after the performances. The selected interviewees were mostly composed of theatre practitioners who watched the performance, with a balance between persons who identify as males, and interviewees who identify as female. There was also a balance in terms

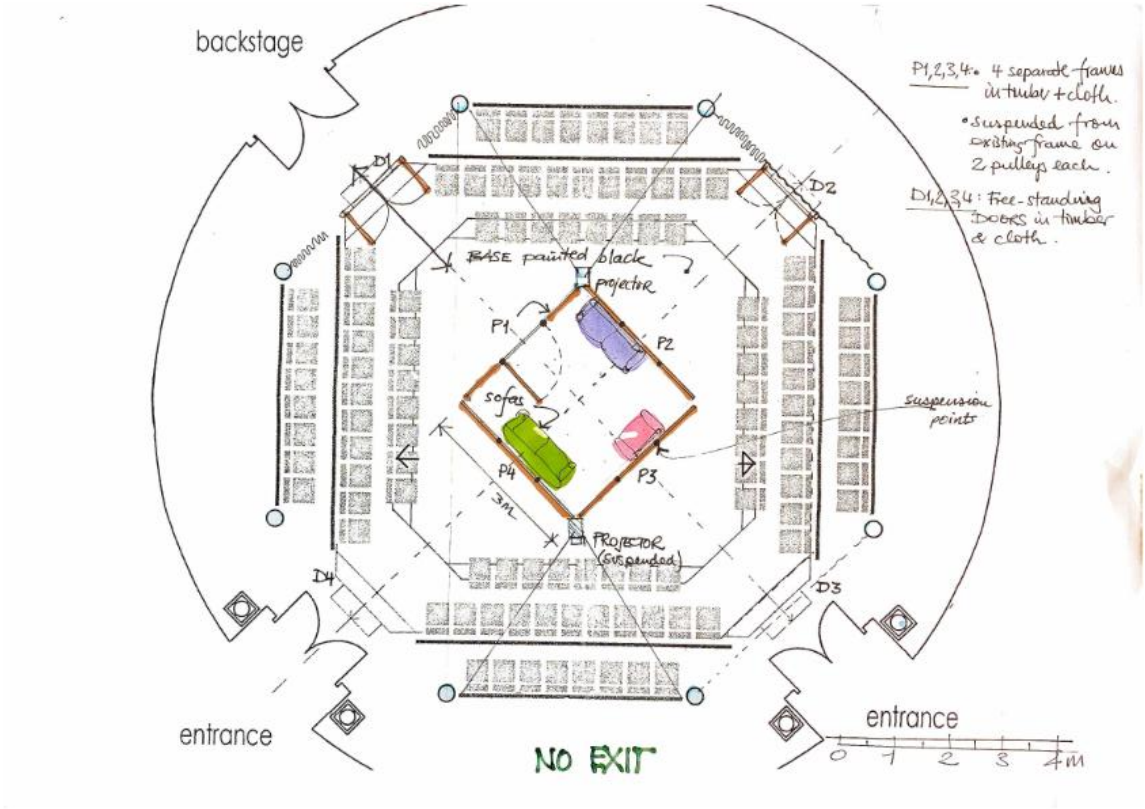
of age range to ensure that the participants encompassed both young practitioners, who are still new to the industry, alongside veterans.

## Case-Study

The main objective of the spatial design of the production *Bil-bieb mitbuq*, the main objective was to lead the audience on an immersive journey. Notwithstanding the size of the theatre at *Spazju Kreattiv* (9 metres by 9 metres, including audience seating, and 5 metres by 5 metres for the acting space) the space was diminished even further to create a sense of claustrophobia. Hence the first half of the play was designed to happen in a 3 metres by 3 metres cube in the middle of the acting space.

**Figure 2**

*Set Design by Perit Adrian Mamo*




The audience walks into a dimly lit theatre. As the house lights fade out, and the interior of the cube is illuminated, the audience notices that there are two sofas, a chair, and a column with a bronze statue on it within the cube. Shortly afterwards the characters are escorted into the cube. The interior of the cube can be seen through walls made of shark tooth gauze, which reduce very slightly the visibility, creating an eerie feeling. According to the reviewer Ramon Depares (2023):

> …this cage gets more and more claustrophobic by the minute, an entirely believable portrayal of hell that messes with the minds of the three leads as they spiral into a vortex of self-hatred, condemned to play and replay the deeds that brought them to this point.

**Figure 3**

*The Entrance to the Cube*. *(Photo credit: Chakib Zidi)*

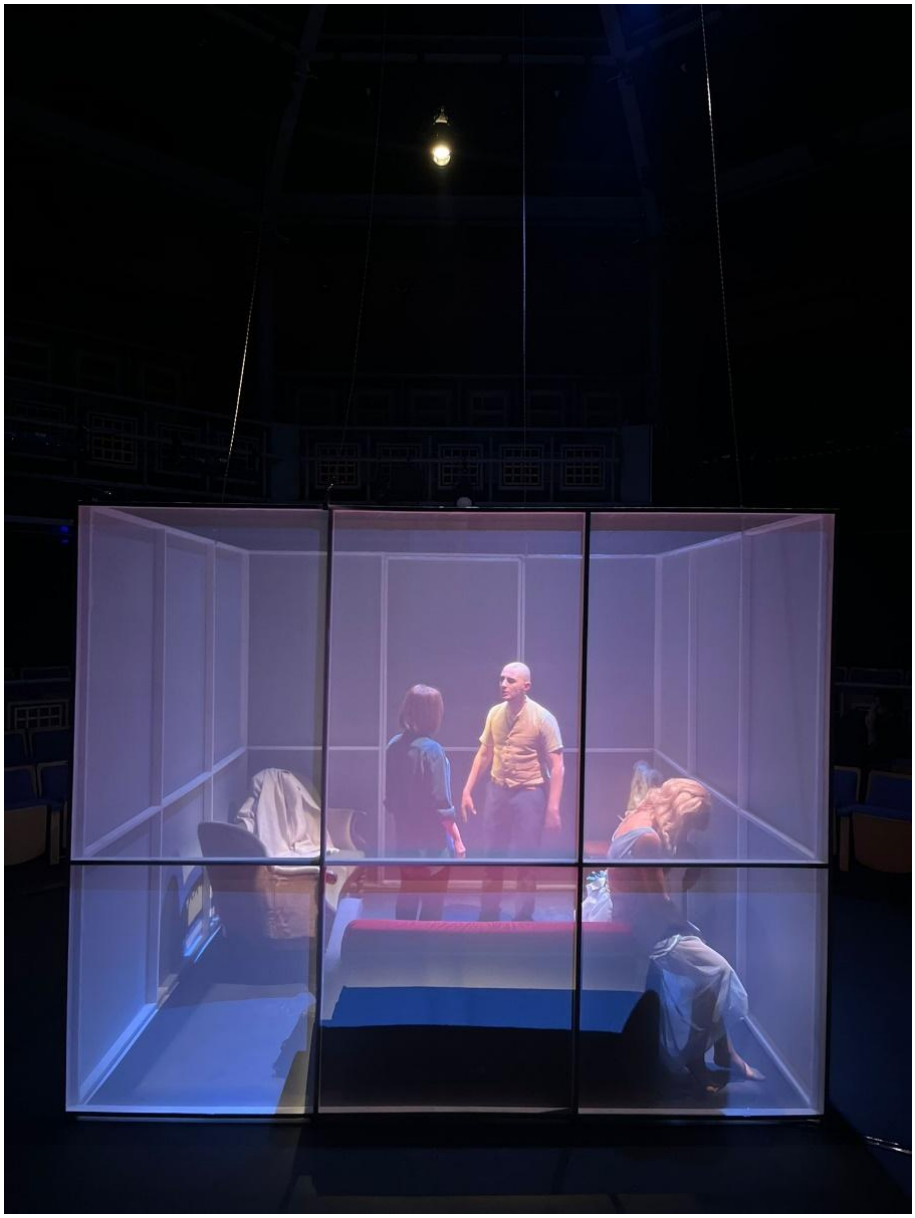


Despite the uncomfortableness that the cube causes, the audience is still in a privileged position. They observe the plight of these three characters, analysing and interpreting their words and movements, in much the same way how a clinical psychologist might observe patients in a hospital through a two-way mirror, or visitors in a zoo watching, and ultimately enjoying, animals in captivity. The audience is “safe.” They are not in hell and the atrocious

crimes committed by these characters are unrelatable. The sense of uncomfortableness was reiterated by the interviewees, who used words such as blurry, faded and detached to describe the experience of the first half of the play. They observed the spatial and mental restrictions of the characters as they struggled in the box, as well as the hindrances that the actors experienced as they interacted with one another in a limited space. According to the interviewees, the first half of the performance felt as though they were watching a film on a screen, or actions through a curtain. One interviewee stated that even though the concept of the box was effective, the performance would have benefitted if the box was removed earlier.

**Figure 4**

*The Actors in the Cube: Inez (Sarah Camilleri); Garcin (Andre Mangion); and Estelle (Antonella Axisa). (Photo credit: Chakib Zidi)*



The theatrical space also embodies life on earth, whether in relation to the past of these three characters, or to the current events happening on earth as they are in eternal damnation. As the characters disclose aspects of their past or make reference and comment on what their significant others are doing, filmed clips of Tanztheater choreographies are projected onto the black panels of cloth that are situated at the back of each of the four sides of the audience area.

Yet these projections are the first semiotic aspect that instills doubt in the perception of the audience, and which accentuates even further the illusionary aspect of the relational. The three dancers on screen are not the three actors on stage, even though at times they are playing the same dramatic characters. Furthermore, at times, the same dancers play interchangeably the significant others referred to by Garcin, Estelle and Inèz. This deliberately baffles the audience. Moreover, there are moments where there seems to be lack of correspondence between what the character in the cage is saying in opposition to the visual being seen on the panel. Some of these moments are subtle and hardly noticeable, such as Garcin referring to his wife dressed entirely in black, whereas the dancer is wearing a white shirt. Other moments are more bluntly confusing. Inèz relates how her lover Florence left the gas on at night, leading to their deaths, whereas on screen, two female dancers, presumably representing Inèz and Florence, suffocate a man with a pillow, and fall onto the floor shortly afterwards. The audience is never sure whether these characters are stating the truth and this uncertainty is reinforced by these images that do not always correspond with the spoken word.

**Figure 5**

*Projection of Choreographies. Dancer (Yuko Kominami). (Photo credit: Miguela Xuereb)*



The reaction of the interviewees on the use of the projections was divisive. Three of them felt that the projections were distracting, and although this was one of the artistic objectives why they were included in the production, the interviewees did not use the word in a positive manner. Four more stated that the projections were unnecessary and did not contribute to the dynamics of the performance. On the other hand, two of the interviewees claimed that the projections allowed them to be more engaged with the drama happening on stage. A possible explanation for such a wide variety of reactions could be that the perception of the projections depended on where the person was seated. Being in the round, some angles allowed for a better engagement with the projections than others, resulting in a more positive reaction to their use.

The analytical attitude of the audience is shattered after forty-five minutes of the performance. As Garcin attempts to drive sense into the mind of Inèz by explaining that their condemnation lies in the fact that they are each other's executioner, the cube is suddenly lifted up, an artistic choice which does not feature in the written text. The acting space abruptly increases to include the audience space too, and the audience is flooded in light. The reviewer Lara Zammit (2023) remarks that:

> …*Huis Clos* (*Bil-Bieb Mitbuq*) is not an easy play to inhabit, whether as a character or audience member. The difficult viewing is crystallised near the end of the act when the box composing the set – the room in hell – is lifted out of sight, spilling hell across the whole theatre, gushing around our seats, forcing us to wade in it.

The audience is now part of hell. The characters approach the spectators, even delivering specific lines in their faces and establishing momentary eye-contact, thus breaking the fourth wall (pun intended). The audience members for the first time see the other spectators, and the actors who spent half the play isolated in the cage can now see the audience clearly. This sudden interaction has a profound implication: the spectators are no longer observers or passive agents. They are now culpable of the same sin as the characters that they have been speculating about for the past three-quarters of an hour – indeed, they were already so unknowingly since the onset of the performance. The sin they share in common is that they are all human and consequently are condemned to relate with each other.

The objective of this dynamic is to reverse the perception of hell. The first part of the play was designed to feel more claustrophobic, leading the audience to believe that the torture of hell consists in the closed space and the dark ambience that ensues. This is totally challenged when the cube is lifted. The audience – as well as the characters – shockingly realise that the torture of hell is not related at all to physical space. Relationality transcends proximity. No matter how far away the characters attempt to place themselves from each other, the intensity of damnation is nevertheless experienced. Indeed, the most excruciating scenes and the

spiraling down of each character are played in an extended space and in full brightness. Light and space do not offer any safety or escape route. This allows the three characters to seemingly invade the audience space, with certain uncomfortable scenes, such as the sex scene between Garcin and Estelle being acted out in one of the four corners in between the sections of the audience seats. The extension of the space increases the disquietude of the spectators, and the increase of light intensifies the anxiety caused by the mere presence of the other.

Another spatial dynamic that occurs once the cube is lifted is that the openings in the space are revealed. Estelle frantically rushes and bangs against these openings, crossing chaotically from one corner of the theatre to the other. One of the openings is the door through which the audience entered the theatre; the second door is the emergency exit; and the third opening is a curtain leading to the backstage area. Each corner was covered by a black curtain which Estelle draws open. Hence, the doors in the space have multiplied but this does not make the situation any more relieving. It magnifies the exasperation of having numerous possibilities that do not lead anywhere.

All the interviewees expressed the view that they were more engaged in the second part of the play. The raising of the box provided a sense of relief, but this change of mood did not affect the overall attitude of the audience members. They now became aware of each other's presence and realized that they were all in the same reality. Although the space increased, and the actors felt smaller, since they were not concentrated in a limited space, the feeling of closedness was not only retained but paradoxically became more intensive.

The artistic decision to increase the space and to demonstrate that the condemnation of otherness surpasses distance is clearly embedded in Sartre's text. Towards the end of the play Garcin bangs vehemently on the door of the room, and this opens suddenly. Speechless, the characters pause and gape at the open door. Yet they cannot leave: they are doomed to be with each other. The only difference that was introduced in the use of the door in this particular mise-en-scène is the choice of door. The door that opens unexpectedly at Garcin's command is the same entrance through which the audience came into the theatre. This makes the audience realise that an hour before they were inadvertently entering hell through that same door, and consequently now wonder whether like the characters they are trapped in it forever.

The interviewees also commented on the effect of the opening of the theatre door towards the end of the play. The door combined reality with fiction. It was the real theatre door but now it was transformed into the fictitious door of hell. Although one interviewee expressed that it provided a sense of respite because there was the possibility of leaving the space, most interviewees felt that paradoxically the opening of the door entrapped them even further, highlighting the sensation that they were in hell. The entrapment was no longer only physical

but became a trap in the mind too, which potentially is more dangerous and daunting than physical imprisonment.

**Figure 6**

*The Lifting up of the Box (Photo credit: Chakib Zidi)*



This frustration is reiterated at the end of this production. In the final scene, after the three main characters fall on the floor in fits of hysterical laughter, Garcin stands up and states that they should proceed. Conventionally the blackout after this last line leads to the curtain call, which is accompanied by the house lights as soon as the actors exit, having taken their final

bow. As the audience stands up to leave the theatre, another blackout is inserted (not in Sartre's didascalies) and when the theatre lights are turned on again, Garcin and the valet enter repeating the first four lines of the beginning of the play, giving the impression that the performance is going to recommence. This is followed by another blackout and houselights, as an indication that the audience can now leave the theatre. This added scene played on the concept of the looped narrative. Like Sisyphus, we are fated to keep on rolling the boulder to the top of the hill forever. We are condemned to replay continuously the same dynamics that imprison us in our relationships, and no form of awareness seems to liberate us from this imprisonment.

**Figure 7**

*The Opening of the Door. Garcin (Andre Mangion)*. *(Photo credit: Miguela Xuereb)*



## Conclusion

Depares affirms that this production is "an important piece of theatre that deserves to be made accessible to a wider audience'' and that ''given the limited space, the production is surprisingly physical…By the time the iconic line is delivered – hell, then, is other people – the entire audience was visibly in a state of nervous tension that would have undoubtedly pleased Sartre" (2023). The fulcrum of the production was the use of space to depict the existentialist hell that is caused by alterity. By identifying the salient aspects that emerge in Sartre's philosophical and literary writings on the subject, in dialogue with other notable philosophers, physical expressions were discovered that facilitated the translation of these insights into embodied

action in such a way that they were relevant to a contemporary theatre audience in Malta. As Dr Alex Vella Gregory commented after having watched one of the performances: “Every word is important. Each action is filled to the brim with meaning” (Facebook, 2023). This production of *Bil-Bieb Mitbuq* demonstrates the power and the poignancy of the dynamic interrelationship between the word and the body, between the text and the action. Both semiotic elements indeed clearly point to the same direction: “Hell is other people”.

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# The Politics of Space in *Ça ira (1) fin de Louis* by Joël Pommerat: Staging the People. The Gap Between Presence and Representation

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## Abstract

Joël Pommerat's *Ça ira (1) fin de Louis*[32] evokes the history of the French Revolution while exploring contemporary trends of depoliticisation. The linear dramatic structure of the performance follows the events from the King's convocation of the Assembly of the Three Classes in 1789 to the adoption of France's first Constitution and the establishment of a constitutional monarchy in September 1791. However, the prospective dramaturgy -pointing towards the future and following "presentism"- neither moves from crisis to crisis towards a climax and a final resolution nor aims at a historically accurate narrative. Instead, the crisis is permanent and lasts beyond the performance, extending towards contemporary political crises and blending fact and fiction, past and present. In its five-hour duration, the theatre becomes a "parliament" where the spectator is positioned in the gap between presence and representation. The paper explores the ways the performance exposes this gap using strategies of staging the people (Rancière, 2011). After exploring the sound and vocal elements of the performance as a spatial "distribution of the sensible" which contributes to a heightened sense of presence and their spatio-temporal relation to history, we will examine how the aesthetic practice of staging the people is manifested in two scenes of the performance.

*Keywords:* Presence, representation, staging the people, politics of aesthetics, distribution of the sensible, aesthetic regimes, regimes of historicity.

[32]The performance was presented in Greece at central stage of the Onassis Cultural Centre, 4-8 October 2017. The title could be translated in English as *It 'll be fine (1) the end of Louis.*

## Spatial Distribution of the Sensible in *Ça ira:* Sonorous Elements, Lighting Design and Presence

The politics of space in *Ça ira* are addressed using as framework Jacques Rancière's term "distribution of the sensible" (Rancière, 2004) or "division of the perceptible" (Rancière, 2004, 2011), a concept grounded in the dialectic of a politics of aesthetics. For Rancière art is not political because of the way it represents social structures, conflicts, or identities. It is political precisely because of the distance it maintains about these functions to the extent that it arranges, shapes, produces, frames a particular spatio-temporal sensibility, modes of being together or being apart, of being inside or being outside, in front or in the middle, modes of arranging and dividing the visible and the invisible, modes of distinguishing speech from noise.

> Politics consists in reconfiguring the division of the sensible, in bringing new objects and subjects onto the stage, in making visible what was not visible, in making audible as speaking beings those who were only audible as noisy animals. To the extent that it sets up such scenes of discord, politics can be called an "aesthetic activity" in a way that has nothing to do with that ornament of power that Benjamin called the 'aestheticisation of politics' (Rancière, 2004, p.13).

Joël Pommerat, as an *auteur en scene* (or *écrivain de plateau*), writes "from the stage, on stage and for the stage" (Phelopoulou, 2019, pp.163,161) in collaboration with actors of Compagnie Louis Brouillard. As his emphasis is on reality rather than verisimilitude or a reconstruction of the past through a realist scenography, the props of *Ça ira* are minimal and the stage is almost stripped down, with sparse, removable furniture. The main spaces are created by contrasts between light and darkness (by set and lighting designer Éric Soyer), rendering the scenic and sonic design allusive, blurring spacio-temporal boundaries, and prioritizing the actors' haunting presence. The lighting design, coming from above or from the left and right (rarely from the front) of the stage –as is usually the case in dance performances– produces radiant bodies.

The way sound and light create space and bring the actors' presence into the fore is redolent of Peter Brooks tenets about presence and the empty space. Presence, for Brook is not related to subjective action. It rather figures as an objective quality related to space:

> For me, the way of the theater leads (...) to a perception that is heightened because it is shared. A strong presence of actors and a strong presence of spectators can produce a circle of unique intensity in which barriers can be broken and the invisible become real. Then public truth and private truth become inseparable parts of the same essential experience (Brook, 1987, p.41).

Presence –central to Brook's philosophy and Pommerat's performance– attains its full resonance only in relation to the concept of empty space which is not conceived as a geographical or physical entity but as everything that does not yet have form, as a virtual and yet-to-be born reality that is as yet undefined (Sucher,1995). For Brook, an actor has to be capable of expressing more than an objective horizontally motivated by desires and actions. Rather, the actor is a vertically integrated presence capable of accessing and transmitting both corporeal and incorporeal realities. The vertical dramaturgy of *Ça ira* brings into relief the equality of the interacting scenic elements. The 'shock of presence[33]' (Brook, 1997), presupposing the actors' interdependence to the audience and the other performative elements, encapsulates Peter Brook's influence on Pommerat' s work.

**Figure 1**

*Scenes From* Ça ira (1) fin de Louis*, source: https://www.artpress.com/2016/10/01/joel-pommerat-ca-ira-1-fin-de-louis/*



The sound design (by Francois Leymarie) contributes to this complex interrelation of actors' bodies and space as a performative agent, creating images and multiple spatial perspectives. These perspectives make up what the dramaturge of the performance Marion Boudier calls "prospective dramaturgy", which consists in the collaborative construction of the performance text through theatrical improvisations based on research topics or text fragments.

[33] Pommerat has been influenced by Peter Brook's work as he and his company were guests at the Bouffes du Nord, Peter Brook's theatre in Paris, in the early 2010s.

It is noteworthy that, while the term “prospective” is generally applied to visual perception (it “looks forward” [prospectare[34]]), in *Ça ira*’s dramaturgical context it takes on a sonar dimension alluding to our hearing perception. This is indicative of the privileged status attributed by Pommerat and his company to aurality -the dialectic counterpart and complement of visuality- and the dramatic and semiotic value of soundscape and noise.[35]

Sound is privileged as a dramaturgical strategy for its referential ambiguity and polyvalence and its potential as a signifying agent, extending beyond the directorial arrangement of language via actors' speech and defying ocular-centric theatre semiosis. Voice amplification and strategic speaker implementation create sonorous spaces invisible on stage, representing an exterior to what we witness, generating fictional soundscapes close to the spectator’s ear. A wide range of sound effects are used narratively or extra-narratively creating atmospheres or transitions suggestive of what is happening on stage or backstage (e.g. different frequency bombardments signal the approach of the army to the building of the National Assembly or voices off-stage indicate the siege by the crowd).

**Figure 2**

*Snapshot from the recorded performance of* Ça ira (1) fin de Louis *accessed via the Onassis Cultural Centre*



[34]“Prospective dramaturgy (...) contemplates future needs, anticipates, or encourages the directions the writing takes by gathering and sharing potentially interesting material, the potentials of which are explored collectively during rehearsal. It “‘is a process of inquiry and research” which “develops during rehearsals, closely to the stage, and in connection with the actors” and involves -amongst others- “contributing to thinking about the writing currently undertaken, the point of view used, form, and relationship with the audience” (Boudier, 2021, p. 752, 753).

[35]“Theatre noise is a new term which captures a contemporary, agitatory acoustic aesthetic. It expresses the innate theatricality of sound design (...), articulates the reach of auditory spaces, the art of vocality, the complexity of acts of audience, the political in produced noises (...). Noise (...) is to be understood as a plural, as a composite of different noises, as layers or waves of noises” (*Kendrick & Roesner,* 2011, p. xv).

## Presence through Embodied Speech

Pommerat asks the actors “to be *in* the speech, not to recite or reproduce a text.” Thus, he tries to “break the mechanism of (...) the theatrical attitude” and “the lack of naturalness” (2007, pp. 9-10). The actors’ de-dramatised voice and their direct address to the audience breaking the fourth wall, signals a departure from the text and emancipation from the supremacy of an authorial mould, targeting colloquial language’s dynamism. While written texts and archival documents play an important role at the beginning of the creative process, with actors appropriating historical sources, in the later stages this process involves a detachment from them, prioritizing “ideas over style and character study” (Pommerat, 2016b, p. 10). The written text “disappears”[36] on stage due to the actors’ phenomenological physicality, while performative, active verbs (e.g. give the floor, threaten, warn, reject, validate, deprive, legitimise) permeate the performance exemplifying an understanding of speech as “embodied logos”.[37] This spatial distribution of the sensible through the actor’s voice aims at a “balance between revelation and concealment, between the desire to see and that which prevents it” (Pommerat, 2007, p. 32) and both at distantiation and an intimate relationship between spectators and actors.

The performance's distance from myths, legends, symbols and stereotypical constructions about the French Revolution dominating collective imaginary, collective memory and public history and the de-monumentalising attitude towards history, -a deliberate venture to “cleanse” it “of all its folkloric rubbish and monumental sediments” (Norrito, 2015) is reflected in the avoidance of recognizable, well-known quotations from famous figures of the revolution and in the change of the names of its protagonists. Similarly, the reiteration of the phrase “Ça Ira”[38] by Louis as a leitmotif does not function as an allusion to the famous symbol of the revolution but inscribes the written language of the archives and past symbols to a living, colloquial, contemporary mode of speaking and to contemporary modes of depoliticisation. “Getting rid of the rhetoric and the appearance of the revolutionaries seemed necessary in order to really hear those speeches again and rediscover a certain innocence of the gaze” (Pommerat, 2016, p. 10).

[36]The demands of Pommerat's stage writing explain why the written word plays a minor role in *Ça ira*. According to the dramaturg of the performance Marion Boudier, Joël Pommerat was reluctant to publish his texts and it took the insistence of an editor to finally accept (Boudier, 2015, p.23).

[37]This term is inspired by Merleau-Ponty’s theoretical understanding of *logos as flesh* that allows the perception of logos as an embodied and inter-subjective experience (Stenstad,1993, pp. 52-61)

[38]Reference to the “Ça ira” of the title (meaning “It’ ll be fine”) but also to the famous revolutionary song of the same name which, by 1795, has become a patriotic song or national dance.

**Figure 3**

*Scene from* Ça Ira (1) Fin de Louis
*Source: https://www.thaetre.com/2017/03/24/entretien-avec-eric-feldman/*
*© Élisabeth Carecchio*




The microphonic amplification of actors' voice (through high frequency microphones [HF] and headset microphones) and the play with the range of voice levels, tones and tensions, preserve its everyday, natural and "intimate signature" and the "grain of voice" (Barthes,1978[39]), avoiding "vocal projection" (Triau, 2013, p. 60). The aesthetic prioritizing of voice is politically inflected as the physiological manifestation of the phonetic properties of language is always socially coded to place subjects within the social and political order. As Rancière observes, the distribution of the sensible is a "delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise that simultaneously determines the places and the stakes of politics as a form of experience" (Rancière, 2004, p.13). Therefore, the microphone on the podium does more than enhance the actors' presence and the polyphony of the performance bringing them closer to the spectator, allowing the space between them to

[39]For Barthes, the "grain" primarily refers to the phenomenological perception of the materiality of language and speech in voice with no reference to how the body's materiality might be mediated by discourse and by various technologies. However, Pommerat does not promote an understanding of the human voice that ignores the body as an effect of power relations and regulatory norms and the fact that embodiment is "shaped in each historical context by specific cultural, aesthetic, and scientific models, and paradigms" (Zarrilli et al., 2013, p. viii).

become denser and bridging the individual and the collective, the scene and the auditorium. It also exposes the gap between presence and representation by highlighting the construction of identities and subjectivities predicated on claiming and possessing language. It acts as a "weapon" ("I fight with words, not with weapons" (4: 20: 55[40]), says a member of parliament), as a "modern way of exercising power on people" which the actors have to seize and "appropriate with different skill", states the sound designer of the performance, François Leymarie (Sinard, 2016). What is more, the emphasis on actors' voice does not imply a logo-centric "metaphysics of presence"[41] but rather points towards a constantly fleeting present and stresses the paradox of the actor's abscence-presence, simultaneously inhabiting the past and the present. As Peggy Phelan argues, a value and an ontological aspect of performance is presence's disappearing character. The fact that the body and the voice are always media or surplus of meaning, always becoming themselves through disappearance (Phelan, 1993, p. 146), never establishing themselves on stage as present in the here-and-now, never coinciding with themselves, requiring taking a stand and a certain point of view, reveals their political potential[42] and subversive status.

## Staging the People: The Gap Between Presence and Representation

The interrelated questions of how the people are represented and how the spectator is included in the performance will be addressed using Jacques Rancière' s conceptualisation of "staging the people" (Rancière, 2011). The "people" is more absent than present, as they actually gain visibility and claim their voice after the fourth hour of the performance. Does this mean that the people are misrepresented in the performance?

In *Ça ira* the audience acts as members of the French National Assembly since the actors are addressing them and mingle with them in the auditorium. Some reactions (boos or cheers) seem to come spontaneously from the spectators, but, in fact, there are fifteen extras, dispersed in the rows of the auditorium among the audience, divided into two political groups (left and right wing), called "Forces vives" by François Leymarie (Sinard, 2016), who applaud their leaders or boo their opponents. Although this is not a participatory performance, some spectators react along with the "Forces vives". The voices of actors and audience and sound

[40]References to the text of the performance are taken from the Greek subtitling of the performance by Louisa Mitsakou as shown in the recording (indicated by the time marker) and from Joël Pommerat's published text (Abbreviated: ÇI) (Pommerat, 2016a).

[41]In *The Voice that Keeps Silence* Derrida states that "voice is the being which is present to itself in the form of universality, as consciousness; the voice is consciousness" (Derrida, 2012, p.498).

[42]"Political activity is whatever shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes a place's destination. (...); it makes understood as discourse what was once only heard as noise" (Rancière, 1999, p. 29-30)

diffusion through speakers are used to create the atmosphere of an assembly hall and to immerse the spectators in a specific space-time dimension that blurs the boundaries between stage and auditorium (see figure 4).

**Figure 4**

*“Forces Vives”*
*Source: https://www.parislete.fr/en/home/ca-ira-1-fin-de-louis*
*© Élisabeth Carecchio*



The way the spectator and the people are included or separated from the action constitutes a distribution of the sensible. Distance and proximity established through sound strategies render the people present and absent at once or represented suggestively. This distribution of the sensible transforms the space between stage and auditorium into a “parliament”, echoing the slogan outside the Théâtre de L'Odéon in Paris in May 1968: “When the parliament becomes a bourgeois theatre, then the bourgeois theatre becomes a parliament”. The audience is positioned in the intermediate space between the people who are deprived of speech and visibility and their representatives who monopolise the scene, between the new constitutional organisation imagined by the deputies and the real needs of people. Thus, the spectator is hovering in the gap between the people and their representatives, between presence and representation, sharing their contested terrain.

At the heart of Rancière’s conception of the politics of aesthetics lies the demonstration of this gap and tension between presence and representation as a political but primarily a theatrical question, as “the inter-play between them determines who is there and how they are seen” (Rancière, 1999, pp. 87-88). The aesthetic practice of staging the people and its capacity

to frame, codify and remediate the presence of people is central to imaging their political figure and their "claim" in representative democracy (Rancière, 1999, pp. 87-88). However, once the people[43] are theatricalised or staged as a material presence "they are emptied out", "they become an image (…), as if always already a representation" (Didi-Hubermann 2016, p. 68). The people are missing from representative democracy because they never existed as a unified totality, but "only in the condition of minority" (Deleuze, 2013, pp. 215- 217). " 'The people' are (...) the locus of the unbridgeable gap between presence and representation that constitute politics' primary (…) site" (Rancière, 1999, pp. 22, 87). As long as representative democracy, the post-democratic apparatus and populist rhetoric attempts to close this gap, the practice of staging the people remains the recurrent ground of political and aesthetic tension (Kear, 2021).

*Ça ira* reproduces[44] and simultaneously undermines contemporary depoliticised tendencies exposing them as a "post-democratic show" or "populist theatrical spectacle" unveiling the people's "missingness" from the aesthetic-political regime and re-opening the gap between presence and representation as a contested terrain without final resolution (Kear, 2021, pp. 2, 3).

## Scene 5

In the 5th scene of the performance, a Spanish anchorwoman deliriously comments on the opening ceremony of the General Classes from behind the official forum. Once the Prime Minister takes the floor, the Spanish reporter rushes to the hidden right side of the stage, to interview an MP who expresses the divisions of the General Classes, concealed in the image of the live broadcast. In a dialectic juxtaposition, the stage is divided into two, with the left side -where the officials and the Prime Minister stand- silent and illuminated, and the right side - where the MPs stand- speaking and dark (see figure 5). The members of parliament are duplicated and are no longer opposite the stage (as the audience) but within it, into the spectacle of history but also absent because invisible and hidden by a black wall. Their

[43]"A 'people' (…) is not an assemblage of social groups and identities. It is the polemical form of subjectification that is drawn along particular lines of fracture, where the distribution of leaders and led, learned and ignorant, possessors and dispossessed, is decided" (Rancière, 2011, p.15).

[44]Olivier Neveux criticises Pommerat for reproducing depoliticised discourses, for presenting political discourse as an already constituted, rhetorical and spectacular whole and for bringing out the various forms of discourse according to a purely thematic logic (Neveux, 2007). The director's neutrality certainly does not reveal a militant political position. However, he exposes the depoliticisation of politics through a politics of aesthetics. Conversely, the issue of the disappearance of the art forms of dialectical conflict (dissensus) is addressed differently by Rancière. Both political debate and a sense of the strange disappear at the very moment when artworks address contemporary social or political issues directly. In every such attempt there is an automated effect of "delegitimation" and self-referentiality (Rancière, 2004, p. 14). However, contemporary politicised aesthetic regimes promote and augment political action by their very ambiguity.

presence is only implied by the voices of the deputy and the anchorwoman. A new re-configuration of the classical stage-spectator division -a new distribution of the sensible- is created. The theatricalisation and dissociation of sound and image allows the spectator to reflect on the mediated nature of the historical event as a sensational post-democratic show or a populist theatrical spectacle, unmasking the mechanisms of both theater and history as constructed. The gap between the immediacy of the live event and its media coverage is exposed, challenging the hegemony of the image, while at the same time taking full advantage of it. This self-referential comment points suggestively towards the consensual[45] and universal discourses and class-based rationales that govern the institutional framework of the performance. It also reveals how aesthetic regimes or regimes of spectatorship can produce and frame regimes of historicity (Hartog, 2003) and exposes the gap between presence and representation questioning representative democracy. History is revealed as a spectacle that separates the viewer from the object of viewing.

**Figure 5**

*Snapshot from the recorded performance accessed via the Onassis Cultural Centre archive*




[45]Consensus implies the suspension of hierarchies in traditional dualisms and oppositions and therefore the abolition of dialectical conflicts. “The shift from dialectics to symbolism is obviously linked to the contemporary shift in what I called the aesthetics of politics, meaning the way politics frames a common stage. This shift has a name. Its name is consensus” (Rancière, 2009, p.48).

The Spanish TV commentator operates as a kind of meta-dramatic, epic bridge between stage and audience. As such she embodies a contemporary depoliticised perception of politics and a parody of the power of media. Her attitude also reflects the aesthetic question of the performance: to escape the *déjà vu* surrounding the Revolution and to immerse the spectator in the unpredictable (Mazeau, Boudier, 2015), but also to distance her/him through the effect of liveness rendered from the journalist's burlesque perspective. “An important event for France, of course, but we may say without exaggeration, for the whole European continent” (ÇI, p. 25). Unable to construct a grand narrative of the French Revolution in her confused excitement and lack of objectivity, the journalist reinforces the irony about an optimism or faith in progress which is challenged along with the spectator’s horizons of expectation. The performance asks us to evaluate our participation as spectators, destabilizing our privileged position as such, through the fact that history is played out “live”. Electronic media tend to relativise– if not to abolish– the “Euclidean” experience of space-time and the opposition between presence and absence as well as that of proximity and distance in the situating of bodies (Weber, 2004, p. 99). “Televised ‘bodies’ mediate between the body and its presence, between the experience of the body and its stage existence” (Weber, 1996, p. 117). One of the strongest scenes of the performance is, in fact, the one that is less “live” as – in exposing mediation– the truth status of the visual system is questioned in contrast to the voice off-stage that brings from the background the historical conflicts that are silenced by the “televised” image.

## Scene 26

The last scene of *Ça Ira* leaves the “end of Louis” (fin de Louis) suspended along with all the questions about the aftermath of the Revolution. The scene, structured between two games of billiards, invites the viewer to read the conflicts in the light of the symbolic meaning of a game. The ambiguity of this game -played by the queen and the king's sister and then by two bailiffs and the militiamen- no longer being the exclusive privilege of aristocracy, is underlined by the dialogue between the two women [“Perhaps we should avoid arguing in public...”, “Where is the audience, my lady?” (ÇI, p.129)].

Here again the gap between presence and representation is unveiled pointing towards the audience by making the theatrical space a site of dynamic and dialectical conflict between the political and the aesthetic. As a metaphorical expression of a class demand and an allusion to the sans-culottes people of the Revolution or the military coup, this game is emblematic of Pommerat's staging of history in the present tense, showing history and politics as a game played by many class agents, a game of conflict, surprises and carom. History is presented not as a predetermined but as a productive and potential moment, as a field of struggle. The

performers' and the audience's presence inextricably and dialectically relate the historical past with the "here and now". "The spectator is in a state of discovery of events, as if he himself is contemporary with what is happening before his eyes" (Pommerat, 2016b, p. 11). The performance does not aim at reproducing a pre-existing past reality as a referent to itself and outside itself. Instead, it aims at producing history as a system of fluid and multivalent cultural signs by haunting the performance space and the movement of the actors, by dissipating the sense of pure presence and by generating potentially alternative presents. Dramaturgy aiming in that direction involves a form of performative writing inscribed in the body and by the body, a scenic writing that reflects the various mechanisms of memory and referentiality and pushes against a teleological conception of history, pointing towards "not an essence but a positioning" (Hall, 1990, 226).

**Figure 6**

*Snapshot from the recorded performance accessed from the Onassis Cultural Centre archive, "Where Is the Audience my Lady?"*



"In my performances I am looking for the relationship we have with characters in a novel" (Pommerat, 2007, p.32). An epic dimension is manifest in Pommerat's work, aiming at distancing while simultaneously immersing the audience. Although his stage writing bears traces of 'historicizing[46]' in a dialectic, Brechtian manner, the blurring of past and present

[46] '"To historicise is to show an event or a person in a light that is social, historical, relevant and changeable" which renders it "the exact opposite of archaeological reconstruction" (Plassard &. Prost, 2006, p. 80).

temporalities brings him closer to what Hartog defined as "presentism[47]". The audience is invited to read the conflicts in the light of the symbolic significance of a "live" television broadcast and a game of pool which function as a metaphor for politics and aesthetics as a site of conflict. The rearrangement and division of space does not appear as an external condition which precedes the performance. Instead, it forms part of it, creating a new relationship between audience and stage. If the performance offers a form of collectivity, it is in the absence of the ideal of a coherent, fully transparent, unified community. As a shared and yet divided space, it is a space we can join precisely because of its pointing towards a gap between presence and representation, because of its dividedness. "Our separateness (...) is the unity of our condition" (Cavell, 1976, p. 339).

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[47]The regime of historicity, which Francois Hartog defined as "presentism", emerged after the collapse of the visions of modernity to replace the modern regime of historicity that had begun with the French Revolution. "Presentism" signals "a predominant attachment to the present, where the future is no longer predictable, where the relationship with the past becomes blurred, localised, variable according to interests, situations or business plans. Defenders of modernism have called this transformation of the 1980s a crisis of ideologies and the end of unifying 'grand narratives'". This change, according to Didier Plassard, marks the end of Brechtian historicisation in theatre directing. "The past that takes shape on the theatrical stage is no longer presented in its historical coherence nor in its transient and ephemeral dimension, but as an enigmatic space where *res factae* and *res fictae* freely intertwine, a space that is at once historical or mnemonic and poetic, testifying to the fact that history has lost its legibility" (Plassard, & Prost, 2006, pp. 80-83).

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# Aesthetic Description as Performative Act. On Re-Figuring Spatial Loss

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## Abstract

The aim of my paper will be to present some critical considerations regarding the relations between the notion of *aesthetic description* and what is known as *performative act*. By establishing a relation between the two, in terms of an analogy between the aesthetic and the performative, I will elaborate an argument regarding the aesthetic and performative properties of the body as an artwork and more broadly as a historical and material configuration. Understanding the aesthetic and the performative entails a certain refutation of conventional modes of causality along with the specification of an aesthetic domain of experience and the difference between causality and finality. My basic point is that what I call *aesthetic description* can be seen as a performative act. For the sake of my analysis, I will address a phenomenological idea of the body based on Judith Butler's relevant contributions. For the larger part of my analysis, and under the aim to set an appropriate framework for unfolding my argument, I will rely on the way Jacques Rancière approaches two cases of aesthetic description. First, Winckelmann's description of a statue known as the Belvedere Torso in his *History of ancient art*. Second, Schiller's respective approach of a statue known as Juno Ludovisi in the 15$^{th}$ letter of his *Letters for the aesthetic education of humanity*. In both cases, there is the working of an aesthetic freedom exercised by the aesthetic categories of free play and appearance. In fact, these two categories are foundational for what Rancière calls the aesthetic regime of the arts in an attempt to capture the artistic and aesthetic phenomena that do not obey an imposed, in historical and cultural terms, harmony between *poiesis* and *aisthesis*. The overall aim of my approach will be to draw the basic lines of a method that entails the use of description as a performative-spatial tool that can in turn engage, in aesthetic and creative terms, with processes of reparation, reconstruction and re-design of impartial and ruined spaces.

*Keywords:* Aesthetic description, performative act, re-figuring spatial loss, Jacques Rancière, Judith Butler's phenomenological idea of the body, Winckelmann's description of the Belvedere Torso

## Judith Butler's Phenomenological Idea of the Body

The starting point of my analysis will revolve around the idea of the body from a phenomenological point of view, relying primarily on Judith Butler's relevant contributions. From a methodological standpoint, the phenomenological approach is characterised by an emphasis on description, a radical enquiry that attempts to liberate itself from prejudice and a priori metaphysical premises. In *The phenomenology of perception* Maurice Merleau-Ponty states that "Phenomenology involves describing, and not explaining or analysing" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. ix). In Merleau-Ponty there is as well a critical typology of the body; there is the body as a physical object and then there is "the body from the point of view of the self" or "one's own body." This multiplication of perspectives opens the path for understanding the body as being and moving within sensory fields that interact with the body along several dimensions. Merleau-Ponty's endeavor is to approach the body as a "historical idea and not a natural species" (p. 198), as an expressive and dramatic medium.

In her early writings, Butler relies on these ideas of the body in Merleau-Ponty and the subsequent extensions provided by Simone de Beauvoir in the *Second Sex*. Of particular importance for our analysis is the relevant description of the body as "a field of possibilities that are taken up and actualized in various distinctive ways" (Butler, 2020, p. 175; Beauvoir, 1953, p. 38). This description operates in Butler's approach as a linking and transitory point between the phenomenological and the performative. Of course, Butler's aim is to support the idea of an openness in gender's constitution. However, for the sake of our analysis, the convergence of the phenomenological and the gender-performative can provide us with a description of the body that could serve as a model for an aesthetic approach. In this context, of particular importance is the following passage:

> To understand the construction of gender (…) *is necessary* (…) to delimit the field of historical possibilities which constitute this gender, and so to examine in details the *acts* by which these possibilities are appropriated, dramatized and ritualized. For Merleau-Ponty, the body is a "place of appropriation" and a mechanism of "transformation" and "conversion", an essentially dramatic structure which can be "read" in terms of the more general life that it embodies. As a result, the body cannot be conceived of as a static or univocal fact of existence, but, rather, as a modality of existence, the "place" in which possibilities are realized and dramatized, the individualized appropriation of a more general historical experience (Butler, 2022, p. 175).

The performative aspect of description, that is, description as a performative act, is that if a body, if a historical object is constituted in one way, then, through description it can be constituted in another way. In order to do so, we are implicitly accepting that we can contest the representational model, the purposiveness of the organicity-model. But here, we have to make a few distinctions. The body as an artwork, which is the case for us, does not always coincide with the body as physical entity.

Butler has argued for an expansion of the phenomenological theory of constitution so as an act would entail both the constitution of a meaning and the performance or enactment of that meaning. So, if we are to accept that the body according to Butler is a set of possibilities, then this leads to a twofold observation: (a) the perception of a body, by an external spectator, is not dictated by "some manner of interior essence," (b) the concrete expression of a body "must be understood as the taking up and rendering specific of a set of historical possibilities" (Butler, 1988, p. 521).

From the point of view of my argument, description can be seen as a particular kind of agency, that is, as a process that renders such possibilities determinate. A similar correspondence could be established between the concept of the dramatic on the one hand and the aesthetic category of free play. By the concept of the dramatic, Butler means, "that the body is not merely matter but a continual and incessant materializing of possibilities" (Butler, 1988, p. 521). The body is considered as a plastic entity that can be modified by that "I" in relation to that body. But on the other hand, for the body being a historical situation, that is, a set of historical conventions, it is possible to re-draw its basic contours, to design a new embodiment according to novel lines of temporality. What can be named as style in the vocabulary of Sartre or Foucault, is actually a performative act of ascribing to oneself, via strategies of performative acts, certain features of a stylised being. And what is important to maintain from Butler's approaches is the way she performs certain extensions and modifications to Edmund Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and George Herbert Mead's phenomenological theory of acts and precisely the way she provides an enlarge interpretation to the processes and operations of constitution. Her reading of social conventions via the lens of social temporality can function as a model for reading artistic conventions via the lens of historical temporality. Thus, the performative appears as a constitutive force that can be deployed in the differences opened by history and in broader terms, by time.

In this context, causality and ontology are structured as well articulated differently. Both of them are open to the performative, they can be seen as guiding but not definite structures that can be mediated and re-constituted via act of descriptions that converge with acts of writing and re-writing. Accepting that causality and ontology are conditioned by history, time can be considered as a diagrammatic author, a force that traces inscriptions in a surface, that cut-offs parts creating thus the conditions for a new reading, a new performative description. A

convenient bottom line is the idea that causality and ontology, in their historical understanding, are matters of fiction, not in the sense of an alternative to reality but rather, as the complex of relations that are not yet materialised, being part of a formal discourse. Butler reflects this situation by referring to Gayatri Spivak and more specifically to ideas of operational essentialism and false ontologies (Butler, 1988, p. 529). An operational form of essentialism, a kind of a false, or equivalently in apparently negative terms, of fictional ontology, is actually a conceptual surface that summarises on the one hand, the formality or necessity of a structure or a body, and on the other hand, the awareness that it is about a process of reconstruction based on actions of performative descriptions and repetitions.

## Rancière's Free Play of the Aesthetic

In Jacques Rancière works of art there are topographies of new possibilities connected to a mode of experience that refers not only to qualities of a work of art but also to qualities that do not belong to it. The manifestation of what is art along with what is not art, that is, what it wasn't destined to be part of the work of art, is a kind of a "free appearance," an experience of the free play of the aesthetic. To illustrate this point, Rancière refers to the Roman statue known as the Juno Ludovisi, stated by Schiller at the end of the 15$^{th}$ letter. It is about a goddess. However, the working of time, the play of its temporality, the distance between, on the one hand, its initial purpose and state and, on the other hand, its current becoming and loss of certain attributes, amount to a situation where the goddess "wears no trace of will or aim." It is about a configuration that emerged freely, out of any intention or planned action: "The statue thus come paradoxically to figure what has not been made, what was never an object of will. In other words: it embodies the qualities of what is not a work of art" (Rancière, 2015, p. 117).

In this case, "free appearance" is the appearance of what has not been aimed at as art. It is free in the sense that,

> it ceases to be a suspension of the oppositions of form and matter, of activity and passivity, and becomes the product of a human mind which seeks to transform the surface of sensory appearances into a new sensorium that is the mirror of its own activity (Rancière, 2015, p. 118).

From this point on, the aesthetic as well as the aestheticisation process can be seen in relation to operations of framing and constituting a world defined by a specific content given to the art-life axis. In other words, there are different scenarios where aestheticisation acquires different meanings depending on the politics of aesthetics, that is, on the presuppositions associated with the constitution of a community, the coordinates of a common world, the framing of a new collective *ethos*. From this re-contextualisation of the "free appearance" emerges a new ground as well for the free play, or in this context, for the aesthetic play. Thus,

aesthetic play becomes “a work of aestheticization” and correspondingly, art, in this aesthetic regime of the art, is art “to the extent that is something else than art. It is always ‘aestheticized’, meaning that is always posited as a ‘form of life’” (Rancière, 2015, p. 118).

The crucial point here, is to understand the importance of the concept of life. Can a form of body like that of a statue have a life? Can a fragmented artwork have that sense of liveness? In fact, I will argue that a critical task of the aesthetic description is to give life to its object, to provide a new layering of senses by means of enacting possibilities and the performative use of the imagination so as to render a sense of life. In the representational or poetic regime of the arts, the primacy, according to Rancière, is attributed to an idea of organicity, to an idea of a whole “within which a principle of unity - a principle of proportion and concordance, governs the multiplicity”. In the representational regime of the art, “life is the life of an organism. And beauty is defined by the adjustment of the parts of the organism that makes them concur to same end” (Rancière, 2017, p. 598). On the other hand, the idea of life under the aesthetic regime of the art is performed,

> by disconnecting and rearranging the relation between the notions at play in the definitions of the ends of art and the criteria of beauty; this idea of life disconnects the power of the form from the implementation of a concept, the appearance of the beautiful from the perfection of an organism and the use of a thing from its utility (Rancière, 2017, p. 597).

## The Aesthetic Description of the Belvedere Torso

Under this light is that we could see the instance of an aesthetic description in Winckelmann’s description of the Belvedere Torso in the *History of the Ancient Art* published in 1764:

> Abused and mutilated to the utmost, and without head, arms, or legs, as this statue is, it shows itself even now to those who have the power to look deeply into the secrets of art with all the splendor of its former beauty. The artist has presented in this Hercules a lofty ideal of a body elevated above nature, and a shape at the full development of manhood, such as it might be if exalted to the degree of divine sufficiency. He appears here purified from the dross of humanity, and after having attained immortality and a seat among the gods; for he is represented without need of human nourishment, or further use of his powers. No veins are visible, and the belly is made only to enjoy, not to receive, and to be full without being filled […] The artist may admire in the outlines of this body the perpetual flowing of one form into another, and the undulating lines which rise and fall like waves, and become swallowed up in one another. He will find that no copyist can be sure of correctness, since the undulating movement which he thinks he is following turns imperceptibly away, and

> leads both the hand and the eye astray by taking another direction. The bones appear covered with a fatty skin, and the muscles are full without superfluity, and no other statue can be found which shows so well balanced a plumpness (Winckelmann, 1880, pp. 264-5 cited in Rancière, 2013, pp. 1-2).

There is a history of additions to a mutilated body and an attempt to imagine the action accomplished by the hero. These additions, as in the case of Winckelmann's description, are a way of re-figuring a spatial loss, a writing across a field of possibilities; the missing parts of the statue is the negative field that lends itself to an aesthetic description that performs a space. According to Rancière (2013),

> a mutilated statue is not only a statue lacking parts. It is a representation of a body that cannot be appreciated any longer according to two main criteria used by the representative order: firstly, the harmony proportions – that is to say, the congruence between parts and the whole; secondly, the expressivity – that is, the relation between a visible form and a character – an identity, a feeling, a thought – that this visible form makes recognizable in unequivocal traits (p. 3).

The performative arises as a product of an indetermination, of a forced state of inexpressiveness. What testifies the description of the Belvedere Torso by Winckelmann is that "beauty is defined by indeterminacy and the absence of expressivity" (Rancière, 2013, p. 6).

Here, the formula of the beauty can serve as a guiding thread for the re-figuring and reparative action as a performative one. This conception of beauty comes with a new model for vivacity that do not presuppose the effective mobility of the bodies but on the contrary, its indetermination appears to offer more dimension for performative elaboration than the sole dimension of mobility. The disruption of a material-effective formal beauty lays the ground for an undecidable state of expression, a radical form of inexpressivity that acts as a topology of possibilities where the figuration of a living expression is not dictated by a supposed correspondence with formal-organic model of beauty, but, on the contrary, by the activation of an inter-temporal set of forces that performs a never-ending interweaving of elements that do not comply with any sense of organic unity, proportionality or relation of the parts to a formal whole. For Rancière, there is a new form of art announced by the praise for the mutilated *Torso* and this is an art "of the plural compositions of movements freed by the dissociation of form, function and expression". And within the same gesture provided by Winckelmann, an age is inaugurated; it is the aesthetic age where the artists occupied themselves to the task of,

> unleashing the sensible potential hidden in inexpressiveness, indifference or immobility, composing the conflicting movements of the dancing body, but also of the sentence, the surface, or the coloured touch that arrest the story while telling it, that

> suspend meaning by making it pass by or avoid the very figure they designate (Rancière, 2013, p. 9).

These artistic transformations testify the idea of an aesthetic topology, a field of possibilities in the form of a surface where is possible to convert one body into another. And for Rancière, it is exactly this situation that manifests an aesthetic performativity of the beautiful: “The tension of many surfaces on one surface, of many kinds of corporality within one body, will define beauty from now on” (Rancière, 2013, p. 9).

## Aesthetic Description as Performative Act: A Process of Re-Figuring

Understanding the transformative potentials of aesthetic description as a process of re-figuring necessitates an analysis of what a figure is. Thus, in its first sense, a figure could be understood as the outside form of something, the representation of something. On the other hand, and from a graphic point of view, a figure could be seen as a matter of lines. Thus, drawing a figure simply means creating a line or a combination of lines that have the power to produce a certain signification which for its part, is a process of producing connections between a physical or mental entity and its graphical depiction. So, if we are to take in the opposite sense this path, the act of de-figuring is a process of intervening to the mechanism of signification that establishes relations of correspondence between assemblies of lines in the form of figures and meaningful senses (significations). De-figuring thus, can be considered in two ways: as a form of play and experimentation that creates suspension of meaning and indetermination in an aesthetically and perceptually rewarding manner, following the paths paved by Kant and Schiller. And in a more negative undertone, as a process of destruction, as a polemical act against the very ideas of representation and organicity. De-figuration in its broader sense means transformation. On these grounds, re-figuring can be seen as the opposite of de-figuring, as a process of reparation that unfolds from a state of indetermination to a state of actualising possibilities and creating a new sensible fabric out of an existing one, that is, a new distribution of the sensible understood both in terms of density, intensity and allocation in a generic field of senses.

Put in that way, the figure presents a dissensual function in the sense that it does not reinforce the given and somehow evident semantic content of a sensory reality but on the contrary, it performs a dissensus in the form of a semantic displacement and of an interpretation that prevents from a consensus over a definitive and determinate meaning of a sensible reality. The notion of the figure, as presented here, contributes to the refinement of the sensible texture of a sense community and the process of figuration (and re-figuration) is, correspondingly, a process of displacement within a system of relations between similarity and

dissimilarity that enriches a given sense. In the *Emancipated Spectator* Rancière provides the lines for understanding the displacement itself in the notion of the figure:

> In its classical sense, the figure combined two meanings: it was a sensible presence and it was an operation of displacement that put one expression in place of another. In the aesthetic regime, however, the figure is no longer simply an expression that takes the place of another (Rancière, 2009, p. 122).

Thus, a process of re-figuring in aesthetic terms do no means the substitution of one figure for another. It is about a new weaving, that entails performative processes of description and expression, which enables the co-existence of two or more regimes of expression without homogenizing them.

## Performative Act as an Aesthetic Idea

According to Kant, an aesthetic idea is “a representation of the imagination that occasions thought without it being possible for any determinate thought” (Kant, 2000, p. 192). This kind of indetermination is produced by the distance between an artistic form, the form determined by the intention of art, and an aesthetic form, the form that is perceived without a concept and declines any idea of intentional purpose. “The aesthetic ideas are exactly those inventions of art that are capable of making this connection between two ‘forms,’ which is also a leap between two regimes of sensible presentation” (Rancière, 2009, p. 131). Rancière tried to think further the *topos* or the art of aesthetic ideas by means of expanding the concept of figure so as to make it, as we have seen in the previous section, “signify not only the substitution of one term for another but the intertwining of several regimes of expression and work of several arts and several media” (Rancière, 2009, p. 131). From this point of view, an aesthetic consideration of the performative act falls into the general description of an aesthetic idea since it is the constitution of a *topos* for the intertwining of several regimes of expression.

But one question that arises here, has to do with a more structural preoccupation. How things can stand together, whether is a matter of surfaces, bodies, or regimes of expression so as to assure an aesthetic effectivity, that is, an aesthetic performative act? Again, with reference to the Kantian analytic of the beautiful, there is a pragmatic dimension intertwined with aesthetic indetermination that Rancière presents under the concept of aesthetic efficacy, that is, “a paradoxical kind of efficacy that is produced by the very rupturing of any determinate link between cause and effect” (Rancière, 2009, p. 64). Thus, aesthetic effectivity as a form of performative act, that is, as a mode of thought and as a mode of experience that can induce changes in a field of senses, is supported by aesthetic efficacy.

As a concluding remark, we could argue that aesthetic description and performative act converge to the idea of a re-figuration of spatial loss through the model of an aesthetic idea,

that is, of the re-figuration as configuration of several regimes of expression, as a dissensual operation that transforms a given form or a body into a new one.

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# Performing Architecture: A Collaborative Educational Research in Acronafplia

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## Abstract

Walking practice became central in architectural teaching mostly after the Second World War, within a broader context of transformation in pedagogical methods aimed at departing from the traditional approach of viewing architecture primarily as a matter of technique and form. Methodological tools and theoretical inquiries from social sciences and performing arts begun to interweave with those in the discipline of architecture. Walking is recognized as both an innovative and inherently intuitive method for exploring the qualities of the human environment and built spaces. Not only major figures of the 20th century's architecture pointed out the importance of the human body moving through space (as exemplified in *la promenade* by Le Corbusier), but there has also been a growing interest in urban planning that places walking in the very centre of concerns for designers, envisioning the reconstruction of cities and neighbourhoods. Walking thus has a central role, not only as an objective within designed environments but also as a *means* of understanding these spaces as experienced places open to redefinition.

In this paper, we present, reflect upon and discuss the results of the site-specific action *One hour, One Path. Narrations of Acronafplia* that took place in the area of Acronafplia in Nafplion (Greece). This site-specific educational workshop was initiated by ENSA Paris-Malaquais School of Architecture (Paris) and implemented in collaboration with the Department of Performing and Digital Arts of the University of Peloponnese (Greece). On the 4th of November 2021 twenty master students of ENSA Paris-Malaquais and ten bachelor students from the Department of Performing and Digital Arts met for the first time and for a three-hour session in order to explore the area of Acronafplia guided by a series of *in-situ* explorations and prompted by questions suggested by their supervisors. How does the body experience the distinctive landscape of Acronafplia? In what ways can movement through

space, lead to new forms of appropriation of the city and the public space, while considering the palimpsest of heritage traces?

First insights from the fieldwork experience highlight the potency of walking in stimulating engagement with the observed environment. By federating *in situ* different disciplines and ways of looking but also by enhancing a constant interaction with other bodies (co-walkers), the exercise aims to unveil ways in which walking can be a promising pedagogical tool at the intersection of disciplines concerned with spatial studies.

*Keywords:* Walking, place, performance, tourism, landscape design

## Walking, Experiencing Place

Since antiquity, walking has been associated with the act of inhabiting the world. From the peripatetic school of Aristotle, where discussions were enriched by walking, to Henry David Thoreau's writings[48] celebrating the act of walking as a prerequisite of spiritual exploration, the act of moving on foot through landscapes is inherent to human conscientiousness as a fundamental expression of belonging. In the early 20th century, the sociologist Marcel Mauss (1934) was among the first to offer a critical examination of the act of walking, highlighting the richness beneath what might seem like a trivial mechanical movement of the body. The potential of walking to reveal sometimes hidden essences of the environment was already known by the mobile methods explored by the 19th century's *flâneurs*, as well as the Dadaists and Situationists movements. Literature is full of urban strollers who found in walking a means of expression (Hessel, 2020; Benjamin, 1999). The Chicago School offers a pioneering hypothesis for its time, suggesting that an understanding of the social realm, can be achieved through careful observation of public life (Simmel, 1903). While the advancement in computation systems and the predominance of quantitative methods in geographical science have marginalised personal observations and fine-grained fieldwork ethnography, the revolution of the 1960s opened the way to a renaissance of qualitative methods in the analysis of urban lived environments and landscapes. Jane Jacobs' work was illuminating in this regard, as she proposed a new understanding of order in public life and emphasised the importance of liveable streets in promoting a democratic city (Jacobs, 1960). Landscape architect Lawrence Halprin pioneered the city walk as a method for participatory design in the late 1960s. Some years later, the urban planner William Whyte (1980) searched in walking behaviours for a renewal of public space design tools. Michel de Certeau (1984) looked into the pedestrian's life, implementing its proper rules, making places significant and others not,

48 *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau* is a project that provides accurate texts of Thoreau's complete works and can be found online. https://thoreau.library.ucsb.edu/index.html

contrasting the top-down designed city. Explorations of walking practices and urban life were accompanied by the flourishing of political walking practices during the 1960s and the 1970s. In an article published in 1959 in the journal *Landscape,* Kevin Lynch and Malcolm Rivkin (1959) explore the connections the articulations between description and perception of urban environment through walking. After 2000, humanities and urban studies have witnessed the flourishing of qualitative methodologies occurring within a context of fertile intellectual debate on time-space theories. The landscape (whether urban or not) is not merely a static scene but rather a malleable construction that remains unfinished and constantly under definition (Massey, 2005). On the same line, the anthropologist Tim Ingold (2000) insists on the need to understand territory and landscape, as embodied experiences that cannot be fully understood through measurements or geographical characteristics. Many geographers utilize walking as an efficient method for accessing urban experience iun its entirety (Edensor, 2008; Middleton, 2009). This increased interest aligns with the proliferation of studies and policies aiming to facilitate and valorise pedestrianism (Blomley, 2011). In the turn of the new mobilities paradigm (Sheller & Urry, 2006), many scholars have delved into researching the ways in which mobility is experienced (Cresswell, 2006) bringing to the foreground place-specific methodologies. Anderson (2004) suggests that talking while walking reveals in a direct and unbiased way how the environment is embodied. Furthermore, the study of body movements in space not only reveals what people think about a particular environment, but also unveils the body as a repository of cultures, politics and beliefs that deserve to enrich the information gathered by the researcher (Edensor, 2000). In her fieldwork, Sarah Pink (2008) underlines the importance of “sensoriality” and “sociality” in shared walking experiences (researcher and participant) in order for the researcher to experience the object that he/she seeks to analyse and understand. She also reminds us that different bodies may experience the same place in different ways (Pink, 2007). The phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) reminds us that it is in fact through the body that a human exists in the space. In his pioneer essay *Walkscapes*, Francesco Careri (2002) showcases –through the performances of the artists group Stalkers– the power of walking practices in reflecting on transformations that occur in everyday environments and in offering a means for a critical look on spatial changes. Walking, by its very essence, offers a sensitive interaction with the outside world. Senses are crucial in helping us understand the organisation of a space (Tuan, 1974) not as a Cartesian environment but as an emotional reality. Walking not only requires a certain engagement with the environment –towards which we cannot just be observers– but also brings us to socially interact with other beings (Knox, 2005), to be confronted to difference and sometimes even to be familiarised with the unknown. For Kate Moles (2008), walking served as a precious method allowing her to gather a multitude of observations over an extended period of time including diverse elements about park life. This process created a new space of theoretical debates.

Walking has been used as an artistic practice or medium for performance aiming to introduce new interpretations and understandings of public spaces (Philipps, 2005). Walking performances proposed by artists invite a reconceptualization of public space's perceptions, practices and imaginaries. Many artists have explored the duality of walking, recognising it both as a trivial human practice accessible to almost everyone, and as a means for creating something new, art, in space. The link between body movement and the rhythmicity of the city is celebrated not only by geographers[49] but also by artists like Francis Alys, Hamish Fulton etc. The possibility of improvisation while walking makes the latter a useful tool for experimenting with the appropriation of space. For land artists like Richard Long or Robert Smithson, moving through space becomes an integral part of the created art. Artist Janet Cardiff explores the relationship between sound and walking, introducing a personal form of art known as the audio promenade. Psychogeographer Tina Richardson (2015) invites us to examine the crossroads between artistic practice and academic research, in order to access the impact of urban phenomena to individuals. Ben Jacks (2004), emphasises on the capacity of everyday walking to become a rebellious subversive act in a computerised, globalised world as Tim Brennan's guides participants to a critical overlook of fragments of an urban environment (Brennan, 2005).

Ole B. Jensen and Tim Richardson (2003) underline that the connection of discourse to space is never neutral. Words transcend meanings, and sayings about a space are shaped constantly while being in it. Walking around the site under study has an importance in terms of pedagogy, but also the value of a common engagement "on the field" between different disciplines.

Several scholars have shown how walking serves a significant method for evaluating public space (Mehta, 2014). In the professional context of architects and urban designers, walking functions as a medium for perceiving architecture in an emotional, personal manner, while also of defining the quality of architectural space (Gehl, 2006).

Walking practice became central in architectural teaching in France[50] mostly after the second world war, within a general context of transformation of pedagogical methods following the will to break up with a heritage of approaching architecture primarily as a question of technique and form (Violeau, 2005). Methodological tools and theoretical questions in social sciences and performing arts are beginning to intertwine with those in the discipline of architecture. Walking is recognized as both an innovative and inherently evident means of

49 David Seamon (1979) with his concept of "place ballets".

50 After 1968, a major reform started restructuring architectural higher education in France. Until then, architectural discipline was taught inside the Regional Schools of Architecture (ERA), which were created in 1903. The aim of the reform was to rehabilitate the figure of the intellectual architect by opening teaching programmes to the human and social sciences and fieldwork experimentation. With the founding of the Educational Architecture Units (UPA), architecture schools gained autonomy and started integrating sociology courses and plastic arts courses. These new courses were using outside learning and contact with the built environment as structural tools of learning.

exploring the qualities of the human environment and built space. Not only did major figures in the 20th century's architecture pointed out the importance of the human body moving into space (as exemplified in *la promenade* by Le Corbusier),[51] but also a keen interest for urban planning has put walking in the very centre of preoccupations of designers and politics, envisioning the reconstruction of cities and neighbourhoods. Walking has then its central role, not only as an objective in designed environments but also as a means of understanding the latter as experienced places, open to redefinition.

## A Site-Specific Experience: The Case Study of Acronafplia

In 2021, the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture Paris-Malaquais, started a master design studio focusing on the theme of Xenia Hotels in Greece, exploring the evolution of touristic accommodations of the 1950s and the 1960s. In this context, groups of 20 students travel every year to Greece in order to examine specific Xenia case study. The aim and objectives of this project are to understand possible methods of transforming modern built heritage, to become familiar with site analysis and building rehabilitation tools, and to experiment with qualitative methods of experiencing the landscape and the complex relationship between architecture and *topos*. On the 4th of November 2021 twenty master students of ENSA Paris-Malaquais visited the Xenia in Nafplio and collaborated with ten bachelor students from the Department of Performing and Digital Arts. The students met for the first time to explore the area of Acronafplia through a series of exercises designed by their supervisors. The main objective of this collaboration was to conduct a joint workshop *in situ*, and to explore the possibilities of re-examining the methods of "understanding" and "situating" architecture within a specific landscape. The aim of this fieldwork experience was to question –from a multidisciplinary perspective– the ways in which the body can become an active medium, not only for "measuring" public space and the built environment, but also for enriching the design process with less tangible or quantified inputs such as senses, atmospheres, rhythms and so on.

The meeting of the two institutions in the field was organised around a common "exercise" that lasted for approximately three hours. This exercise served as a pretext to encourage the students to negotiate in different ways the limits of the open space and the elements perceived - at first sight - in order to create new imaginaries about the relationship between architecture, sight and movement. Participants were invited to walk freely in space around the Xenia building and to create a path documenting their experiences. Mixed groups of students from both institutions began surveying on foot around Acronafplia. Some strolled, others stopped and danced. Students invented various ways of spontaneous interactions with the environment.

51 See Flora Samuel (2010)

Several questions were addressed in the beginning of the fieldwork exercise in order to guide the teams and to facilitate the surveying and the collection of information on the site: How does the body experience space and in which way is this experience linked to the particular landscape of Acronafplia? Can new kinds of walking practices offer new readings of the *topos*? In which ways can moving in space and taking into account the palimpsest of heritage traces, lead to new forms of appropriation of the city and the public space?

Building upon these questions, the students were invited to rediscover the site and shape narratives about its identity, perception, function and atmosphere. Each group traced their route first on a map and then on the site itself. They then physically walked the route to propose a narrative around the following questions: What do you think of this route? Why did you choose this point of departure and arrival? What emotions does this view evoke? How does our body interact with changes in the environment? The above questions served as entry points into the theme.

In practice, the teaching team primarily invited the students to walk along their chosen itineraries. Secondly, students were asked to freely explore the site and to write down questions about how to perceive the landscape, the built and the natural environment. Thirdly, they were asked to collect material and to document their path in order to create a storyboard that would serve as a baseline for the creation of short films.

The participants were invited to propose different methods for transcribing their embodied experiences. Therefore, different media were used, including drawing, photography, video, and text. The act of transcribing their experiences of walking along a path led the students to articulate their body movements through variety of other forms of expression, such as drawing, writing, and singing.

During the final hour, groups presented and discussed their first impressions and narrative guidelines with the teachers and other participants, using public space as the setting for their presentations. In these presentations, the students expressed the elements of the path within the framework of a narrative trajectory.

They engaged in discussions about potential narratives arising from the sequences of experiences. They explored diverse approaches to framing architecture by navigating through the landscape with the body being strongly integrated into the final presentation scene of the narratives through live performances of dancing and singing.

By the time their work was returned, the students had produced a large number of A4 papers, notes and videos. The groups arrived at the space for the final presentations with other baggage, including a collection of found objects and natural materials. An interesting complicity developed between the students as they tried to produce a final synthesis of their experiences.

## Moving Bodies. Explorative Languages

Walking by its very definition is a form of intervention in urban space, underlines Filipa Matos Wunderlich (2008). The researcher distinguishes three kinds of walking practices; “purposive, discursive, conceptual”. While the last two promote discovery and interaction, even purposive walking inevitably adjusts to the environment as it is performed (*ibid*.). In this relational way of creating the act of walking, we cannot but admit that walking has the capacity to re-create space. At the same time, the solicitation of senses and emotions increases the sense of belonging in space as it is proposed by Rodaway (1994). The final restitution of the *in situ* “exercise” was above all a shared experience in place. Students arrived with various types of mediums for restitution (e.g. architects insisting on drawing a body movement, students of the Performing Arts Department searching for inspiring places to test movements directly in space), as well as ways of narrating what happened while walking on the path. The shared time of the exercise hides, in reality, a multilayering of individual ways of experiencing the time of the walk. Contrary to a linear perception of time as a “time passing-by” says Jennie Middleton (2009), urban space, particularly through walking, can evoke an experiential dimension of time. Students’ walks were formed by hesitations, accelerations, delays and turnovers.

Students have *reproached* the place, claiming an alternative reading of it through fragments of “looking, hearing, drawing, dancing, singing”. Ultimately, “walking encourages us to think with all our senses” (Bates & Rhys-Taylor, 2017, p. 4). At every stop, and in between stops, students used the generic format of an A4 paper as well as photos and videos, to “capture” the experience of the body “in space” creating their own “Embodied Field Notebooks.”

This seemingly spontaneous act was in reality influenced by several factors: the intensity of stimuli, the interplay between shadow and light, wind patterns, various smells, noise intrigues, the topography of the area, the shapes of architecture, design elements and found objects. A noteworthy trend among performing arts students was their inclination to revisit choreographic exercises that they had previously been introduced to, during the dance classes as part of their curriculum earlier in that year.

The performing arts students had previously been introduced to performance practices that emphasise the strong relationship between the human body and the notion of space, including the surrounding natural, urban and architectural environment. They had already gained experience with a range of site-specific choreographic exercises informed by the pioneer choreographer Rudolf Laban’s research on spatiality (1963) and Mary Overlie’s (2016) Six Viewpoints method, which includes practical exercises for researching and opening up the relationship between space and bodies. Moreover, these students had already been introduced to important dance works and performances that highlight this relationship between

bodies, space and architecture, such as Trisha Brown's *Roof Piece* (1971), Valie Export's *Body Configurations* (1972-76) and Willy Donner's *Bodies in Urban Spaces* (2007).

Their influence by such practices, is evident in some of their photographic and video documentation (Fig. 1) as they followed their group walk and interacted with their surrounding environment. In these spontaneous interactions with space, bodies took on various forms, exploring balance, force, release and resistance to gravity. Some groups emphasised the significance of playful physical interaction within a particular space, echoing the approach of the artist group Wrights & Sites (2013) who view the city as both a playground and a playmate. Other students highlighted the importance of details during an otherwise trivial itinerary in the city, reminding us of Andrea Haenggi's research on experiencing the city through urban plants that grow in the cracks of the asphalt (Avgitidou, 2020).

First insights from the fieldwork experience highlight the power of embodied interaction in fostering engagement within the surrounding environment. As Haenggi (cited in Avgitidou, 2020, p. 56) suggests, "the pause, the stillness, to stay in place, is a dynamic configuration that allows for any moment to react and change the body in place." It is also important to note that in certain groups, the barrier of language was overcome by the simple act of walking together as a group. In these instances, the students focused more on getting to know each other during their walk. For these students the exercise provided a framework for meeting each other through the sharing of personal stories that revealed their relationship to music, dance and architecture.

## Conclusions

In summary, by bringing together on-site different disciplines and ways of seeing, and by encouraging a constant interaction with other bodies, the exercise has demonstrated how walking can be a promising pedagogical tool at the crossroads of disciplines concerned with space. Combining diverse cultures and disciplines in the field provided an opportunity to highlight the significance of cultural dimension of place in the production of body movement in space (Ingold & Vergunst, 2008). Through practical research, students became aware that every movement changes the space (Robinson, 1981) and that the act of walking in space, not only engages the body (Solnit, 2001) but also disrupts our "established" way of looking at our surroundings (Phillips, 2005). The collective act of walking and crossing paths in space, revealed ways of appropriating space and informed possible reinvented tools of investigation and positioning, both as a researcher, a practitioner and as an artist in this context.



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# Exploring Symbolic and Temporary Spaces in Urban Rituals Using Fire as their Primary Component

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## Abstract

Rituals are symbolic acts that allow individuals to connect their beliefs and values with the natural world. To establish this connection, these ceremonies often use the four primary elements of nature. Fire is one of them. In rituals, people use different forms and amounts of fire of diverse sizes. These usages of the fire formed different temporary spaces, creating symbolic meanings during the practice. This study aims to comparatively investigate the structure of these symbolic and temporary spaces in fire-based rituals in the urban space. To compare, we choose four different rituals: Hıdırellez, Anasteria, Las Fallas, and Burning Man, which occur in various locations and have different origins.

*Keywords:* Architecture, ritual, fire, urban space.

## Exploring Symbolic and Temporary Spaces in Urban Rituals Using Fire as their Primary Component

The control of the fire has a revolutionary effect on human history. First, fire provides a reliable light source and heat, which can be used for defense. Fire also revolutionised human eating habits. The form of the resources has changed by cooking, and many indigestible foods have become eatable (Harari, 2014). Fire thus became a fundamental element in the lives of our ancestors, with many rituals associated with fire, revealed across different parts of the world. For instance, bonfires are a common feature in many celebrations. Many processions include fire objects like torches, candles, or lanterns. Also, many rituals include bravery movements such as firewalking or jumping over the fire. In these events, space is not a static entity but is dynamic, continually altered and redefined by the changing form of fire, the movements of people and objects. In this paper, we first introduced the changing fire space and its

components, and then four examples using fire in the urban space, Hıdırellez, Anaesthesia, Las Fallas, and Burning Man, are analysed.

## The Concept of Fire

Fire holds a multitude of concepts and symbolic meanings that resonate deeply with human experience. First, it is a powerful symbol of “transformation”, representing the ability to change, evolve, and grow. The bonfires lit at the end of these rituals during equinoxes, like in the fires in Newroz in Turkey or the Equinox Viking Boat Burn in the U.K., symbolise this transition. The usage of water and fire is also common in many ritual practices. In the death rituals of Hindus, for example, the cremation process offers the ashes to the water (Tiwari, 2010). According to Gough (2013), witnessing a dead body being cremated, particularly in Hindu and Balinese cultures, has cultural and ritual significance. He highlights the “transformative and cathartic” nature of the process. Usually, these ceremonies have a communal nature, which involves extended families, villages, and professional troupes, and they are a part of the grieving and “acceptance” process. In Heraclitus' philosophy of the cosmos, fire is also used as a metaphor to explain the “impermanence” of human life. Much like fire, life is not infinite, and throughout history, fire has been employed as a symbol of endings and beginnings (Herakleitos, 2009). For example, at the end of the six-day carnival Busó festivities in Mohács in southern Hungary, a coffin is burned to symbolise the death of Winter. Also, “purification” is a part of this renewal process. According to Eliade (2017), non-religious time must be eliminated to restore the world's purity. This is accomplished through symbolic rituals that symbolise the world's end, such as extinguishing fires and the return of souls. These rituals signify the regression of the cosmos to chaos, the state preceding creation. The world that has endured for a year is genuinely vanishing, as all the sins and corruptions of time are physically eradicated.

In his book *Myths of the Origin of Fire*, Frazer (2019) thoroughly explores and analyses various myths from different cultures that revolve around the concept of fire. His research reveals a recurring theme in these myths: fire is depicted as a sacred entity or a divine creation. Furthermore, the significance of fire in religious practices is evident through the incorporation of fire-related rituals, such as the symbolic act of lighting a candle, which is a powerful representation of the divine connection between humans and the ethereal element of fire.

Bachelard (1995) reinterprets these mythological stories in his book and offers a modern perspective. For instance, he suggest that “growth”**,** and “freedom”, is represented through the act of stealing. Owning one's fire is seen as a marker of adulthood, reflecting the capacity to make independent choices, like how humans control fire. Possessing a personal fire also grants divine power and the ability to exercise freedom.

One other reading of fire can be seen with destruction. Zografos (2019) interpreted the restoration of the burned structures and reads destruction as a part of human memory. Similarly, Yves Klein (1959) suggests that fire is a part of human memory and defines fire as the memory of nature.

In addition to these interpretations, fire is closely connected to various other ideas and emotions. It signifies physical and metaphorical “heat illumination”, evoking “sensations of warmth, passion, and intensity” (Bachelard, 1995). Fire is often seen as a source of softness, as it can provide gentle light and create a cosy atmosphere. On the other hand, fire can also symbolise war and destruction, representing the immense power and devastation it can bring. So, as Klein (1973) suggested, fire has a “contradictory nature” that can simultaneously be evil and good.

Rituals often involve various intricate movements, each with nuanced meanings. Therefore, while burning may have different interpretations in different rituals, it can give rise to diverse spatial forms, enriching the overall ceremonial experience with depth and complexity. The placement of fire, preparations, and participants' movements during ritual practice influence these spatial forms.

## The Place of Fire

The place of fire is one of the aspects of the fire rituals. In that case, fire can emphasize the existing space with its visibility or create a space with its being the new centre.

The idea of fire as a sacred entity is similar in many cultures. So, many burning rituals happen close to or inside sacred places. This could be either a high hill detached from everyday life or an existing spiritual place in the city. For example, in Catholic churches, all lights are turned off on the Saturday night before Easter, and a new fire is kindled using traditional methods. After that, all these lights are rekindled with the use of this fire (Frazer, 1913).

Centrality is a very common feature in many rituals, including fire rituals. Schechner observes this pattern in "natural" urban settings. When an accident occurs, a crowd spontaneously circles the event. The performances of people on different occasions are the rehearsal or the repetition of that situation (Schechner, 2003). As such, when a fire is lit, people gather around it, creating a circle. The circle is both a symbol and the shape of the fire rituals. The fire is deliberately placed at the centre of many ceremonies and rituals, as explained by Schechner. Also, fire can be lit from an existing fire, so it can be reproducible. In many rituals, including Easter, many fires are lit and carried to other places (Frazer, 1913). So new centres can be created by using the same source.

Rituals unite people and often utilise city streets and squares as stages. Processions are a vital component of many rituals. As Schechner (2003) describes, processions have a fixed

route and a known goal, involving multiple stops and performances. Some spectators may join the procession as it passes by. The stops represent central events within the ritual process, while the processions serve as invitations to these events. Fire objects are often used during these parades, especially at night, to make this invitation and movement visible (Turner, 1992).

## Preparations and Performances

Unlike other elements, fire is rarely found naturally. Fire constantly needs humans to maintain its existence. Therefore, there is a constant cooperation between man and fire. The continued existence of fire depends on what people give to it (Bachelard, 1995). This situation can be seen in the movie *Howl's Moving Castle*, a 2004 Japanese animated fantasy film by Hayao Miyazaki, based on the novel by Diana Wynne Jones. In the film, a wizard deals with a fire demon and gives his heart to the fire. This union is depicted with the image of a house that can move and has become disconnected from its original location. (Miyazaki, 2004). Therefore, the hearth, a symbol of an ongoing mutual relationship, creates an everlasting fire that can have its freedom. Offerings in different sizes and methods create different symbols and performances.

One example of these offerings can be seen in bonfires. Bonfires are large fires intentionally created for specific purposes, and burning off effigies forms many bonfires. An effigy is a representation or likeness of a person or object, often made from straw, wood, or paper. Usually, hanging or burning effigies is a form of political protest involving creating and displaying symbolic figures to express dissent (Göttke, 2015). Like burning a human-like structure, touching or being inside the fire also forms a part of this human-fire relationship.

The limits of the body and the way it approaches the fire are researched during these rituals. Walking on the coal, jumping over the fire, or climbing a fire construction can be the exploration of these limits.

Lastly, fire stimulates our senses by combining it with various elements and appearing in various forms. Like fog, food, steam, coal, or the explosion sounds created by war representing fire, listening and watching all these variables are among the forms created by fire. Unlike other performances, being in the fire and watching it is an action that increases imagination (Bachelard, 1995).

## Case Studies

To better understand the concepts and rites of fire, four rituals are selected in these sections to show the differences and similarities of the fire rituals. In selecting the rituals, rituals from different locations and origins are selected.

### *Hıdırellez*

Hıdırellez is an ancient fire ritual celebrated on May 5th and 6th in many regions such as Anatolia, the Balkans, and Central Asia. This traditional event, the seasonal time of the summer, is marked with several bonfires and fire-jumping performances (Güngör, 1956).

This celebration combines circular time with Turkish and Islamic mythology. The most well-known mythological story is the belief of Hızır and İlyas, two Saints in Islamic and Turkish mythology. According to folklore, Hızır represents fire, and İlyas represents water, and they meet on the night of Hıdırellez. This meeting ensures a fruitful year (Kapağan, 2019).

In Hıdırellez, there are both communal and individual rituals that have been practised throughout history. Hıdırellez appears as a ritual that takes place in a vast geography. Therefore, celebrating this ritual may contain some differences in each region. However, when that day comes, people usually go to the area called "Hıdırlık" where they live. This area was a gathering place for celebrations and could also house various tombs of holy persons, a mosque, a well, a fountain, and a tree, which are considered sacred. It is expected to tie votives or rags to objects in these places to accept prayers and requests (Hatipler Çibik, 2021).

Also, Hıdırellez has various practices related to fire in every region. These practices traditionally take place collectively. In the Maraş region, for example, Hıdırellez fire is lit in the house of an elderly person. Everyone in the village throws the wood they brought from their home into the fire and keeps it burning throughout the night. On the same day, young people collect supplies from house to house. Something is given to each house, and these foods are cooked and eaten collectively. When the fire goes out, the embers are taken to other houses in the village and the fire is dispersed (Aras, 2021). Another practice about fire in Hıdırellez is lighting bonfires. These fireplaces are the centres of the celebrations. Dancing and jumping over the fire are considered both popular and traditional practices. To light these fires, different materials are collected according to the beliefs of each region. For example, straw is used in Bulgaria, and juniper tree is used in Maraş (Aras, 2021; Özkan, 2020).

There are also some private practices in the Hıdırellez. One of the popular ones is to wrap a text with wishes and bury it under the rose tree on the evening of May 5th. On the morning of May 6, the notes are taken from there and left in the water (Hatipler Çibik, 2021).

The increasing growth of cities makes collective movement within the city difficult. For this reason, Hıdırellez celebrations held in cities have gradually started to turn into events organised by institutions such as municipalities and universities. Ankara Kızıcahamam and Malatya Kernek celebrations can be given as examples of this. During these celebrations, places used for different purposes, such as parks, streets, or squares, are re-evaluated for these applications (Arslan, 2013; Teke, 2016). So, the practices also change with the character of the site selection. As shown in the picture, during a Hıdırellez celebration held in Beylikdüzü,

Istanbul, people can be seen jumping over fires prepared at regular intervals on the street. It is seen that a linear place was prepared for the fire to be lit, and these lines were repeated and lined up on the road, as in obstacle jumping. Therefore, the central space has turned into a more linear structure.

**Figure 1**

*Hıdırellez Celebration in Beylikdüzü*
*Source: Beylikdüzü Belediyesi. (2022, May 6). Hidirellez Ateşi Barış İçin Yandı (Hidirellez fire burned for peace–News).*
*Beylikdüzü Belediyesi. https://yeni.beylikduzu.istanbul/haber/1808/hidirellez-atesi-baris-icin-yandi*




Apart from the formal celebrations, we can still see some collective preparation in the cities. For example, in İzmir Bornova, during the 90s, it was mentioned in a conversation that each apartment would light its fire on Hıdırellez day. This indicates that people celebrated individually within their homes yet still maintained a sense of community by jumping over their neighbours' fires (Baş Yıldırım, personal interview, May 15, 2023).

### *Anastenaria*

The Anastenaria is a firewalking ritual celebrated in some villages in Greece and Bulgaria by a group of Orthodox Christian refugees known as Ketolides. The celebrations are usually held for honour of Saints Constantine and Helena (Danforth, 1989). The ritual spans more than

three days. Each village had a sacred well and a chapel housing the icons of saints and a “konaki”, a rectangular building and the main gathering place for the events. On the day of the ritual, a procession is held, led by the participants known as Anastenarides. According to Grimes (2004), the relationship between object and subject is fluid in many rituals. The object can quickly become a person and a person an object. Also, when a mundane object turns into a sacred one, the object could create a sacred place, which can be described as Hierotopy. The usage of Icons in the Anastenaria can be an example of this (Lidov, 2011). In this procession, the participants carry the icons of Saint Helen and Constantine. The procession moves towards a chapel housing to the sacred well. In this area, a ceremony of water blessing is made, and an animal is sacrificed for the honour of the saints. During the parade, the participants carry icons and banners, chanting hymns, and pray throughout the procession (Lidov, 2011; Xygalatas, 2011). Upon reaching the ritual area, a circular pit is prepared; participants walk across the hot coals while holding icons or crosses, which is one of the most well-known moments of the Anastenaria (Lidov, 2011).

The next day, another procession is made to bless the village's house by using holy icons, and incense (Lidov, 2011). So, another form of fire is also used to share the divine powers of the ritual. And lastly, the group gather in the “konaki” and dance with the icons. The participants, according to the research by Danforth (1989), believed that Saints possess them while they danced or walked on the hot coal. So, with that possession, the participant is not harmed by the fire. A feast is prepared for the whole village, food is shared, and the day ends with walks over the fire, just like the first day (Lidov, 2011).

### *Las Fallas*

Las Fallas is one of the traditional celebrations that use fire in Spain, and it takes place in Valencia every year in March. The festival's origin goes back to the Middle Ages as a celebration of the spring of the carpenters. At that time, the surplus of the carpenter's workshop was shaped as a human and burned in these events. At the beginning of the 20$^{th}$ century, these burns transformed into comical sculptures, which can be seen as critics of popular culture or politics. Nowadays, the festival consists of four main parts: La Plantà, La Ofrenda, La Mascletà, and La Cremà (Lawrence, 1992).

In La Plantà, wooden and papier-mâché sculptures, called “ninots”, are erected in the streets. Creating the ninots begins months in advance, with each neighbourhood in Valencia constructing its sculpture. These sculptures are carried with the parades, and firecrackers are added to that sculpture, creating another design called “falla”. Of those arrangements of different groups, the city is filled with coloured and comical sculptures during the festival.

Including divine figures from Christianity is very common in European rituals. In Las Fallas, all the celebrations were held in memory of Saint Joseph. Also, on the second day, a parade of traditionally clothed women makes a parade, offering flowers to the Virgin Mary sculpture. Las Fallas celebration usually spans five days. Every day at 14:00, a ritual called “Mascletàs” is held. In Mascletàs, firecrackers are set off, creating fog and noise (Lawrence, 1992). So, the city is filled with explosion sounds, and visions are blurred with the fog, creating a chaotic atmosphere as shown in the picture.

On the last day of Las Fallas, the ninots are burned in an event known as “La Cremà”. The flames engulf the sculptures as the night falls, creating a mesmerising spectacle of fire and light.

**Figure 2**

*The Changes of the Fog During the Mascletàs*
*Source: Caballer, R. (2019, March 19). Fallas de València 2019, Mascletà Martes [Valencia Fallas 2019, Mascletà Tuesday]. Vivir la pirotecnia.*
*https://www.vivirlapirotecnia.com/19/03/2019/fallas-de-valencia-2019-mascleta-martes-19-de-marzo-2019-pirotecnia-ricardo-caballer-ricasa/*



## *Burning Man*

Many rituals are nourished by different mythological stories, and the movements of the rituals are derived or interpreted from these stories. However, rituals are not read-only through mythologies. One other reading can be done through collective consciousness. Therefore, even if a movement does not have a sacred story behind it, it can turn into a ritual through its communication with the collective. Burning Man is an example of this. It began as a party orginased by Larry Harvey and Jerry James,[52] in 1986.

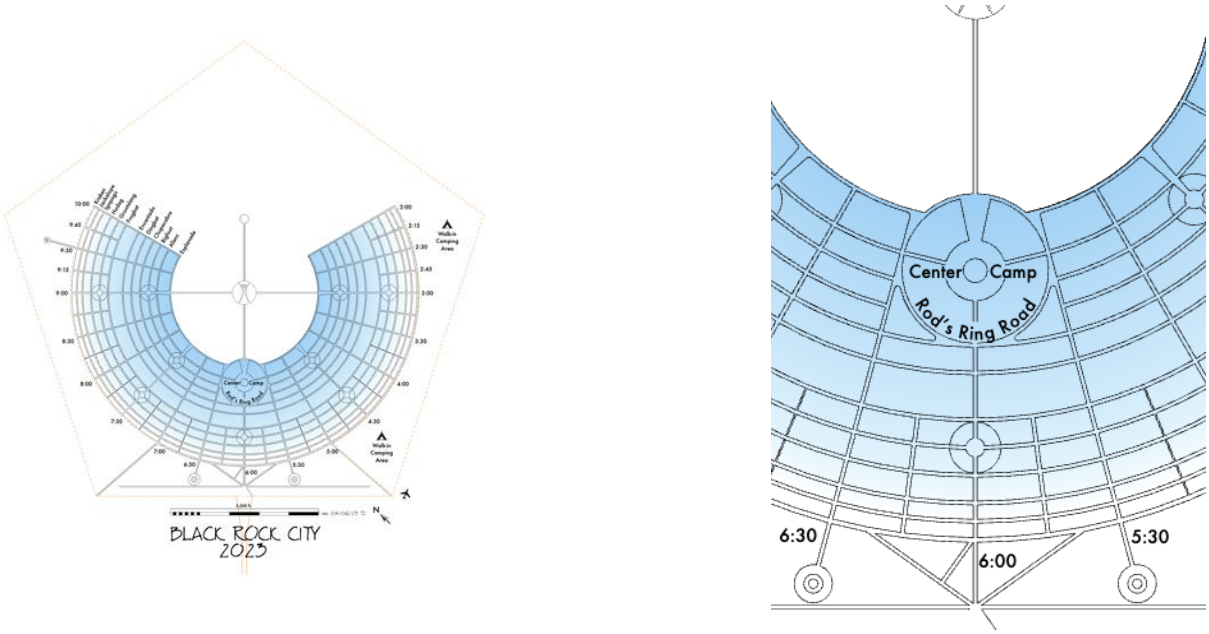
In 1986 Larry Harvey and Jerry James, burned an effigy without knowing other rituals use them like Zozobra, Wicked Man or Cremation of Care. After repeating their ritual with increasing participants, the event decided to transport the Nevada desert. Every year, during

[52] Larry Harvey and Jerry James are the creators of Burning Man. Larry Harvey was an artist, and Jerry James was a Carpenter. In 1986, they constructed a wooden effigy to burn on San Francisco’s Baker Beach with a couple of their friends. As they repeated this activity every year, this organisation grew into a well-known ritual-like activity (Gilmore, 2005).

the event, Black Rock City is built around this effigy in the desert. It is a temporary city, much like the fleeting nature of fire itself (Gilmore, 2005). The city plan undergoes subtle changes every year. The leading effigy, “Man”, is placed at the centre point of this plan. So, it can be seen in every part of the city. The event spans for a week, and this effigy is burned the day before the last day. This burn is a kind of celebration with different sounds and movements of the participants. The city is shaped like a circle, which resembles a utopian plan. In the plan, some other centres are used during the event time for several artworks. So, the city has become a creative place for different design experiments and artworks.

**Figure 3**

*The Site Plan of the Black Rock City*
*Source: Burning Man Project. (2023) 2023 Black Rock City Plan. Burning Man. Retrieved from http://burningman.org/about/history/brc-history/event-archives/2023-event-archive/2023-brc-plan/*




Each year the event has a different theme, and some subtle changes are made to adapt to this theme, such as naming the streets in the city to reflect the theme of the event. For example, in the 2023 city plan, streets are named after magical creatures from mythology and folklore, complementing the anımalia art theme (Burning Man Project,2023) .

In 2000, a new structure called "The Temple" was added to the Burning Man event due to the death of a friend of David West. In contemporary times, death and mourning are often considered private events. However, within the Burning Man community, this structure serves as a communal space for individuals to process their grief and emotions (Gilmore, 2005). The Temple is not just a static structure, but a dynamic space transformed by the participants who add their personal touches, resulting in a unique environment every year. As seen in the

provided photograph (Figure 4), small mementoes and tokens of remembrance can be observed on the altar and walls inside the temple.

**Figure 4**

*The Transformation of The Temple with Personal Mementoes*
*Sources: Yes. (2015, July 20). What Does the Temple Mean to You? [Blog post]. Burn Life. https://www.burn.life/blog/what-does-the-temple-mean-to-you*
*Hazard, K., & Guy, S. (2023, January 11). Introducing Your 2023 Temple: Temple of the Heart. Burning Man Journal. https://journal.burningman.org/2023/01/black-rock-city/building-brc/introducing-temple-of-the-heart/*



The burning of The Temple on the final day of the event, Sunday, is a solemn moment when participants gather to bid farewell to the temple and its memories. It is not a time for revelry or celebration, but for reflection and remembrance.

## Conclusion

This study presents four rituals that used fire as a main component, particularly the use of fire and the movements of the participants during the ritual practice.

One of the different features of the rituals in this study is their prevalence. Hıdırellez is a popular ritual celebrated in a vast geography. Anastenaria, on the other hand, is celebrated in a few villages as a ritual belonging only to a certain group. Meanwhile, Las Fallas is a local ritual deeply rooted in Valencia's traditional culture, and Burning Man is a contemporary art festival which can be seen as a "ritual-like" performance. These two events are closer to the concept of site-specific performance which is designed for a particular place and they both events combine historical concepts and use of fire to the current cultural or political atmospheres.

Collectivity in the making of the fire is a common feature of all these rituals. Even in Burning Man, which can be described as the newest example, it was seen that all the buildings and interiors of the city were built with a collective consciousness. Collecting things from individual people or households and returning the fire created from them to the house as objects such as embers or sticks are also seen. Therefore, the transforming feature of fire is

also emphasized. Fire is used in many forms, and these forms affect the perceptions of the environment. With the changes in the atmosphere, especially in the examples of Las Fallas and Burning Man, a new urban space is recreated with the assemblage of the fire object.

Although each ritual has similar characteristics, they differ by creating different compositions. Therefore, the rituals mentioned in this study constitute only a small example of these mixtures.

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# Negotiating Performance Architecture as a Pedagogical Tool

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## Abstract

This paper discusses the composite term of Performance Architecture as a pedagogical interdisciplinary tool. Increasingly the term is discussed differently within the disciplines of computer science, architecture and performance: as a method of data driven digital technologies and their structure, as building performance and energy cost effectiveness of buildings, as the architectural design of performative spaces or spatial or *in-situ* performances. Excluding the first case of computer science, the term performance architecture is always examined from the scope of the two diverse disciplines, either site-specific / responsive / sensitive performance or a space measuring and experience tool, an activity enhancing tool, a participatory building and designing tool and a spatially behavioural inscribing tool from the point of view of architecture. The paper uses as a key study and draws on the experience of a series of international workshops conducted in the period of 2019-2022 by the Performance Architecture School, an independent educational body that runs workshops and annual courses on the subject of Performance Architecture.

Using theories of space production (Lefebvre, 1975), and engagement with everyday life (De Certeau, 1988), presence, the body and its political manifestations in space (Stavrides, 2016), issues of representation in architectural education and performative studies (Pearson, 2010) we will aim to rethink the “design action’’, simultaneously an exercise and a final position that lies in the core of the performance architecture method.

Conclusively, this paper examines the possibilities and boundaries of “performance architecture” as a distinct term, a pedagogical tool that eases the disciplinary boundaries of

representation and presentation set by architecture and by performance studies and allows for practicing a non-utilitarian, holistic and diversity-sensitive design action.

*Keywords:* Performance, architecture, pedagogy, public space, thresholds.

## The Current Definition and Pedagogical Examples of Performance Architecture

This paper is discussing different negotiations of the term “performance architecture” as a pedagogical tool. It is using a body of theory on representation, public space and everyday life and as a case study a series of international workshops conducted in the period of 2019-2023 by the Performance Architecture School.[53]

The term “performance architecture” is a composite and relatively new term discussed differently within the disciplines of computer science, architecture and performance. The most popular use is this of performance architecture as a method of data driven digital technologies and their structure. It is also describing building performance and energy cost efficiency of buildings, as well as describing the architectural design of performative spaces or spatial and *in-situ* performances. Excluding the first case of computer science that describes a term not relevant for this paper, the term performance architecture is predominantly examined from the scope of the two diverse disciplines, site-specific / responsive / sensitive performance or a space measuring and experience tool, a participatory building and designing tool and a spatially behavioural inscribing tool from the point of view of architecture.

Performance Architecture Pedagogies are part of the curriculum of both architecture and performance courses at universities across the Western world. Beth Weinstein (2018) illustrates the examples of separate courses run at universities and institutes across the USA by a mixture of academics and practitioners of performance architecture. The pedagogical material of these examples falls within the applications that are described above.

Juliet Rufford (2018) as a notable distinction presents the application of Performance Architecture Pedagogies in her teachings of post dramatic devised performance making courses in Britain. Unlike the common applications, here performance architecture is applied in understanding space, form and structure, and used as tools in the composition of performance.

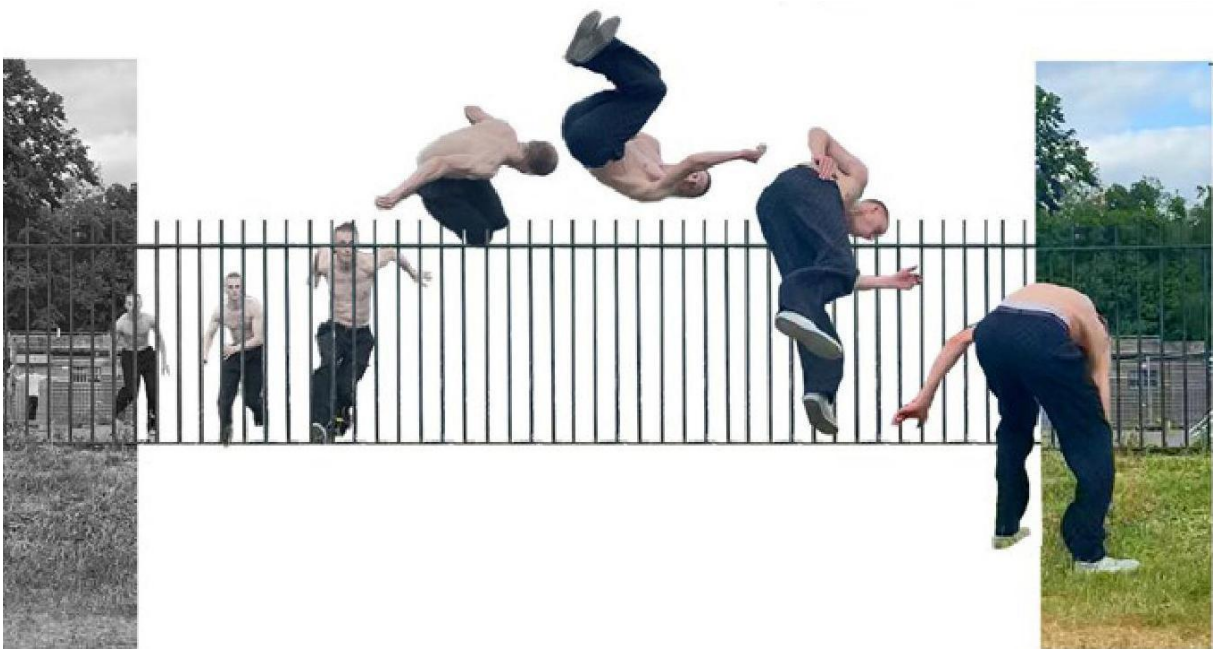
The Performance Architecture School we are presenting here is not part of a university curriculum and, therefore, it does not need to serve as part of a general programme of teaching either performance or architecture. It is an independent educational body, dedicated to researching and applying the pedagogical possibilities of performance architecture for participants across disciplines. Within the range of participation, we have welcomed architects,

[53] The paper is written by Aliki Kylika, Eliza Soroga and Ursula Dimitriou, the founders of the Performance Architecture School, an independent educational body. “We” in the body of the text refers to all three authors.

dancers, parkourists (Figure 1), fine artists, public artists, magicians, circus performers, biologists, theatre academics and charity workers.

**Figure 1**

*"Overcoming Thresholds" by Bodhi Horton (UK), Part of the Online Performance Architecture Summer School 2020*



For this reason, we have the liberty to focus on performance architecture as an independent genre with interdisciplinary pedagogical possibilities and outcomes and which can draw freely from the palette of both disciplines that it taps on.

## The Approach of the Performance Architecture School: Public Space Activations

As a starting point in our courses, we ask the question of citizenship and of the production of space in relationship with the performing body.

As Harvey (2012) exhaustively demonstrates in *Rebel Cities* the notion of the city has been drastically transformed throughout the 20th century, affected by neoliberalism, the urbanisation of the countryside, and globalisation. Already in 1968, Lefebvre was able to declare "the city may be dead, long live the city!" (Harvey, 2012, p.xvi). This realisation produced the shift in Lefebvre's thinking from *The Right to the City* (Lefebvre, 1996, pp. 147-159) to the *Production of Space* (Lefebvre, 1991). In the latter, Lefebvre captures the dialectic triad of physical (perceived), mental (conceived) and social (lived) spaces that together produce space. The space of Lefebvre is where politics and everyday life combine, it is the public space.

Understanding public space as such illuminates the purpose of embodied interventions in the city, which are produced during the performance architecture courses.

In Lefebvre's thinking "every society […] produces a space, its own space" (Lefebvre,1991, p.31). At most times, public spaces in the modern city operate as transition zones between spaces for productivity and spaces for consumption. However, during this transit individuals have to navigate through the city choosing pathways, interacting and negotiating crossing paths with strangers.

As Stavridis puts it: "Walking, understood as navigating, epitomises a particular embodied wisdom, the wisdom that understands social identities and behaviours as constantly in negotiation, creating out of differences and similarities the fabric of human interaction" (2010, p.79).

For Stavridis, being in public space is an encounter with otherness. To be able to negotiate with otherness, to accept the potential of transformation and to remain open to the unknown outcome is an ability acquired and practised in threshold conditions and threshold spatialities. These are identified by a certain porosity, the status of in-between, the experience of liminality. Stavridis suggests that creating threshold spaces can be an emancipatory act, allowing people to engage with other identities, recognize old habits and be comfortable with uncertainty and with the unexpected.

## Case Study 1: 'Occupying Thresholds'

Recognizing, occupying and treating threshold spaces (Figure 2) is an exercise we practise during the courses of the Performance Architecture School. The participants are requested to identify a threshold in their surroundings, material or immaterial. They first trace and then cancel the threshold with their body. Both spatial conditions receive a title that communicates an emotion. It is then presented live or in photographs in the class for discussion.

This exercise seeks to connect Lefebvre's physical, mental and social spaces towards the production of a new threshold space. It is physical because the body is engaged, mental because it requires a Cartesian analysis of conceived threshold spaces, and social because it holds emotional engagement, because it is performed in the public space and it is discussed with others. The tools required for this exercise are part of the palette of Performance Architecture which serves for an invaluable pedagogical experience.

Repeating this exercise first indoors in the classroom or in the domestic space and then outdoors in the public space opens a further potential for a threshold condition. One that makes the border between indoor and outdoor softer, and introduces domesticity in the public space, as well as inviting the public into the domestic and private.

**Figure 2**

*"Tracing and cancelling the thresholds", Cold versus Comfortable by Tamar Groenesteijn (Netherlands), Part of the Performance Architecture Online Summer School*



This new threshold experience has become part of everyday life raising the condition of being and connecting online into a new form of public space. Identifying it as such and exploring it so is a preparation, a rehearsal for encountering and negotiating the potential identities and collective future visions that emerge in this space. The more we test this space and learn to interact in it, the closer we are to the production of emancipatory futures.

## Performance Architecture Applications on Everyday Life in the Public Space

Performance architecture pedagogical practice applies the study of public space and everyday life as a canvas to enable critical thinking. Participants are invited to carefully observe and actively engage with public space and its everyday life by considering it from a social, economic, political and environmental perspective historically and in the present day.

As Braudel (1981, p. 24) states: "Everyday life consists of the little things one hardly notices in time and space".

A method that is used towards the study of everyday life in public space is the site-specific performance approach, which helps understanding and discussing the rules and constraints that spaces have or its existing choreographies/rhythmic motives and incorporating them into the shaping of the performance concept.

As Pearson (2010) outlines:

> The work of site-specific performance is not to excavate the hidden truth or essence of a location, but instead to activate the inherent multiplicity of site: site is always many places at once, a convergence of experiences and fabrications, a somatic experience rather than a purely scapic or scopic one (p. 49).

## Case Study 2: 'Rules & Wishes' in Public Space

In Performance Architecture School we run the exercise "rules and wishes" (Figure 3) in public space where participants are invited to work site-specifically, enter in a playful dialogue with the city, and consider their location as a resource.[54] Through this exercise we opt to investigate the ways in which the practice of performance architecture gets informed by the everyday interactions and the experience of the urban space by engaging with the micro and macro viewpoint of the city.

**Figure 3**

*"What do you wish Incorporate" by Candy Karra, Part of the Online Performance Architecture Winter School 2021*



The city is a terrain for action, imagination and inspiration, celebrating the idea that the whole world can be seen as a stage[55] where borders between performance and everyday life are blurred. Richard Huelsenbeck (1918, n.p.) stated in his *German Dada Manifesto*:

> Life appears as a simultaneous confusion of noises, colours and spiritual rhythms, and is thus incorporated — with all the sensational screams and feverish excitements of its audacious everyday psyche and the entirety of its brutal reality — unwaveringly into Dadaist art (…).

[54] The instruction we give to the students is provided as follows: "Take a few minutes and note down a list of existing rules of the place you are found in. Note that rules do not have to be written somewhere for them to exist. They can even be gravity rules!"

[55] This notion is based on the metaphorical concept of the Theatrum Mundi (or the Great Theater of the World), which portrays the world as a theatre (apparent in Shakespeare's saying that "all the world's a stage") wherein people are characters and their actions form a drama, with God as the author. In each formulation of the *theatrum mundi*, the world is a sum greater than its parts, where various roles are played by different actors.

There are rules decided by the existing country law i.e. “not allowed to be naked” and rules that are shaped from the “social conformism” i.e. “do not obstruct the route of passers-by”. Also, there are rules generated by spatiality. As de Certeau states:

> If it is true that a spatial order organises an ensemble of possibilities and interdictions, then the walker actualizes some of these possibilities. In that way, he makes them exist as well as emerge. But he also moves them about and he invents others, since the crossing, drifting away, or improvisation of walking privilege, trans-form or abandon spatial elements. (1984, p. 108)

For the rules to become apparent and for the wishes to be born, participants are invited to observe everyday life in the public space, the conditions that occur through the architecture that determine social behaviour. In reverse, the observation reveals how everyday behaviours reappropriate space in ways that may challenge the architectural rules (e.g. When “desire lines” are formed or steps are used as seating). The micro scale of these spatial and behavioural details is juxtaposed to the macro scale of official rules.

Through this exercise participants learn that designing space or generating an action in the public realm emerges as a result of identifying and distinguishing the set of rules that exist in space. After carefully detecting the rules, participants are invited to challenge them by writing down their “wishes” in a loose accordance to them. Wishes are structured in correlation of the rules thus every rule has a potential wish, unleashing wishes and imagination that routinely get restricted in contemporary capitalist urban environments. Later in the course, we invite participants to incorporate those wishes in the public space (Figure 4) by creating spatial actions and body geometries in space in order to activate them.

By introducing participants to produce a wish for a public action, we instigate not just a personal level interrogation on the public space conditions, but also the workings of imagination and emotion.

The rich study of everyday life and the city is incorporated in Performance Architecture’s curriculum to exercise critical thinking as an attempt to investigate the sociopolitical *ethos* of the selected space. Through the site-specific performance methodology, participants get a closer understanding of the rules and constraints that spaces have and approach the understanding of the fragile border between everyday life and performance. These social and spatial constraints, work as potential challenges for new pathways of inspiration and creativity for participants enriching the relation between body and space.

**Figure 4**

*“What do you wish? Incorporate” by Wei Wang (Taiwan) part of the Performance Architecture Online Summer School 2020*



## The Question of Representation in the Performance Architecture School

We have presented so far how we approach the public space through two of the exercises practised in the Performing Architecture School. In the process of communicating the practices within the school the question of representation rises, which is the third topic investigated with the participants as part of the curriculum.

Representation has multiple meanings here: how one is represented in space, how the symbolism of a space includes or excludes people and how behaviour is dictated in space, which as we noted before it is tied to the notions of public, and to everyday life and on the other hand how the space itself is represented in order to be communicated; what language does architecture choose each time to present the space (3D visuals, reference boards, orthogonal drawings, diagrams or spreadsheets) in order to discuss the methods of representation of performance architecture.

While we aim to interrelate spatial and performative notions, it has become evident that the investigation of body and space both in performance studies and architecture studies are

discursively close but representationally disparate. Also, as an educational body, performance architecture discipline is/or will be requiring a representational form expressing the student experience and the learning outcomes.

In architectural studies and, in particular, at the design studios the outcome is measured by representations of space and very often the focus lies in orthographic drawings. Alternative media, video, film, performance, interviews are increasingly accepted as forms of spatial research but mainly not as outcomes, unless of course, translated in sets of orthographic representations (including models and 3D that both use orthographic drawings). Architectural representation friezes time, therefore, friezes the experience.

Equally, performance uses its own methods for representation. The outcome, the final project of a school in performance is usually a performance itself with a clear beginning and an end. In performance it is important to have the following elements: time, space, body and presence of the artist, and the relation between the creator and the public.

Performance art has a duration but it is usually of ephemeral nature. A way to capture it in time is by filming it so that the film could serve as another representation of the actual performance. So, what gets accessed in a performance school is the performance itself and its conceptual idea and at the same time how this idea gets structured and communicated through the medium of performance art.

The challenge that lies here then is to find a means of representation; and possibly a means of measurable outcomes that represents the composite term, that allows for the space to be perceived physically, conceived mentally and lived socially. It should also allow the students to both represent and simultaneously experience the space and embody the spatial experience, acknowledging but not succumbing to the bird’s eye view, the city plan, the city as panopticon.

## The Pedagogical Opportunities of Performance Architecture

In conclusion, the possibilities of this tool are multiple. Firstly, Performance architecture goes beyond the two dimensional / the photorealistic image and the drawing, or the represented model: it renegotiates representation. Secondly, it engages with the public space: it exercises the interdependency of individual action and social bodies, shared space and formed space. Thirdly, it challenges the stereotypical representation of the body in urban space and its behaviour. Lastly, it identifies the boundaries of space as a form and during formation: it captures the elasticity of boundaries, as soft as body movement and social relations are. And here is also where the boundaries of the tool are set. Whilst performance and architecture independently have through time and debates established forms of communication, performance architecture as an interdisciplinary subject is only emerging and has not found its representational form.

We utilise and teach performance architecture predominantly as a tool for sociopolitical debates within the process of making / inhabiting space. Using the body to investigate space and especially public space “brings home” the effect that space, architecture and the city have on the individual and the social body. Performance architecture could thus become an interdisciplinary pedagogical tool for understanding, evaluating, internalising and commoning public space.

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# Performing Bodies, Performing Architectures

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## Abstract

The interaction between space and the human body holds profound significance in both interior and urban design, particularly in exhibition layouts. Space, defining the interiority of architecture, possesses its own corporeality despite being intangible, qualities we could resume in the expression "body of space". Similarly, human bodies within architectural spaces form complex spatial relations, involving flows, movements, and temporal dimensions, shaping the "space of the body(s)".

This paper discusses a journey started in July 2022 with the workshop *The Space of the Body, the Body of Space. Dialogues between arts and architecture* at Iuav University of Venice, curated by Professor Renato Bocchi in collaboration with Valentina Rizzi. Thirty MA students in Visual Arts, Fashion, and Architecture from Iuav University, along with MA Spanish students from ETSAVA-Valladolid, participated. The workshop aimed to facilitate dialogue between architecture, visual arts, installations, and digital tools, exploring contemporary Spanish and Italian cultural trends.

The seminar commenced with theoretical discussions on enactivism, perception, nonhuman performativity, digital roles in installations, and architectural performance. Subsequently, six working groups, guided by Juan Carlos Quindós and Valentina Rizzi, developed projects focusing on Ca' Tron Palace, a building overlooking the Grand Canal. The resulting exhibition at Fondazione dell'Albero d'Oro showcased these projects. A second edition of workshop, named *Digitalstage*, also curated by Professor Renato Bocchi, took place in September 2023 at the Real Academia de España en Roma, involving PhD Architecture students from Sapienza University of Rome and Digitalstage research by Universidad de Valladolid.

These experiences aim to provoke reflections on how architectural space interacts with human bodies and fosters perceptual transformations. The proposal advocates for a transdisciplinary approach, blending theory with audio-visual materials from workshop outcomes.

*Keywords:* Performance, architecture, participation, embodiment, site-specific, workshop.

## Lab Excursion between Art Installations, Built Space and Transformative Practices

The dialectic between the body and space is pivotal in shaping architectural design, whether it's for interior spaces or urban environments. Furthermore, these dynamic relationships are particularly crucial in the intricate process of designing exhibition layouts. The title of the project being presented encapsulates two distinct yet interconnected lines of thought and action.

Firstly, space, often perceived as the void within architecture, is far from being a mere emptiness. Instead, it possesses its own corporeality, albeit ethereal and intangible. This intrinsic essence prompts an inquiry into the nature of this "body of space" and how it can be conceptualised and articulated.

Secondly, the bodies of individuals inhabiting architectural spaces are anything but static. They act as the focal point of a complex web of spatial relations, encompassing flows and movements within the space. This dimension also incorporates temporal and performative aspects, adding depth to the exploration of a "space of the body(s)".

This article aims to document the insights gained from a series of workshops titled T*he Space of the Body / The Body of Space*, which sought to delve into these relationships through theoretical discourse, experimentation, and practical application. To begin, it's essential to outline the theoretical foundations underpinning the project.

## Theoretical Premises for Embodied Spaces

In the architectural design process, acknowledging the dynamic interactions among space, materiality, and atmosphere is essential for imbuing space with poetic attributes and activating its inherent qualities.

Peter Zumthor has delved deeply into these themes, advocating for a symbiotic relationship between form and meaning to unveil and amplify the poetic essence within architectural objects. Such properties can be unveiled and applied through the relationship with architecture and in the configuration of the subjects involved in the relationship as equivalent informants, as each other's inhabitants (Zumthor, 1998).

Within this dynamic, the presence of built space does not appear to be the result of an artificial construction process, but a natural extension of the territory. This leads to the "true thing" itself, often eclipsed by the contemporary system of sign references that dissipate its potential. It's the manner in which the body perceives, embraces, and interacts with its surroundings, setting off a resonance that stirs memories and evokes emotional responses (Zumthor, 1998).

The dimension of space as a physical-psychic entity, which shares much in common with the human experience in its structure and sensory nature, is extensively explored in the work of the Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa, who has always focused on design and its practices as a tactile organism and simultaneously a mental apparatus of the human experience (Pallasmaa, 2009). The fear of confronting the continuum of time in its material evolutions has deeply influenced the development of architectural poetics, which are closely linked to dematerialization and the pursuit of conceptual perfection. However, this underlying profound insecurity towards transformations exists. Pallasmaa (2012), on the other hand, emphasises the substantial value of not abandoning a material, corporeal sensibility in the approach to design, promoting the urge to reconsider the flow of time and its unexpected evolutionary potential in order to reconcile with it. Indeed, there is a symbiotic relationship between movement and architectural development that Pallasmaa conceives as a “predicate”, as a form of action, as a verb, the concrete realisation of movement and space as lived experiences.

Central to this interpretation is the figure of the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, for his conception of the body as the locus where intentionality is determined through the reciprocal interactions between self and the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1945) The author contends that the body is not merely a passive receptor onto which external stimuli are imposed, but rather, it serves as the primary site where our understanding of the world is shaped through our practical engagement with it. Merleau-Ponty considers the body to be a medium, not an object positioned passively before us or something that can only be examined externally. Mind and body are not to be seen in opposition because the mind cannot be detached from the body; it is situated within it, embodied. Therefore, the body is not an object situated within the world; it is our viewpoint on the world, our way of *being-in-the-world* (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). Similarly, corporeality cannot be experienced independently of the world; the body exists as situated within a context that both moulds and is moulded by the individual. Space emerges from the perception of our body in motion within it, actively engaging with it in a manner akin to biological and structural participation. The body shapes space, not as a static entity presented in its fully resolved complexity to the individual, but as a dynamic space that, due to its inherent connection with humans, is always inhabited, animated by the movements of a living body. Without this dynamic interplay, the same space would lack its distinctive identity and character.

In this sense, the body can be understood as both situated and a site. The exploration of the role of the senses within the context of design remains an essential theme in envisioning an architecture intimately intertwined with the body, embracing the embodied possibilities inherent in the discipline. From these theoretical underpinnings, there arises an insight into the integration of performative aspects within the design process, recognizing the body's presence and movement as central considerations.

The notion of architecture as a practice of movement can be traced back as early as the 1920s with the Bauhaus school, where Oskar Schlemmer's teachings amalgamated dance, movement, and design culture, thereby unveiling the potential implications for design and its operational forms. Buildings began to be perceived beyond their physical spatial confines, with endeavours aimed at transcending material boundaries and exploring new realms of architectural possibilities.

**Figure 1**

*Bruce McLean,* Plinths, *1971. (Photo: https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/mclean-pose-work-for-plinths-3-t03274).*



For instance, consider the Gutai group and Saburō Murakami with their famous work *Passing Through* (1956), or the process-oriented investigations of Gordon Matta-Clark with his “architectural cuttings” (Richard, 2018). These cuts, thus violent mutilations of the building, facilitated the merging of exterior and interior spaces, often carrying political connotations. This mode of operation, termed "Anarchitecture," blends poetic and political engagement with humanity, a hallmark later embodied by the collective linked with 112 Green Street, of which Matta-Clark was a member.

Another intriguing illustration is the function of the *oblique* by Paul Virilio and Claude Parent (Johnston, 1996) which represents a radical dismantling of traditional architectural principles. They conceive of an architecture liberated from conventional walls, opting instead

for inclined planes that assimilate and accommodate the potential movements of the human body, thereby acknowledging its motor and performative capabilities. This perspective has initiated a fundamental reassessment of the connection between the body and architecture, acknowledging them as interrelated and mutually reliant dynamics.

**Figure 2**

*Didier Fiúza Faustino,* Les Jetées*, 2012 (Photo: https://freight.cargo.site/t/original/i/49388cc3a3cfeaf5acdf469eb48fc68334629eb7870892d8e2afb2f5deb31f8a/FAUSTINO-Les_Jetees-02bis_HD.jpg).*



As highlighted in an article from *The Funambulist* magazine (2023), the concept of the body as a viscous material, capable of assuming diverse forms depending on the surface it interacts with and the object it engages, consciously acknowledges the body's inherent tendency to establish harmonious and pleasurable connections with its surroundings. In fact, the article proposes an interpretation of the viscous potential of the body through three examples. The first one is *Research of Comfort in an Uncomfortable Armchair* by Bruno Munari in which he employs his body to subvert the essential functional purpose and seemingly flawed design of an armchair. Likewise, Bruce McLean in his piece *Plinths* (1971) employs three cubes as both pillars and guides for his movements. Originally conceived as a performance, later transformed into a series of "poses," it shares Munari's impulse albeit in a less explicit

manner, as the cube shape, not directly linked to a utilitarian object, makes the functional absence signalled by the intervention less clear (Figure 1).

The third case is that of Didier Fiúza Faustino's. His entire *Mesarchitecture* emphasises the relationship between the body and space with a language that blurs the boundaries between art and architecture, adopting a multifaceted and subversive approach that transcends normative constraints. Faustino's practice is highly performative, not only in the way the works are experienced but also in their nature and their connection to the surrounding context. His works consistently push beyond conventional understanding, both physically and conceptually (Figure 2).

Throughout these practices, recurring themes such as domesticity, the domestication of space, corporeality, and the subversion of norms provide a common thread. These approaches redefine design beyond traditional categorizations and encourage a rethinking of the fundamental relationship between the body and architecture. Thus, building upon the conviction of a mutual shaping of body and space, we have experimented with a methodology of investigation aimed at stimulating reflection on the extent to which architectural space depends on corporeal presence. Simultaneously, we endeavour to assess the degree to which architecture's capacity to influence the body and its perceptions can generate new dimensions in the experiential realm.

## The Space of the Body / The Body of the Space. Process as Project

> The limit is the true protagonist of space; just as the present, another limit, is the true protagonist of time (Eduardo Chillida in Bocchi, 2009, p. 107[56]).

Based on the identified premises, the present contribution compiles the trajectory and workshop results of two experiments on the subject. The first took place in July 2022 in Venice, encompassing locations such as Ca' Tron and Palazzo Vendramin Grimani (Albero d'Oro Foundation), for students enrolled in the Visual Arts and Fashion Master's degree course at Iuav University of Venice and a few MA students in Architecture from ETSAVA - Valladolid.

The second occurred in September 2023 at the Real Academia de España en Roma, involving PhD students of Architecture - Theories and Project from Sapienza University of Rome. Adopting a methodology that integrates conceptual inquiries, somatic practices, and digital extensions, these workshops position themselves as a process-oriented exploration of encountering and unveiling a continuously evolving density. The objective was to provide participants with the opportunity to engage in practices of spatial measurement and

[56] Translated from the Italian by the author.

comprehension that transcend disciplinary boundaries, fostering a collaborative approach beneficial for both exploratory phases and the development of design outcomes.

Both workshops have been curated by Professor Renato Bocchi with the collaboration of Valentina Rizzi.

### *I Edition: "Dialogues between Arts and Architecture", Venice*

The first edition of *The Space of the Body / The Body of Space* unfolded between July 18th and 24th, 2022, in the spaces of Ca' Tron, a palace overlooking the Grand Canal in Venice's Santa Croce district. Ca' Tron stands out as a distinctive case within the Venetian landscape for several reasons. Primarily, despite its status as an institutional space owned by the Iuav University of Venice, it has gradually fallen into disuse for educational purposes over the years, primarily serving as office space and occasionally hosting lectures or events.

Our very presence within these spaces can be seen as both a reactivation and a rediscovery of a place shrouded in shadows, safeguarded multiple times over the past fifty years from being sold off through collective initiatives led by the university community. At various levels and on numerous occasions, this community has thwarted attempts to dispose of the space by occupying it. Traversing these neglected spaces instilled a desire to observe, explore, and ultimately reclaim them. Thus, from its inception, the workshop was guided by the ambition to intimately engage with the unique identity of the venue. Within this framework, the workshop sought to delve into the intricate relationship between the body and space, fostering a dynamic and expansive dialogue encompassing architecture, visual and plastic arts, artistic installations, and digital and multimedia tools.

During the initial three days of the workshop, participants were immersed in substantial theoretical discussions[57] delving deeply into topics such as spatial and bodily perception, the intersection of architecture and performance studies, nonhuman interactions in visual arts and installations, as well as the integration of digital tools in artistic projects and exhibitions. Subsequently, six working groups initiated investigative projects focusing on performance and the digital and multimedia processing of the palace spaces. Finally, through a collaboration with Palazzo Vendramin Grimani – Fondazione dell'Albero d'Oro, the results were presented to the public in an exhibition (Figure 1).

[57] Contributions came from Fernando Zaparain, Jorge Ramos and Juan Carlos Quindós (Espaciar Research Group from the University of Valladolid , Raquel Sardà and Vicente Alemany (Faculty of Fine Arts in Madrid), Emanuele Arielli (Università Iuav di Venezia), Roberta Dreon ( Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia), Cristina Barbiani (director of Iuav's Digital Exhibit Master), Klaus Obermaier (artist), Valentina Rizzi, Roberta Da Soller and Teresa Masini (PhD Students at Università Iuav di Venezia), Larisa Oancea Phd. We also had a guided tour of the Lucio Fontana/Antony Gormley exhibition curated by Luca Barbero at the Negozio Olivetti in Piazza San Marco.

The projects delved into various aspects unique to Palazzo Ca' Tron. They ranged from examining the physical and perceived boundaries and the transitions of windows, doors, and passageways, to exploring the notion of privacy associated with typically closed-off areas of the palace, such as its private quarters. Additionally, there was a focus on investigating the interactions between bodies and public space, attire, and sexuality. Moreover, students delved into the history of the building's occupancy through archival and sound research. Through the use of audio and video recording as tools for comprehending and engaging with space, the hidden intricacies within inhabited spaces, shaped by both our presence and past histories, have been unveiled. The resulting works epitomised the essence of the workshop, embodying successful interdisciplinary amalgamations through performances, documentation of performances, video pieces, and installations. Moreover, the exhibition presented an opportunity to devise an exhibition map that would interact with the works displayed at the Albero d'Oro Foundation during that period by Bosco Sodi. This served as an additional site-specific endeavour, fostering a dialogue between the exhibited works, the final presentation, and the internal coherence in formal choices.

**Figure 3**

*Final Exhibition 1st Edition, Palazzo Vendramin Grimani – Fondazione dell'Albero d'Oro, Venice (Photo: Juan Carlos Quindós).*



### *II Edition: "Digitalstage", Rome*

The second edition of the workshop, *Digitalstage*, took place at the Real Academia de España en Roma from September 11th to 17th, 2023.[58] Echoing the dynamics explored in Venice with the spaces of Ca' Tron, the process of discovering the Accademia complex—a primarily cultural institution with limited access—engaged participants in a similar exploration. In this instance, the experience was conducted through the Doctoral Programme in Architecture "Theories and Design" at the University of Sapienza in Rome, aiming to propose innovative approaches to space and locales. Embracing a fresh site-specific perspective, the workshop delved into the intricacies and contrasts of a place shaped by histories of restructuring and juxtaposition. Specifically, the research sought to examine practices of design adaptation through digital devices and their interaction with corporeality.

Building on the explorations initiated in Venice with *The Space of the Body / The Body of Space*, the workshop continues its endeavour to furnish a theoretical and methodological framework. This framework, achieved through the comparison and synthesis of concepts and design strategies drawn from contemporary visual and performing arts and architecture, aims to facilitate the exploration of the dynamic relationship between body and space in live corporeal experiences. These experiences encompass various domains, including artistic installation, environmental art, digital exhibition and stage design, and interior architectural spaces. Within this research perspective, the contribution of modern and contemporary artists who have embraced the corporeal dimension as a reference and measure of architectural space, as well as a performative tool for perception, is paramount. Specifically, we examined the contributions of contemporary art research that immerse and engage viewers in a performative manner. This was contrasted with the focus on the spatial and bodily dimensions of experiences developed by certain contemporary architects in scenography and interior design. The communications analysed some experiences of performance art and theatre in their relationship with the architectural spaces that host them, such as Bruce Nauman's experiences in relation to Tadao Ando's exhibition spaces in Venice or Virgilio Sieni's experiences in relation to Rem Koolhaas' spaces at Fondazione Prada in Milan.[59] Following

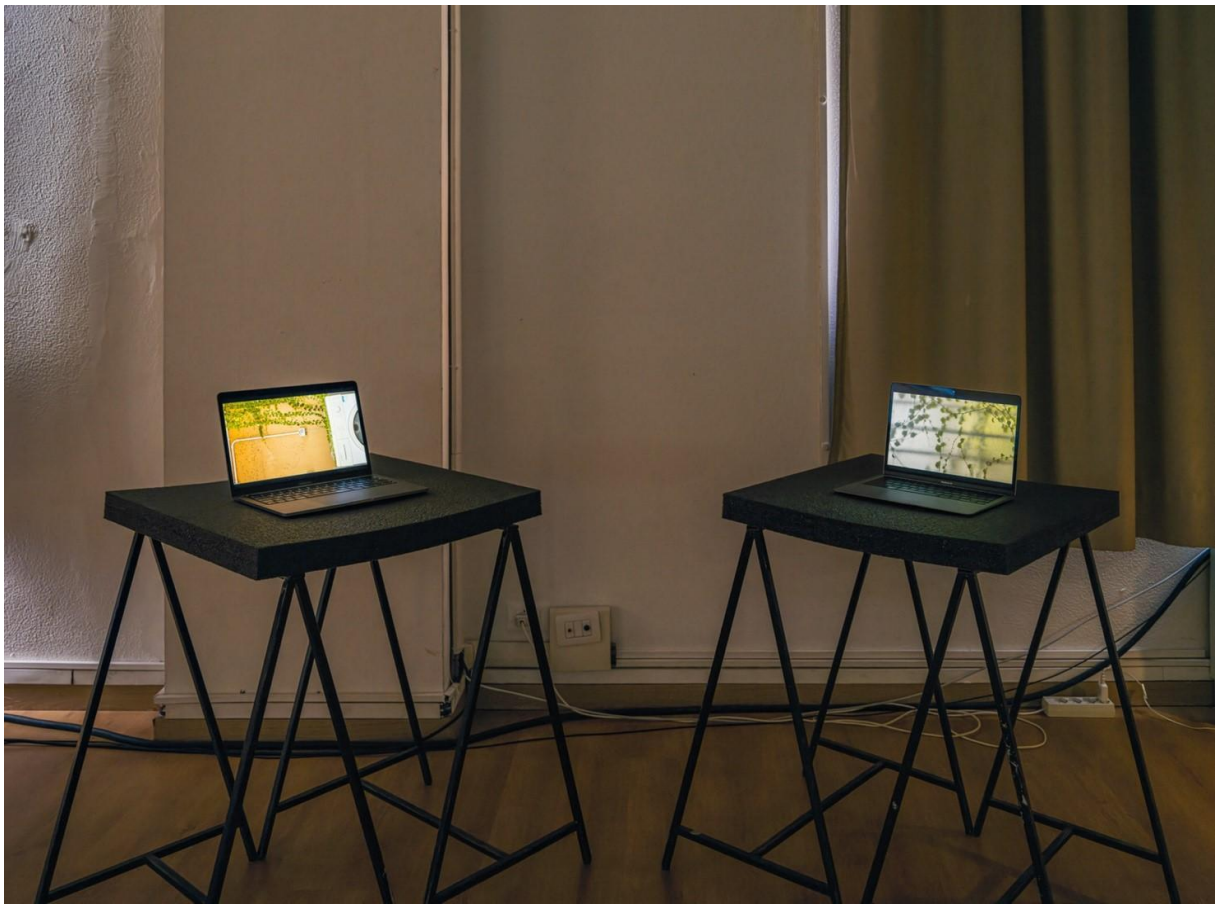
[58] The second edition of the workshop also benefited from the collaboration with the ESPACIAR research group from the University of Valladolid, which initiated the Digitalstage project in 2022. The choice of the workshop's title and objectives was also influenced by their presence and expertise.

[59] Following the Venetian experience, we examined the comparison recently proposed by Luca Massimo Barbero between the work of Lucio Fontana and Antony Gormley and the spaces designed by Carlo Scarpa at the Negozio Olivetti in Venice; at the same time, we dealt with the presentation of historical experiences of interior design, scenography and environmental art in the Italian tradition; a series of experiences of contemporary Spanish art in the same fields, analysed by researchers from the ESPACIAR Research Group at the University of Valladolid; experimentation with the tools of Digital Exhibit proposed by the master's course of the same name directed by Cristina Barbiani at the Iuav in Venice. The faculty was composed of Federica Andreoni (Accademia di Spagna), Cristina Barbiani (Master Digital Exhibit Iuav), Lucia Di Pietro (Università

the format established in the first edition, complemented by a series of lectures and debates featuring interdisciplinary discussions on these themes, the workshop involved the configuration of site-specific proposals for artistic interventions based on the history and the space of the Real Academia de España en Roma. These proposals were subsequently showcased on the final day in an exhibition held at the Academia itself (Figure 2).

**Figure 4**

*Final Exposition 2nd Exhibition, Real Academia de España en Roma* (Photo: Juan Carlos Quindós).



In this instance, working with PhD students of Architecture, it was essential to delve deeper into exploring insights from the realms of visual and performing arts that could inform a design approach more attuned to corporeal engagement. To achieve this, a workshop was organised with choreographer Lucia Di Pietro, who conducted a session on psychosomatic practices in relation to the architecture of the Academy. This experience enabled the group to

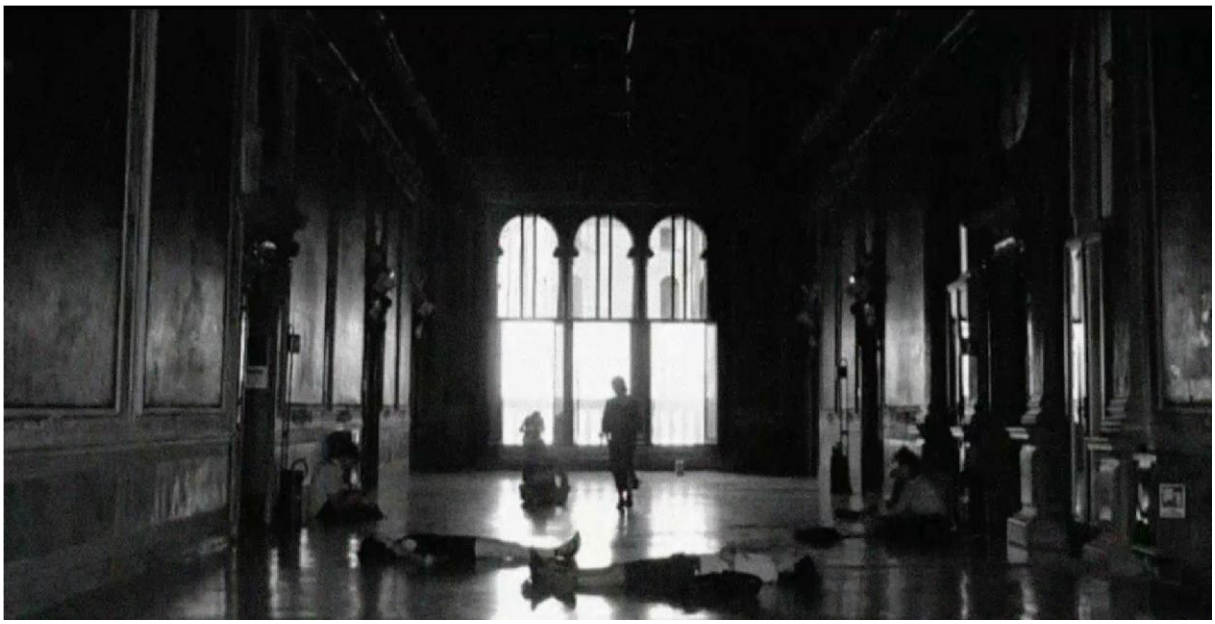
Iuav di Venezia), Giulia Fegez (Università Iuav di Venezia), Filippo Lambertucci (Sapienza Università di Roma), Esther Pizarro (Universidad Europea de Madrid), Jorge Ramos Jular (Universidad de Valladolid – ETSAVA), Elena Roccaro (Università Iuav di Venezia), Fernando Zaparain (Universidad de Valladolid – ETSAVA). The final exhibition was coordinated by Juan Carlos Quindós, with the collaboration of Valentina Rizzi, Niccolò Pagni and Anna Ghiraldini.

broaden their perspectives on both conceptual and exploratory levels, transcending the conventional boundaries of the project. This activity proved to be crucial in unlocking the work and liberating it from conventional constructs. The realised projects explored the inhabitation of the academy's spaces, their appropriation, and revitalization through everyday gestures. Activities such as running, washing, sleeping, ranging from mockumentary to poetry, were employed. Another area of analysis focused on the materials and layers associated with the site's restoration. Significantly, a material and performative approach predominated in engaging with the spaces and uncovering them from a fresh perspective. Once again, mirroring the approach taken in Venice, the final day of the workshop was dedicated to publicly presenting the projects through an exhibition held within the spaces of the Academia. Each group was tasked with independently conceptualising an installation device tailored to their proposal.

## *Crossovers: The Projects*

**Figure 5**

*Occupazione Sonora by Collettivo Cuore, Ca' Tron 2022*



The experiences here presented have been conceived as procedural practices, involving relational construction and progressive engagement with themes, places, and disciplines. The projects generated by this process advance along pathways that challenge the conventional configurations of space and the human body across various dimensions. These projects are conceived as means of extending spatial boundaries, employing liminality and projection in their interaction with the body, as well as in their approach to display and intervention techniques. They represent endeavours that delve into the concepts of plurality and reappropriation, tackling the essence of practices that explore the realms of physical and

psychological matter. Their aim is to extract dialogue and potential from these substances and materials, viewing them through somatic, political, and presentational lenses (Figure 3).

The projects developed by the participants in both courses found interesting declinations with respect to the ways of inhabiting and occupying spaces. It has been significant to consider the phases of renovation and integration within the architectural components comprising the venues, along with contemplating future projects envisioned for these spaces. These considerations prompted reflections on *being* in the space beyond its physical structure, perceiving it as membranous bodies and amplifiers. Consequently, there arose reflections exploring the inversion of perspectives, accentuating the potential of an institutionalised space and, consequently, the institutionalisation of bodies and actions within it (Figure 4).

**Figure 6**

*Estudio 31-32-33, by Mattia Baldini, Lorenzo Casavecchia and Laura Mucciolo, Real Academia de España en Roma, 2023*



## Conclusions

*The space of the body / The body of the space* stands as a vehicle and experimentation of hybrid approaches to design, integrated and situated. The course, in its declinations to date, has brought out the richness of research in dialogue and the potential of integrating practice-based forms as an important and generative tool for the project in its complexity. An important aspect is tailoring the content and proposals according to the participants: in methodological consistency, it is necessary to develop strategies tuned to the skills and needs of the participants. The structuring of the workshops has proven to be robust and, functionally, open, even to last-minute adjustments and integrations.

In fact, bodily experimentation, the solicitations that play with and on the edge of display, visual acquisition and knowledge are part of a methodology of investigation that takes theory and history as an engine to unhinge thought and reactivate it in new forms. By abandoning the traditional tools for limited but intense segments of time, the tools themselves can then be seen to be declined in extended capacities, new to those who engage with them. It is not only by practising with the given instrument that it is refined. Whoever is confronted with the practices of the project, with the culture of the project, be it architectural or artistic, must form himself/herself as a critical protagonist of his own ideas within the context in which he places them. He/her must become the transformative thinker who draws on transdisciplinarity with a sense of respect and acceptance. The participatory value of such experiences confirms the drive towards a working choice beyond exclusivity and a conscious experimentation as an openness to expositional, social, communicative refinement.

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# Healing Flavours. An Immersive Emotional Perception of Asklepieion Sanctuary's Landscape

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## Abstract

Space has the ability to modify our perception. Human entity retains the stigmata of time and space traversed and encountered, as an indelible marker of the experience (Béligon & Digonnet, 2020). Body becomes a sensitive interface through which we apprehend spatiality. In the process of the participatory workshop *Healing Flavours*, inhabitation was achieved through the experiential observation provided by the practice-based laboratory session. The workshop was held on August 29th, 2022, as part of the *Performing Space 2022* project organised by the Department of Theatre Studies of the University of Peloponnese and the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid. It consisted of an interactive emotion walk that invited participants to move and halt through a series of ancient sites in an open space, immersing themselves in a range of emotional states. The workshop was based on the holistic system of R. Schechner's *Rasaboxes* and S. Bloch's *Alba Method* patterns, where muscular activity and specific breathing patterns can be consciously controlled and manipulated to induce and regulate emotional states. The methodology of perception entailed the implementation of a specific protocol that consisted of three key elements: a. visual gaze to facilitate the exploration of the surroundings, b. revelation of the emotion and c. physical discovery and involvement in varied ways, meant to enhance the emotional experience of participants and to encourage them to engage with the environment.

*Keywords:* Site-specific laboratory, embodied experience, physical immersion, performers training, Alba Method, rasa, cognitive theory.

## Healing Flavours. An Immersive Emotional Perception of Asklepieion Sanctuary's Landscape

Richard Schechner (2003) suggests that spatial arrangements of a performance result from temporal developments of public events, based on two basic structures of spatial development: a) the explosive nuclear structure, such as the circle formed by passers-by around an accident and b) the ephemeral structure of the nomadic procession (as in the epitaphic litany or nomadic parasitism). This ephemeral structure consists of a planned course, which includes stops and moves, with linear spatial development and culmination.

In the case of the *Healing Flavours* workshop, the procedure consisted of a five-stop processional site-specific emotion walk that invited participants to move and halt through a series of ancient sites in an open space. The workshop was held on August 29th, 2022, as part of the *Performing Space 2022* project organised by the Department of Theatre Studies of the University of Peloponnese and the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid. It was based on the holistic system of Richard Schechner's *Rasaboxes* and Susanna Bloch's *Alba Method* patterns where muscular activity and respiration specific patterns can be consciously controlled and manipulated to induce and regulate emotional states. The experiential journey invited participants to traverse various historically significant locations, commencing from a forest area adjacent to the Epidaurus Theatre and concluding at the Propylaea (Figure 1).

### The Protocol: Transitioning From Visual Stimulation to Emotional Embodiment

In order to transition from the realm of architectural considerations into the realm of emotional and physical space, an identical and precise protocol was consistently implemented at each stage of the process. This protocol entailed the articulation of a series of stimuli, comprising three key elements: 1. visual engagement with the space, 2. emotional revelation and 3. embodied engagement.

### Visual Engagement with the Space

The first element of the protocol involved directing one's visual gaze to the external environment, in order to perceive the external space and stimulate the revelation of an emotional state**.**

In Western culture, vision dominates all other senses. It is through the articulation of the visible aspects that spatial perception is organised and understood (Ardenne & Polla, 2011). What articulates vision is:

- The structure of the space: the spatial relationship between objects and their observers. It involves the analysis of how objects are situated in their environment and how individuals perceive their own spatial positioning within that context.
- Its emotional attribution: it has a subjective nature, depending on individual associations. The resonance ascribed to the visual components of an environment is variable, shaped by personal experiences and emotional inclinations.
- Its identity: in this context, it is related to the unique features and characteristics that distinguish one spatial environment from another.

Space as perceived through individual gaze served as the primary focal point during the immersive workshop, acting as an external stimulus that triggered the initial engagement. It functioned as an environmental cue, drawing participant's attention outwardly, thus generating a new emotional meaning of space structure.

In accordance with this perspective, Konstantin Stanislavski, though renowned for his emphasis on the actor's internal processes to elicit emotional reactions, recognised the profound influence of the gaze as an environmental stimulus on an actor's emotional subconscious. He claimed that "surroundings have a big influence over the feelings. And this happens on the stage as well in real life" (Stanislavsky, 1989, p. 170).

This perspective highlights the intricate interplay between the visual perception of the external environment and the resulting emotional experiences.

From the vantage point of the facilitator, space emerged as a canvas, upon which personal perceptions were projected onto the world. It unveiled intentions and functioned as a conduit for the purposeful navigation of participants to each designated stop with clarity and purpose.

## Emotional Revelation

The second element of the protocol implied an emotional reaction to the impact of the space.

In the emotional walk workshop participants were guided to explore a range of emotional states in the specific locations, using the gaze as the initial trigger and attributing emotions to what they visually perceived.

The same physical space could evoke diverse emotional responses even in the same person, for example associated with joy, nostalgia, or serenity. In order to maintain a framework of emotionally responsive immersion in each location, this process was based on the holistic system of Schechner's *Rasaesthetics* and from neurobiologist Susanna Bloch's *Alba Method.*

In *Rasaesthetics, rasa* is an emotional experience and an aesthetic flavour that extends from the physical presence and movements of performers, as well as the spatial relationships between performers and the space itself (Schechner, 2003).

According to Schechner, there are eight basic flavours/rasas: *adbhuta* (surprise, wonder), *sringara* (love, romance), *bhayanaka* (fear, shame), *bibhatsa* (disgust), *vira* (courage, heroism), *hasya* (laughter, joy), *karuna* (sorrow, compassion), *raudra* (wrath). On the other hand, Bloch (2015) proposed six basic emotions: joy, sadness, fear, anger, sexuality, and tenderness.

Throughout the workshop, the utilization of the concept of *rasa* was predominantly focused on the participants' embodiment of their emotions by physical attitudes and breathing awareness. Due to time constraints, the decision was made to work primarily with a selection of identical emotions/flavours, drawn from both the *Rasaesthetics* and *Alba Emoting* systems, following the example of primary emotions suggested by Antonio Damasio or Paul Ekman (Prinz*,* 2004). It included emotions like joy, sadness, fear, and some more complex ones, such as pride/heroism and surprise, each with its own spatialisation in the Asklepieion area.

## Embodied Engagement

The third element of the protocol involved the embodied engagement. William James maintained that emotions consist of the subject's internal awareness of the bodily responses resulting from the interaction with her environment (Deonna & Teroni, 2012). He claimed that each emotion corresponds to a distinctive type of bodily awareness, that may in turn generate an array of physical attitudes. The embodiment of emotion includes information derived from diverse sources, such as facial feedback, alterations in skeletal muscles, the autonomic nervous system (e.g., respiration, heart rate, digestion, etc.) and the endocrine system.

For the purposes of the workshop, the embodied engagement to emotions was divided to the following components:

a) breath, as a foundational element in modulating the participant's affective experience,
b) and physical attitudes, so as to experience the actions of the body influenced by the overall engagement.

## Breath

A cascade of physiological changes and psychological states within individuals is triggered by emotions. As those emotional waves wash over us, breath naturally responds, adapting in terms of rhythm, depth, and intensity. This breathing adaptability is an instinctive response governed by the autonomic nervous system**.** As Antonin Artaud (1958) aptly noted, breath is an incomparable source of life and an essential element in the work of a unifying performer. The performer may harness the power of breath and emotions to engage in a profound exploration, akin to an "affective athlete" or an "athlete of the heart."

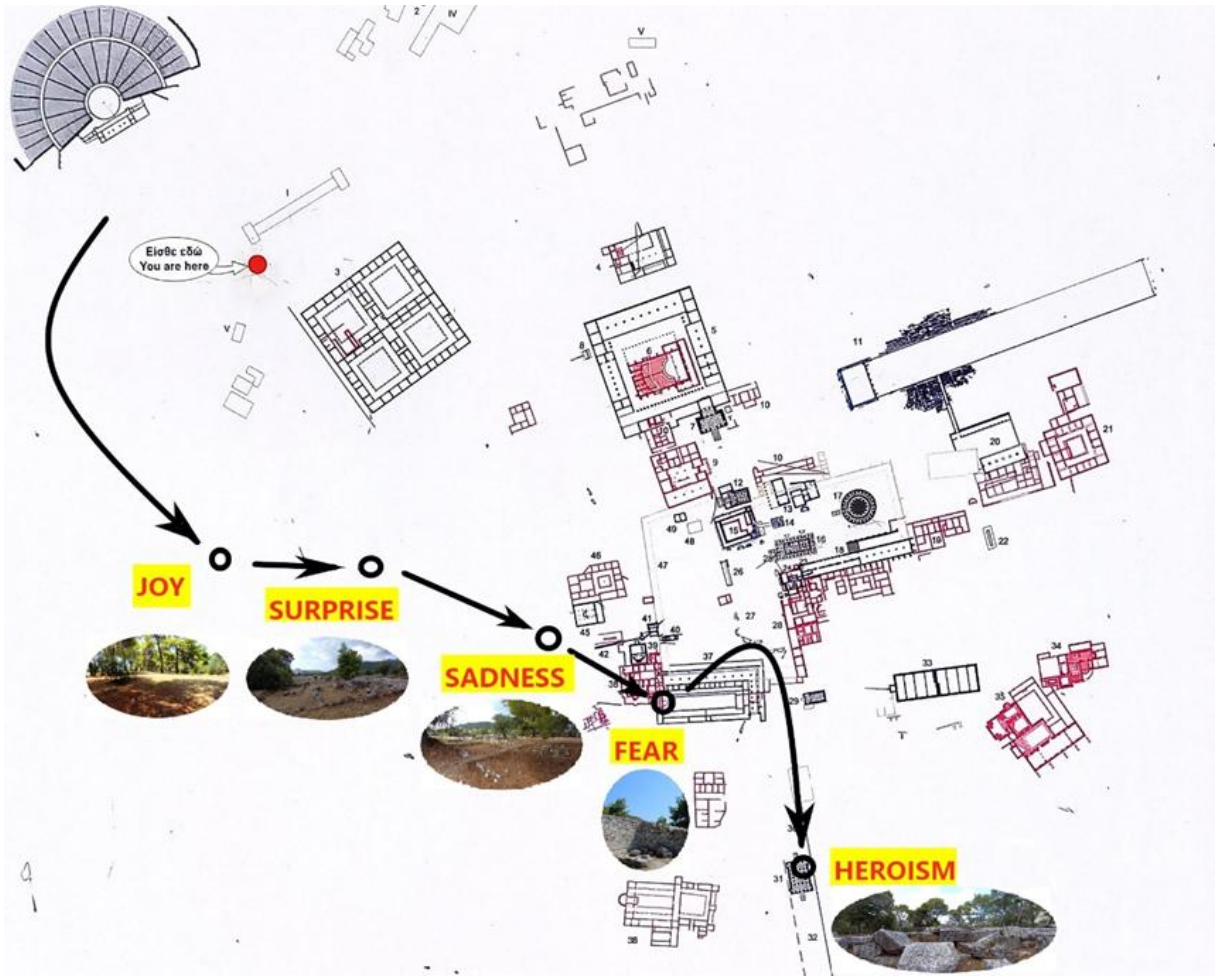
In the context of exploring emotional states, neurobiologist Bloch conducted a comprehensive analysis, involving the measurement and examination of various physiological

and motor parameters. These dealt with respiratory movements, the motor activity of the trapezius muscle, heart rate, blood pressure, facial expressions, and subjective impressions that accompanied physiomotor reactions in individuals experiencing different emotions. Through the systematic collection and analysis of this data, the experimenter was able to identify emotional effect or patterns, leading to the development of the *Alba Emoting method* (Bloch, 2015). The method is frequently employed in the realms of drama and performative somatic education, enhancing the understanding of how emotions are embodied and expressed.

Participants were led towards breathing patterns, in order to perceive the emotional intelligence of the physical body. The intentional awareness of breath not only aided in emotional expression, but also served as a safeguard for the participant's psychological equilibrium, as it enabled individuals to discern and attend to their emotional states.

**Figure 3**

*Map of Asklepieion Sanctuary Showing the Promenade and the Locations of the Five Stops in the Emotional Walk Workshop ''Healing Flavours''*



## Physical Attitudes

As mentioned, emotions may correspond to a bodily change. Physical actions and emotions are intertwined and mutually influential. In theatrical drama theory, a large number of directors sought to comprehend the function of the nervous system and the relationship between thought, emotion, movement, and speech. Vsevolod Meyerhold, Jerzy Grotowski, Eugenio Barba and even Stanislavski in their laboratorial work researched the body, brain, and mind, aligning them with a scientific approach.

A similar correlation may be found in Michael Chekhov's psychological gestures (Chekhov, 2014), which also utilise the notion that bodily movements and gestures are interconnected with cognitive sensomotor processes. M. Chekhov, as a student of K. Stanislavsky, asserted that movement and emotion and sound are interrelated. Movement should not take place, until it is instigated by an emotional drive that overflows outward and manifests itself in gesture or, possibly, in sound.

During the workshop, attendees were led towards acceptance of a somaesthetic proprioceptive result—an embodied action of their emotions, so as to discover their *soma*, the body endowed with life, sensation, movement and perception.

## Brief Overview of the Emotional Walk Workshop

As previously mentioned, the *Healing Flavours* emotional walk workshop consisted of five stops within the Asklepieion Sanctuary Area. Here is a concise summary, outlining the associated protocol.

### *First Stop*

The first stop examined the emotion of joy. During this phase, there was a deliberate intention to establish a slow pace, so as to cultivate a sense of inner calm. The tempo served to redirect the participants' awareness inward, facilitating the cultivation of an enhanced proprioception, with a particular emphasis on being present. Furthermore, commencing the emotional walk with gentle movements contributed to the establishment of a centred ambiance, thereby creating a foundational context for further explorations.

#### Protocol

#### *Visual Engagement*

The forest area near Apollo's Temple. The starting point of the walk was situated in the woods near the Temple of Apollo and Asclepius. This location was intentionally secluded from the typical tourist routes.

### *Emotional Revelation: Flavour of Joy*

The calm, the coolness and the shade of the trees brought about a delightful sensation of serenity and happiness. It generated very pleasant feelings, which is particularly noteworthy given the scorching late August afternoon.

### *Embodied Engagement*

#### Breath

The primary respiratory manifestation of this emotional state was characterised by a composed, expansive inhalation through the nose and a serene exhalation through the mouth.

#### Physical Attitudes: Participants Oscillated Around the Vertical Axle

This physical inclination represented a sense of upliftment, indicating an organic response to the emotional stimuli and enhancing the participants' embodiment of the joyful flavour. The incorporation of slow and low-amplitude movements in the process aimed to promote body awareness and mindfulness. Attendees surrendered themselves to the floor during moments of intense emotion, suggesting a profound release to the experience (Figure 2). Progressively, the eyes developed an unfocused gaze, shifting the attention from the external environment to the internal emotional state. This altered visual perception enabled a heightened introspective experience, fostering a deeper connection with the participants’ inner selves.

**Figure 4**

*Physical Engagement of Corporeal Release to the Flavour of Joy*



## *Second Stop*

The second stop examined the emotion of surprise. The duration of the stop was brief, yet effective. The effectiveness was attributed to the participants' sensitivity, cultivated through the first stop.

### Protocol

#### *Visual Engagement: Panorama of the Asklepieion Site*

The second stop of the emotional walk was strategically positioned in the juncture of the woods and the panoramic vista overlooking the site. This specific location provided a significant backdrop for the participants' experience.

#### *Emotional Revelation: Flavour of Surprise*

The juxtaposition of the dark woods with the open sunny panorama of the Asklepieion site created a contrast in the participants' visual experience. Transitioning from the secluded, sylvan surroundings of the woods to the expansive, breath-taking view of the site, provoked a sense of surprise among the participants.

#### *Embodied Engagement*

##### Breath

In accordance with the breathing pattern typically associated with the emotional state of surprise, the participants’ breath was characterised by very brief inhalations – an apnea-like breathing. It was succeeded by passive, partial exhalations and occasionally punctuated by an expiratory phase resembling a sigh.

##### Physical attitudes

Participants established steady foundation to contemplate the change. The body remained mostly immobile, in a vertical position, which hinted at a subtle tension underlying their physical presence.

## *Third Stop*

The third stop examined the emotion of sadness. The landscape created a correlation between the historical and spiritual aspects of the site of Asclepius, where water once flowed. Hollow squares juxtaposed with real tears created a contrast between presence and absence, as if the tears were trying to fill the void, yearning to restore what was missing, or lost.

## Protocol

### *Visual Engagement: Ground Square*

The participants' visual orientation was towards a continuous geometrical arrangement of hollow squares. Due to its shape and enclosed nature, the spot demonstrated visual and symbolic aspects similar to those of burial sites. The resemblance triggered emotional associations to mortality (Figure 3).

### *Emotional Revelation: Flavour of Sadness*

The deliberate inclusion of the square formations evoked introspection and a connection to themes of impermanence of life. The arrangement's resemblance to empty bug chambers served as a catalyst for participants to explore a range of sombre reflections.

**Figure 3**

*Area of Ground Squares. Flavour of Sadness*



### *Embodied Engagement*

#### Breath

Participants experienced lassitude and an overall difficulty in movement, during the observed state. The primary focus was directed to the breathing. It consisted of inhaling through the nose and exhaling through an open mouth. As emotional tension increased, attendees breathing patterns underwent a transformation, evolving into short and abrupt inhales and exhales, as well as brief saccadic outbursts, occasionally leading to tears.

### Physical attitudes

Bodies became slow and heavy in movement, indicating a lack of energy caused by the emotion. While being in this state, they surrendered to inertia. The downward position reflected the physical manifestation of burden, fatigue, and emotional weight. The heaviness in the body illustrated a sense of disconnection and withdrawal from the external reality (Figure 4).

**Figure 4**

*Third Stop. Experiencing Physical Attitudes in the Flavour of Sadness*



## *Fourth Stop*

The fourth stop examined the emotion of fear. During this stop, interruptions and distractions played a significant role. They drew attention away from the task at hand. And fatigue had settled in, due do the emotional burden.

### Protocol

### *Visual Engagement: Roman Baths*

The site comprised a network of narrow corridors, disorderly rows of small rooms with dilapidated stone walls.

#### *Emotional Revelation: Flavour of Fear*

The worn-out state of the edifice and the sense of disarray within the layout, elicited feelings of vulnerability, apprehension and fear.

#### *Embodied Engagement*

##### Breath

Participants adopted a breathing pattern marked by irregular inhalation and exhalation; it was maintained during several breathing cycles.

##### Physical attitudes

Posture was characterised by increased muscular tension and immobility at the same time. Bodies were motionless, as if paralyzed by fear.

### *Fifth Stop*

The fifth stop examined the emotion of heroism. The site of Propylaea, remotely located among the stops, situated in the shade of trees, enhanced the participants' concentration and provided a sense of satisfaction for the journey undertaken. It contributed to an overall positive evaluation of the entire experience.

#### Protocol

#### *Visual Engagement with the Space: Propylaea of the Sanctuary*

What remains of the entrance space to the Asklepieion site consists of stone squares that resemble a platform, a large pedestal that dominates the surrounding plain (Figure 5).

#### *Emotional Revelation: Flavour of Heroism*

Participants were guided to ascend the platform. They swiftly embraced a sense of leadership and active involvement. The platform provided them with a position of visibility and prominence that encouraged the exhibition of willingness, cultivating an atmosphere of empowerment.

#### *Embodied Engagement*

##### Breath

Breathing pattern mirrored a particular blend of pride. Inhalation and exhalation occurred through the nose. It was characterised by cycles of high frequency and great amplitude.

### Physical Attitudes

Participants exhibited tension in their bodies, especially in the neck and back muscles, tilting the head slightly back. The gaze was unwavering and determined, indicating focus and commitment (Figure 6). The overall attitude was firm and coordinated, conveying a sense of control.

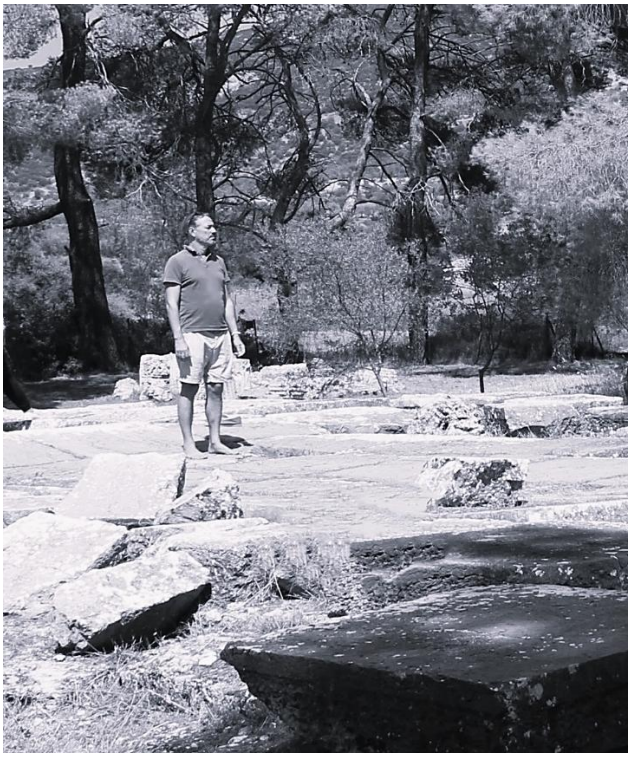
**Figure 5**

*Fifth Stop. Propylaea Area in Asklepieion Sanctuary*



**Figure 6**

*Physical Engagement to the Flavour of Heroism*



## Conclusion

The workshop reaffirmed the profound influence of the environment on emotional experiences and highlighted the significance of embodiment in the expression and understanding of emotions, within the sacred grounds of the Asklepieion. The interconnectedness of external space and emotions, the power of embodied action in revealing emotional states and the intricate relationship between breath and physical attitudes were all pivotal aspects of this immersive experience.

Furthermore, there are certain conclusions that contribute to our understanding of the relation between space and emotional state.

The first conclusion is that spatial proximity of the areas utilised in the workshop played a crucial role in shaping the emotional sequence. Arranging the spaces in close proximity created a logical progression and a sense of continuity in the emotional journey, facilitating the emotional flow and potentially amplifying the emotional impact on participants. The physical proximity of the locations, where the flavours of joy, surprise, sadness, and fear were evoked, allowed a sense of coherence and narrative flow. On the other hand, the area of the Propylaea, where heroic states were experienced, introduced a physical separation, and change of atmosphere. Shifting into this particular location caused a slight lapse of concentration, as participants transitioned from one emotional state to another. However, this spatial separation and the resulting decrease in focus also brought emotional relief. Moving away from the previous emotions, which may have been intense or burdensome, allowed participants to mentally and emotionally distance themselves from them. This distancing provided a chance to mentally reset, before engaging with the next emotion.

A second conclusion is that the workshop acted as a performance that was directed inwardly towards the group of participants. In this context, the participants played dual roles as both creators and receivers of their own “spectacle.” It allowed them to become the architects of their emotional experience, as well as the audience, witnessing and reflecting upon the emotional landscapes they traversed.

As a final conclusion, the workshop demonstrated that participants, through their active engagement, re-appropriated the site in the sense of establishing a new connection in the borders of historical essence. By immersing themselves in the spaces and being in tune with their own emotions, they attributed an emotional identity to the location. The re-appropriation of the site transformed it from a historical relic into a living, breathing space, where the past and present converged, redefining its essence and ensuring its continued vitality and relevance to the present.

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# The Notion of Space in Dance Performance

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## Abstract

The body and the art of dance express ideas and reflections on both personal and socio-political issues in different ways, depending on the ideals and the particular characteristics of each era. The positioning of the body in space has always concerned dancers and choreographers who began to question the existing conventions of spatial organisation. Choreographers challenged the concept of "choreographic space," placing their performances in public spaces and non-theatrical venues. The interconnected relationship between body and space is evident in both the context of everyday life and in dance performances. Although the shape or dimensions of the structured space in which movement takes place do not change, they do change in our perception through the experiential and emotional connections that are being made.

*Keywords:* Choreographic space, site-specific dance performance, perception, embodiment.

## The Representation of the Body and the Questioning Minds of Isadora Duncan and Rudolf von Laban

The body is related both to the personal sense of one's self and to the socio-political context of which it is a part of (Tsouvala, 2008). It incorporates elements of culture through everyday practices and personal choices. Carrying these influences, the individual through his/her movement shapes his/her areas of habitation. At the same time the particular characteristics of each place define his/her individual and collective activity within it. According to (philosopher) Susan Bordo "... our bodies are trained, shaped and imprinted with the mark of the historically dominant forms of the sense of self through the organization and arrangement of space, time and the movements of everyday life" (Makrinioti, 2004, p.31).

Throughout the history of dance, changes in the representation of the body are evident, embodying the perceptions and beliefs of each culture and socio-political system. The body and the art of dance communicate thoughts and ideas that in each era are expressed differently through choices of movement, costume, set design, stage design, stage space, the audience they target, and the concepts and symbolism they wish to bring into dialogue with society. The contribution of the dancer Isadora Duncan and the choreographer, architect, and theorist Rudolf Laban was decisive in the development of dance regarding the notion of art itself, the perception of space and the choice of non-theatrical venues for the dance performances. They suggested a more liberal expression of the body and the self with a new kinetic vocabulary and engaged with alternative places for performing. Their approach offered another way of understanding and perceiving the body and their questioning minds influenced the next generations of dancers, choreographers, and other artists by opening the way to experimentation.

The dancer Isadora Duncan (1877-1927) was a pioneer in the art of dance and with her work she proposed a new approach to both the image of the body and the conceptual content of her art. She was not only a dancer, but also a revolutionary and dance theorist who held a critical attitude towards society, culture and education. She fought for women's rights and social liberation (Barbousi, 2009). She promoted the image of the female body as subject with will and rights, free from social conventions (Daly, 2002). What she presented is contrary to 19th century choreographies. The new dance form indicates a shift in the role models of women, dancers and in the nature of the performances. The dancer choreographs herself and at the same time is a performer of a dance that expresses her own personal impulse without following steps that have been prescribed for her. Dance performances take place even on an empty stage. Dance is gradually becoming a practice for physical and mental health (Barbousi, 2014). Duncan altered the conventional sense of “beauty” and played an important role in displacing dance from enclosed spaces to alternative outdoor performance spaces. Her movement was not restricted by technical forms such as the ballet virtuosity and her dances were combined with live orchestral music, stage decoration and her own speeches. The combination of various artistic elements led her to the creation of innovative hybrid performances that departed from the prevailing aesthetics of 19th century art which required huge stages and expensive productions.

In Europe, Rudolph Laban, Jacques Dalcroze and Mary Wigman performed also in open spaces. The choreographer, theorist and architect Rudolf von Laban (1879-1958) worked on the harmony of space (choreutics) and other influential theories such as the quality of movement (eukinetics, effort) and developed the analysis and documentation of human movement, called “labanotation”, first published in 1928 (Maletic, 1987).

Laban developed one of the most comprehensive languages for the analysis of the art of movement. In his theory, the moving body is linked to specific spatial relations and is defined in relation to its position in space, the directions it follows (forward, backward, sideways), the planes (low, middle, high) on which it moves, and the path patterns it forms (curve, straight, zigzag). As the body moves in space it leaves “traces” that create, what is called, “sculptural space,” that is the visible space of choreography. He therefore proposes a practical exploration that studies the relationships between the body and other bodies and objects, the relationships created as the body moves, the forms it takes, its interaction with space and the effort it makes each time to realize a movement (Maletic, 1987).

The analysis of movement he developed, helps to describe movement in a qualitative and quantitative way that is applicable to any method of researching body movement. As the element of space is analysed also verbally, it becomes a key element in the practice of improvisation, enhancing the cultivation of the perception of space. It also plays a central role in choreographic experimentation making it evident that the posture and position of the body in space is a statement and offers specific meanings. Laban's analysis has influenced later artists in how they see and understand the body.

## The Aspect of Space in Dance Performance

The positioning of the body in space has engaged dancers and choreographers who have begun to question the conventions of spatial organization that were previously proposed. As early as the 1950s, the dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham (1919-2009) considered that the moving body was in itself extremely interesting and did not need to represent anything else, e.g. character, idea, story etc. and began for the first time to reconfigure the theatrical stage space by abandoning the conventions implied by the frontal focus of the stage, creating choreographies with complex arrangements and complex spatial relationships between the dancers. He used public spaces for his performances and called them “events.” He collaborated with artists from other fields, such as music and visual arts, creating performances that could even be presented in galleries or museums. The coexistence of bodies and art forms open the field for further experimentation in the rearrangement and use of space for the production of art.

More artists and choreographers of that period, influenced by the developments, moved away from the theatres, such as Alan Kaprow with “happenings,” and began to explore a broader conception of choreography. These innovations included choreographers from Judson Church Dance Theatre who performed in the city and radically expanded notions of sustainable places for choreography. At the same time the adoption of everyday movement as a core

movement vocabulary (e.g. Lucinda Childs, Trisha Brown.) are indicators of this new practice that is detached from pre-existing aesthetic codes (Rubidge, 2012).

Trisha Brown's early works included walking on walls, performances on rooftops and happenings in private apartments. Lucinda Childs' *Street Dance* (1964) is often cited as an example of early site-specific dance performance as the choreographer questions human engagement with the built environment and promotes the idea that everything can be seen as a dance.

These works and many more created by postmodern choreographers such as Simone Forti, Douglas Dunn and Meredith Monk avoided conventional ways of presenting dance and often incorporated everyday activities and movements. Other movement practitioners such as Deborah Hay, Steve Paxton and Anna Halprin approached dance through dance improvisation and performed in open space. While these works did not label themselves as “site-specific” at the time, they reflect the concepts of today's site-specific dance performance (Hunter, 2015).

Modern dance evolves in line with the events of each era. The presence of women as early as the beginning of the 20th century asserting their participation in political, economic and social life is decisive, and the economic depression in the 1930s in America makes dance present as a means of political activism (Barbousi, 2014). New experimentation continues to resist the restrictions of ballet performance. The body that appears on stage is not intended to astonish with its virtuosity, but is presented as an everyday body, familiar to the viewer, performing simple choreographic patterns (Vounelaki, 2021). The adoption of everyday movements combined with alternative performance spaces such as public urban space or museums have reconfigured expectations of the art of dance. Experiments with movement and space as key parameters continue to expand the boundaries of dance art, creating new models in terms of form, the role of artists and the conceptualisation of performance space.

In the emerging genre of site-specific art, the audience becomes an integral part of the creative process. Instead of watching the artwork, the spectators should instead inhabit it as they inhabit the world.

Contemporary site-specific dance performances are presented in a variety of forms as the genre continues to evolve and incorporates a wide variety of elements from contemporary circus, walking practice, land art, durational performances, etc. Many artists focus on the relationship between body and space and use tools from site specific art and walking art to explore people's relationship to space, landscape, and the city.

Choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker started a walking performance in 2016 that was repeated in 2018 and 2019. It is a slow walk that invites participants to pause and reflect on the city and try to approach it through the most basic form of movement: walking. De Keersmaeker wants to prove that walking is dancing and that everyone has the ability to dance anytime and anywhere. It is an opportunity to highlight dance as a medium that can bring

people together in public space in an accessible way and can help change our perception of this space. (De Keersmaeker, 2019).

The field of choreography has also been expanded by the art of video dance where the “video space” becomes a site of choreography and through installation works where the artists worked with digital media, video and cinema. Dance environments are created even in digitally augmented spaces through interaction (Rubidge, 2012).

The structured space in which movement takes place does not change the shape or dimensions of the space, but it does change the form it takes in our perceptual experience. Scholar and artist Sarah Rubidge (2012) has pointed out that as dancers move, the relationships between the mobile and “static” features of space change. The viewer perceives space in a different way, creating a different experience of the environment in which she/he is present. Therefore, movement shapes the space.

## Conclusion

When tracing the developments in the use of space in dance performances historically, changes in the perception of space and the body in each period are visible. From ballet performances that highlighted virtuosic movement and were limited to specific arrangements of bodies in space, dance performance now requires a broader kinesthetic awareness of the environment and the surroundings in which the body moves. The choice of kinesiology and performance site, highlight the personal expression of the artist or a group of people and the placement of the body in space is a crucial choice for both the aesthetic and the conceptual dimension that the artist wants to present. Dance, which had been the entertainment of the king's court, changed its role, making the body a means of spreading ideas, reflection, claiming rights and protest both in dance performances and in everyday life. The paths we traverse, the way we move and walk either as individuals or collectively makes evident our relationship to the places we inhabit and the way we mutually shape each other as integral members of the same environment.

Although the notion of “choreographic space” is broad and clearly extends beyond the practice of dance, in general terminology it often simply refers to the spaces in which choreography takes place: theatrical venues, installation rooms, urban areas, domestic places, rural landscapes, etc. However (beyond the topological) it can also refer to the more dynamic spatiotemporal space that is inherent in any choreographic project and is created by the activity of dancers as they perform a choreography or by people as they engage in everyday movement in public spaces. In other words, the choreographic space may have two aspects/perspectives. The first is that it is a field for choreography. The second is that the action itself within a space can make it “choreographic.” By turning our attention away from any

primary functional purposes of the space, and focus on the movement that is already happening there; the space is being choreographed (Rubidge, 2012).

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# Anti-Memory. The Space Where the Body Moves Becomes its Place of Origin

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## Abstract

This article approaches the process of aesthetic creation that involves physical performance practices. It focuses on how memory, performative action, and space interact with each other and how the past can be perceived differently. The research process focuses on building a "sensory" approach that delves into the communication between space, body, memory, and history. It does not prioritise content but rather integrates history and its narration through performative action, emphasising the significance of memory and its continuity. The shift from research to performance can recall the connection between experience and memory. As the bodies reframe their historical perception of the event in the present moment, they gain a sense of unity. As the performance highlights the importance of using art to speak about history in today's society, empowering its members' relationships.

*Keywords:* Physical practices, public space, history, memory, site-specific performance, theatre

## Anti-Memory. The Space Where the Body Moves Becomes its Place of Origin

In this study, as we are using sources from oral history (Abrams, 2016) and its imprint on the perception of public history, we focus on the ethnography of the persecuted body and its demand to be integrated by restoring its absorption deficit in social cohesion. Throughout the performance, the configuration of the way we perceive the rights of the “Other” changes. Thus, a spectacle testimony is formed, as it activates a complex palimpsest that relates to its stratifications, the body, the public space, the text, the mnemonic testimony, and the reportage (Rigopoulou, 2008).

**Figure 1**

The Will. *Video still by Patricia Lazou*.



By studying the creation of the art of action, as performance is characterised, leading art forms that are not stored in museum spaces, the use of public space is also examined. A field of claims that includes the event, the action, and the environment, allowing the symbolic similarity of the viewers who enter and are surrounded by it Through the artistic event, personal history, which is part of collective history, highlights a monumental "text" that transforms bodies into punctuation marks, shaping the anthropology of social memory (Patsalides, 2013).

The ongoing practice acquires a self-limiting and therefore ecological and artistic behaviour of ontological choice. It aims to capture the emergence of the elements that try to coexist in space, broadening the way it improves the relationship between the sign and the whole, through the artistic performance project. In the context that is formed and constitutes field research with qualitative characteristics, the viewer is integrated into the produced action. The viewer perceives an action that captures a series of questions related to creativity and the causes of aesthetic conflicts triggered by history as it interferes with people's relationships. As the man or woman narrates, they enter the centre of history.

Through this idea, the following research questions arise:

Why performance? In which space? What happens in the body? What is the physical context that guides the field of negotiation between the theoretical approach and the substantiation of interpretation? If public space acts as a melting pot for recycling private experiences by projecting and embodying what we allow to appear in our public presence, can we rise to the challenge?

If we reverse the order of the stimuli, can public experience and the collective memory of historical records constitute a narrative that starts from our need to be part of a journey with heroic moments, with small or big expectations, with traumas and temporal discontinuities? If our goal concerns our contact with the past through experience, what do we choose from the "bank of memories"?

How is the information illuminated strengthened and utilised over time for society?

Researching the origins and conquest of the right of citizens to use public space from ancient times to the present day, I have repeatedly asked myself what we define as public space. I am looking for the possibility of finding a definition that contains space for people, allowing them to participate in the diffusion of the historical narrative, which is reproduced by their public search and sees in a new way the circularity of the relationship: city-empty space/occupied space-inhabitant.

The subjective perception of facts is at the same time responsible for objective testimony. The “person-archive,” the witness of narration by an elder or a previous lived experience, lost in their past "when these things happened", still keeps the shock of their participation in historical time.

Despite its problems of completeness and objectivity, oral history has the role of the starting point from which research begins. Despite its problems of completeness and objectivity, oral history is the starting point from which research begins. It is very important to emphasise that in the Greek historical documentation of the events the possibility of accessing the archives was achieved much later, since no archives were kept. (Vervenioti, 2008).

As I was writing my paper, I wondered what kind of place a text that substantiates theoretical research for an experiential action acquires, if it fails to incorporate memory “during its “aestheticization” listening. To avoid the creation of a latent relationship, which prevents the closeness between the metaplastic memory of the creator-informant with the institutional memory that is often imposed on the viewer. The boundaries that distinguish these two issues can only be perceived through the performances that create the conceptual framework developed through the ethics of activism (Bakhtin, 1981).

So, if this performance is separated from the truth of its composition, we have a spectacle of suffering caused by this separation (Debord, 1986). Then the viewer's side, if they do not manage through this evocative experience to leap consciousness (Barba, 2019) and to differentiate organically, enjoying the appropriation of space, contributing to the mobilisation of the public community through memory, is repositioned in the Platonic view, which renders them inactive (Rancier, 2008).

The viewer perceives their reflection on the spectacle, but also its influential functionality, which has been taken away from them. This deprives them of the possibility of experiencing a

situation where the information of historical flow can be captured without having to be presented as a painful “ritual drama” (Levi, 2012).

But this separated reality, which is being substantiated to be abolished, is the paradox of the viewer's position. After that, they return to search for their connection with the performative experience. This reactivates the exchange of energy, that relates the person who sees to what is seen.

This brings us to the concept of "life nexus" (Dilthey, 2010). Our shared experiences are a result of constantly processing sensory input and drawing from historical data, forming a grid of life.

Dramatised content about public space favours the breadth of artistic connections in the area of cultural consciousness. Space emerges as a flowing, constantly enriched complex network of dynamic social relations. The viewer organically remembers and connects with space through trans-local memory, which stimulates memories that his body carries, and revives approaching the truth of performative action.

Our approach considers the relationship between the natural environment and the human body, using movement as a guide to understand their codes of operation, development, and changes. The body's adaptability deteriorates when exposed. Performance coexists with space, not just seeks assimilation.

The performer needs to draw first kinetic ideas that, although they do not perceive him in the broad and usual sense of the term, lead them to "represent" images whose dynamics and momentum bring out the intensity of events that took place in the past in the space where the body acts.

The emphasis is on highlighting the body as a later addition. A material point that contributes to the “restoration of the damage” of memory for the physical public space or mnemonic place, which, as it constitutes a map of genealogical awareness and aesthetic identity, becomes a carrier of the co-managed memory that retrieves the event and favours the awareness of the experience.

The relationship between performing art and public space includes research that site-specific action incorporates the biography of the place, the public sphere, and the historical moment.

## The Artistic Action – The Artist

If the term representation is used, it may suggest a process of restating how something is perceived as an event. it is particularly useful to approach honestly and easily the mediator-performer who is involved in creating a direction that stands the test of time.

Acting as a magnifying glass, this artist selects themes of the past, which concern human decisions and intersect in the evergreen landscape. The present that the viewer experiences and participates in, makes them a relative to the circumstances and not a host.

The physical specificity that is proposed in the live representation always has an intense energy and an essential truth. It discusses the present time and the immediate impact of the event it presents. It is born, grows, matures, and ages along with its viewer, who for as long as they watch it appropriates the role of an eyewitness who can certify that the event happened.

Through the spectacle, the viewer approaches, knows, and understands public space, through the prism that the functional, suffering body offers. Through various techniques that connect the approach of space with historical information, the body is called upon to abandon its usual choices, to renounce its ideal characteristics, and to give visibility along with events, to the harshness of the past (Rosenberg, 2016).

At the same time, the observer, along with the experience of viewing, also experiences decay. The time captured by the performance expands and is reflected to the person watching it. Performers and spectators' "stage" together variables of reality and restore lost pieces of a personal or public story. The political act of performance dares to fill the spatial void of the city, "structuring" a new way of reading the function of its inhabitants, dedicating to them the memory of the space that surrounds them (Stavridis,2016).

The artist, drawing on the sources of performance history, intersects and reconstructs the body politics. Empowered by ontological theories, the individual becomes strong and willing to accept the power of human endurance, and to confront authority (Castoriadis, 2017)

## The Body

The research for physical practices leads into our relationship with anti-memory. While creating a safe and open environment that can provide visibility into the fragmented historical unexpected. Under this perspective, the space guides the body in interpreting its orality.

If the body settles in memory space, it has the task of searching among emotional and morphic fragments for deviations from history. "It seeks unity, even if it is inaccessible, utopian, impossible and, precisely for this reason, dramatic" (Kounellis,1991). The body finds its identity and builds resistance to the divestment of the ecological footprint that the social environment causes to the natural (Uytterhoeven, 2019).

The way a performer interprets a piece of work can influence the structure overall. Through their performance, they can convey memories and personal experiences, shedding light on the cultural context of the piece. This can reshape history and add a new perspective to it. Ultimately, the story a performer “talks” about themselves is unmediated and personal (Van Buschoten, 2016).

This is why research into our relationship to anti-memory, i.e., visibility into the fragmented historical unexpected, guides the body in interpreting its orality. It makes it capable while distinguished from space or monument, to "infuse" with its aesthetic choices the material landscape it tries to bring out. Its kinetic identity is the other material, which, although it is now "read" as part of the environment, is not assimilated, but reveals its reconciliation with natural decay and exposure to it (Cooper Albright, 2015).

The site-specific performance, which focuses on physical artistic intervention, is organised, inspired, and created around the particular habitat in which it will take place. It creates an experimental field of reconstitution and documentation of our desired relationship with ourselves, the environment, and the common public place. A process like this gives us the responsibility while acting in and for the environment to set limits for its protection as its importance determines.

The psychosocial organisation and attitude toward life, which are stimulated by the imagination of an individual, are not necessarily meaningful but still affect different aspects of one's life (Castoriadis, 2017). This concept is related to various cultural phenomena that develop a kind of "cultural mobility". Regardless of the aesthetic origins, the dynamics of this concept can promote a pluralistic perception of the necessary ecological sensitivity, which emphasises the coexistence of natural changes, historical records, and human individuation.

## The Metadata of Performance. Space

The urban public space is a "syntactic" element of the city that acts as a balance concerning the built environment. The public space of the city, therefore, which coincides quite a lot with the free urban space, is the syntactic gap of the city, the built space on the contrary constitutes the syntactic complete of the city. However, the characteristic of free and equal access to public space gained through social struggles is not a given. Participation in public space has been freed from restrictions related to gender, class, and race, but it still retains its "normative" character, constituting a space of inclusion and acceptance where "foreigners", whomever they may be, will have to fight for their integration into the public sphere. That is, where one stands to talk about the city, what one examines, what questions one poses, how one approaches, and how one assembles the various information collected.

The concept of “public space” has been introduced into the debate on the city since the mid-20th century in the context of a broader reflection that seeks to extricate urban space from its dominant static and purely territorial significance, and to link it to broader socio-political issues.

The post-use of buildings and public spaces is like an invisible writing. Information of the biography concerning the building and is legitimised through the disclosure of this in the public sphere. In this context, initially with the great contribution of social research and then through interdisciplinary approaches that often arise from multiple osmotic influences between different cognitive areas, questions arise that concern not only the parameters of spatial formation but also the criteria for its approach.

Therefore, emphasis is given to how we try to understand the mechanisms that govern the issues of space, the way we seek the internal logic of coherence of systems of thought and behaviour that concern it and we can summarise with the following description.

Public space is the “stage” where the spectacle of public life unfolds. Streets, squares, parks, monuments, and landmarks in a city give shape to the type and evolution of human interactions. Public spaces help people satisfy their important needs, shape, and protect basic human rights and transmit special cultural meanings, encourage social exchange, free communication, between strangers. Public space is the type of stable or unstable equilibrium between order and disorder, the changing organisation of contradictions (Butler, 2018).

## Epilogue

Through the strong bond, which is encapsulated in the relationship between memory and oblivion and makes the historical site a place of intergenerational interaction, the research-artistic palimpsest that emerges, offers the opportunity to approach the body and the "dramaturgy" that takes place in the spaces where it is revealed. The generosity by which artistic actions are guiding the relationship of artists by reshaping the demands of public opinion into acts of transformation, collective benefit, and acceptance. The body and everything that is inscribed in it, "organises" an artistic gesture, a kinematic catharsis, at the barricades of historical memory, which connects the meaning of the significance of the historical site through the relationship of the body with it. The body and its care concerns the common denominator that life cannot overcome: Decay.

An interconnection of the retrospective view of the past through the reconciliation of official history with memory. A spatial shift in the body of the performers that imbues in the present tense passions, terrors, manners, wounds, and possible reversals, which save the anatomy of the human desire for interpretation and possible reconciliation with the unthinkable, when we talk about the lived experience of collective evil. The experience in which the eyewitness is

absent and in his place as mediator and carrier of information is the artist (Celan, 1996). The influence of actions that expand knowledge about human beings and the events that involve them as they are given meaning by them eliminates inequalities. As the scope of these actions is large, it gives space to the desire of the viewer to protect his/her trace and his/her origin. The human condition, while space remains, deteriorates. It is differentiated, decommissioned, changed, but continues to exist and recalls its continuity, through the historical and genealogical circles that define each other. It reminds bodies that encounter history in public space, of their ability to absorb, without silencing, the moments that define memory. But to turn it into a starting point for artistic creation and a way of deepening documents (Van Steen, 2019).

Through research and trust in historical science and art, focusing on the variable factors added by public history, people are placed at the central point of the map of their choices. The dynamics articulated through the artists bodies and the exhibition in public space strengthen social cohesion through the influential act that constitutes the claim of shaping the urban and non-urban, cultural-historical continuum.

## Photo Annex of Performances in Public Space

Within the historical, social, and artistic context, place, memory, desire, trauma, and Greek history coexist (Kounellis,1991). At the old prison’s administration office, which is preserved in the form it had until today, although it has changed use and is now part of the Tsitanis museum. The meta use of the building offers a research and study centre for new artists. It is available for recording music sessions, painting exhibitions, traditional music workshops, concerts, and other artistic practices.

This performance was the practical part of my thesis, for my master's degree in Art and Public Space.

**Figure 2**

Interrogation, *March 2005. A secret performance at Athens. The National Insurance Building. The anti-aircraft shelter ordered by the German Commander during the German Occupation. Photo by Spyros Tsakiris.*



**Figure 3**

The Will. *Video still by Patricia Lazou. Solo performance, Trikala, Thessaly*



**Figure 4**

The Will. *Video still by Patricia Lazou*



**Figure 5**

The Will. *Video still by Patricia Lazou*



**Figure 6**

The Will. *Video still by Patricia Lazou*



**Figure 7**

The Will. *Video still by Patricia Lazou*



**Figure 8**

The Will. *Video still by Patricia Lazou, the wall before the restoration*



**Figure 9**

Look back, *May 2023.Children's performance with their families. The telephone of the prison visitors, Tsitsani museum.*

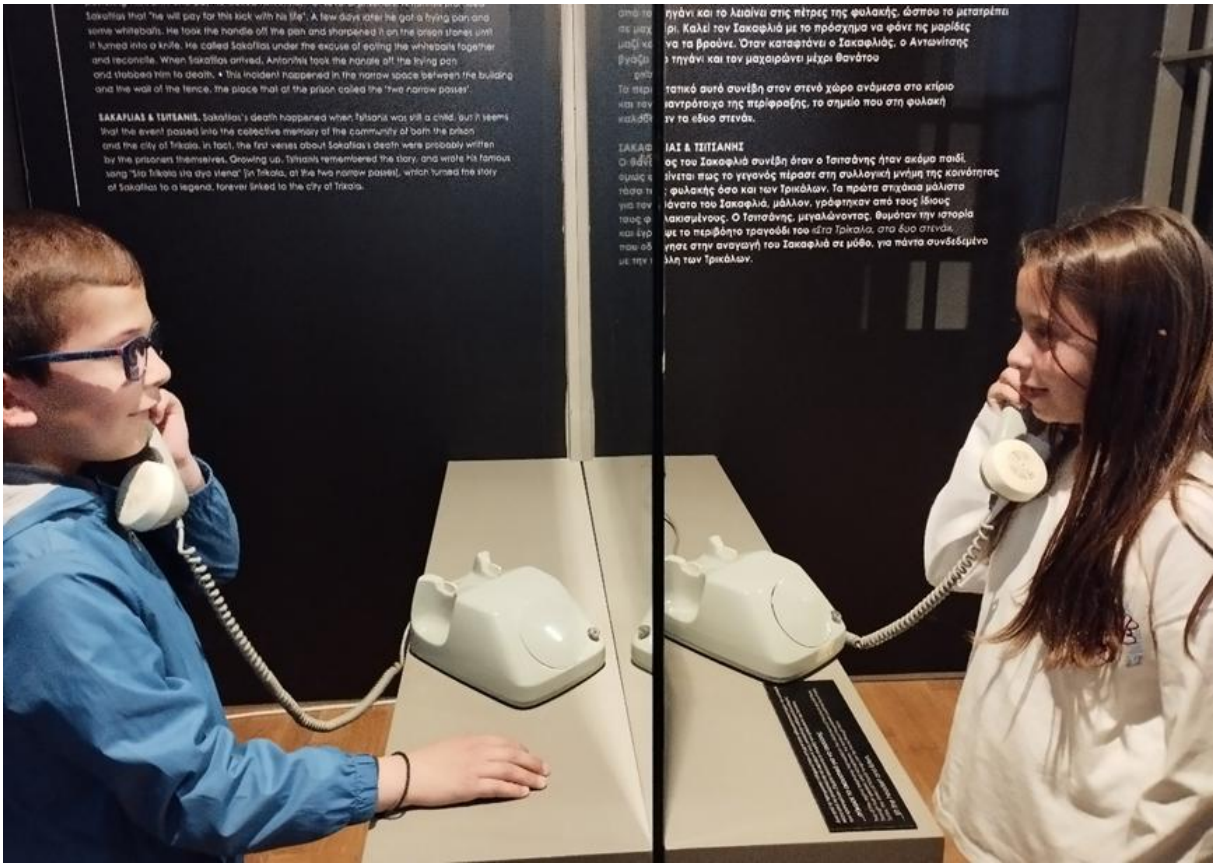


**Figure 10**

24 scale, *June 2017. Ioannina. The site-specific performance took place during the conference "Archaeological dialogues". A walking route for the audience, in the logic of flâneurs. From the dock of the lake of Ioannina to the islet of the lake, through the alleys of the island and led to a ceremony in the monastery at the highest point of the island. Photo by Penni Noutsopoulou.*



**Figure 11**

*Duende,* House of Bernarda Alba, *April 2016, in the old the old flood control factory. Photo by Thanos Floulis.*



**Figure 12**

Dying in April, *April 2017. Site-specific performance. Monument of the young fighters of the left party who were executed by the Germans during the occupation. Instead of a memorial. Work commissioned by the Municipality of Trikala. Photo by Giannis Floulis.*



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# The "CATography" of Ano Syros. A Different Narration

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## Abstract

With the consensus view that the cats are considered as a powerful and recognisable element that can actively contribute to the promotion and acceptance of projects in which they participate, an "alternative" mapping of the landscape of the settlement of Ano Syros (Syros Island, Greece) with cats as protagonists was created. This study was conducted by the authors for the 7th Interdisciplinary Seminar on Sustainable Development, Culture and Tradition at the Syros Institute. To the reasonable question "why cats?", the answer is: "Because in Ano Syros, cats are everywhere! Here, cats are not considered as stray cats, they are practically roommates with the inhabitants of Ano Syros and can easily break the threshold between public and private space".

A cat count map was created showing the population density of cats on specific routes in Ano Syros. In addition, a map was designed showing the most frequently visited/preferred posts of the most recognisable cats in Ano Syros. Snapshots taken from various landmarks in the settlement are then used to create a cute narrative of the landscape through the eyes of the cats themselves, with the cats as the main characters. An approach, with these popular tourists - residents as the main characters in the photographic composition, can highlight the peculiarities of the region with humour and unexpected clarity. In addition to providing insight in to the local atmosphere, it also helps raise awareness of the importance of preserving and promoting the island's cultural and architectural heritage. Also, it can contribute to the protection and care of this precious domestic animal.

It is essentially a creative game of exploration and discovery of Ano Syros, inviting the spectator and, at the same time, potential visitor, to follow, study, discover or rediscover and, ultimately, fall in love with Ano Syros.

Place marketing consists of strategically designed processes that rely on a deep knowledge of place image and place identity (Deffner, 2012). Against this background and

accepting that cats are an inseparable part of island life and landscape, together with the dynamics of these adorable and popular pets, the development of innovative digital applications that promote Ano Syros with a fun and playful spatial performativity can play an important role in place marketing and certainly constitutes one of the ultimate aims of this work.

*Keywords:* Cats, Ano Syros, landscape, psycho-geographic mapping, spatial performativity, narration.

## The "CATography" of Ano Syros. A Different Narration

Places have primary ontological importance as centres of physical activity, meaning and emotional connection for people. The meaning of place is based on the existential or lived consciousness of the *locus* (Tilley, 1994). Thus, the place is not only its spatial data but also “its temporalities and the Discourse and the Legend that its people create as well as their activities and works” Stefanou (2017, personal communication).

The ways of the body's existence in the world are the senses, which act in an overlapping way. We do not perceive the environment by sight alone. All the senses (sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste) participate in this perception. We are talking about warm and cool colours, hard and soft sounds, and we are essentially transferring qualities from one sensory domain to another. The experience of the senses is holistic, as it is the whole that prevails.

Landscape is a multidimensional concept, which is characterised by a particular variety of approaches and meanings in different sciences and countries. The definition given by the European Landscape Convention in Florence (2000) allows the necessary differentiation to be made between landscape and geographical space. Landscape is the collective perception of a place. It is the set of forms, patterns, colours, sounds, living or non-living beings that interact with the cognitive and emotional experiences of humans, leading to the creation of feelings, appreciation, enjoyment, recall of memories, etc., through a process of in taking of impressions and combining all the above elements. A necessary condition is the presence of an observer, who perceives the parts that make up the landscape as a whole, using the senses, memory, perception and emotion (Lynch, 1962).

The cartography of the landscape constitutes the “image” of the meaning of the landscape, through which the contact of humans with the place is made (Bachelard, 1958). It is not a simple representation but the map becomes a tool to explain situations in space.

This project aims at an alternative mapping of the landscape of Ano Syros with cats as protagonists (Figure 1) in a double role. Cats as "narrators" become the new, different, "eyes" to discover the place, but also as its basic biotic element they are an independent part of its mapping.

**Figure 1**

*The World Is a Cat…*
*Source:*
*https://files.brightside.me/files/news/part_34/340760/preview-14760910-650x341-98-1497874087.jpg*




## Performance of Anthropomorphism in Animals

Humans tend to enrich the real or imagined behaviour of non-human entities with human psychological or physical characteristics, such as emotions, intentions, motivations, etc. The above process is called anthropomorphism. From ancient times to the present, the animal, as a concept and as a form, has been a favourite source of inspiration in art and literature. Throughout time in art, animals often acquire thought and speech, interact with humans or possess anthropomorphic characteristics. Sometimes they are the medium for projecting moral thoughts and behaviours, while other times they are negative examples, symbolising something dangerous, terrifying and inferior to human.

Since prehistoric times, people have been re-enacting scenes from hunting animals in caves. In *Aesop's Fables* (*Beast Fables*), for didactic and fictional reasons, animals take on human characteristics and behaviours. In the performing arts and literature, the animals are often treated as speaking subjects who are assigned exemplary moral behaviours, such as providing selfless help to all, including humans, or contributing to the smooth coexistence of all beings.

Animal anthropomorphism can take many forms, from depictions of animals with human characteristics and emotions in mythology, literature, art, and even everyday speech used to describe the behaviour of pets and other animals.

Domestic animals show a higher level of anthropomorphism, as they are often referred to as human companions. At the same time, living with animals seems to influence the performance of emotions, mainly secondary ones, in them (Morris *et al*, 2012). Whereas, in a study of similar content, it is mentioned that the greater number of emotions are attributed to pets (Berry & Wilkins, 2017).

The anthropomorphic use of animals is widespread even today. It is not only limited to artistic depictions, such as cartoons, comics, fairy tales, motion pictures, plays, songs and

literary texts. It also appears in advertisements, in company names or logos, seeking greater appeal to the buying public.

## The Cats in Literature and Art

In *Aesop's Fables* (*Beast Fables*), cats are symbolic characters. In the classic fairy tale *Puss in Shoes (Le Maître chat)*, with the help of the cat, its poor master becomes king.

There are many artistic creations with cats as protagonists in Modern Greek literature, as *The Story of a Cat* by Emmanuel Roıdis (2018[60]) or in Greek poetry like *Monogramma* by Odysseus Elytis (1974[61]) and “The cats of trucks” in the poetry collection *Marabou* by Nikos Kavvadias (1990[62]) or in Greek songs, such as *Serenata* by Arleta (1984[63]) and *The Cat* by Perpiniadis[64] & Mathesis (1937[65]).

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[60] Emmanuel Roıdis (1836-1904) was an important Greek writer and essayist.
*The Story of a Cat* was written in 1893 and refers to the memories of Emmanuel Roidis, when he was a boarder at the Evangelidos High School in Syros. His nostalgia for the unjustly killed *Semina,* the brilliant boarding school cat who kept him company in his childhood, inspired him to compose a hymn about the virtues of the sweetest felines.

[61] Odysseus Elytis (1911-1986) was a Greek poet, man of letters, essayist and translator, regarded as the definitive exponent of romantic modernism in Greece and the world. He is one of the most praised poets of the second half of the twentieth century (The Collected Poems of Odysseus Elytis,1997) with his *Axion Esti* "*regarded as a monument of contemporary poetry*" (Haviaras, 1991). In 1979, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

The first edition of the poetry collection *Monogramma* took place in 1971 in Brussels, in a limited number of copies. The third edition (second in Greece) was published in 1974 by Ikaros.

[62] Nikos Kavvadias (1910-1975) was a Greek poet, writer and a sailor by profession. He used his travels around the world, the life at sea and its adventures, as powerful metaphors for the escape of ordinary people, outside the boundaries of reality. His poems are widely regarded as belonging to symbolism and he has been characterised by some as a *poète maudit* (a poet living a life outside or against society) (Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NikosKavvadias).

The poem “The cats of trucks” is found in his first poetry collection, *Marabou*, which was published for the first time in 1933 by Kyklos publishing house. Since then, it was published 4 times by Galaxias publishing house (1961-1971), 16 times by Kedros publishing house (1975-1989) and, from April 1990 to June 2000, 13 times by Agra publishing house. It contains 22 quatrain poems (written with 'a methodical combination of part paroxysmal and part woven rhyme). The poem gives a taste of the harsh and lonely life of sailors.

[63] Arleta (1945-2017) was a Greek musician, author and book illustrator.

The song *Serenata* with the theme of the separation of a couple is included in the album *Peripou* (*Approx*) (1984) with composer Lakis Papadopoulos and lyricist Marianina Kriezi.

[64] Stellakis Perpiniadis (1927-2003) was a Greek folk singer, composer and bouzouki player.

[65] Nikos Mathesis [a.k.a. Crazy Nick] (1907-1975) was a Greek rebetiko musician. He is considered as the father of Rembetika music and the first great rembetiko lyricist.
The song *The Cat* by Stellakis Perpiniadis from the year 1937 in lyrics by Nikos Mathesis and composed by Stellakis Perpiniadis from the album 78 turns.
(Source: https://www.artsandthecity.gr/stixoi/η-γάτα-2/)

We can, also, find cats in world theatre like *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, an American three-act play written by Tennessee Williams (2004[66]), the musical *Cats* by Andrew Lloyd Webber (1981[67]) and more.

The author Alison Nastasi[68] (2015) has said:

> I think artists and cats are kindred spirits because they are often mythologised. They are both often stereotyped because of their supposed reputation as aloof or even self-centred' and perhaps not unfairly. We could say that cats have human behaviour. They do not have the loyalty and giving of dogs, they are bold, stubborn and independent with frequent changes in their behaviour (p.2).

Hydra Island has one of the most photographed and perhaps most famous cats in the world. Gabriela Staebler (2015), a world-renowned wildlife photographer, has published the book *Hydra, Island of Cats*, with photographs exclusively of the island and the life of the cats there. Emma Baus (2015), a well-known journalist, created the documentary titled *Kittenhood* filmed in France, Japan and Hydra, showing the life of cats in these three places. Both creators, depending on the perspective they each approached the cats, showed with their works that the cats are inextricably linked to the life and landscape of the island.

## Syros: The Island of (for) Cats

Syros is an island with a large number of cats. It is indicative of many of the inhabitants' love for those stray cats that's have their own "Café," which serves croquettes and fresh water (Figure 2). The veterinarian from Syros, Manolis Vorrisis together with other volunteers offers his services and fine treats to the stray cats of the island for many years. Also, in selected places, wooden feeders have been placed, which are fed by trained people and their cleanliness has been undertaken by the Municipality.

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[66] The play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* was published and produced in 1955 and won a Pulitzer Prize. The play exposes the emotional lies governing relationships in the family of a wealthy Southern planter of humble origins.

[67] *Cats* is a sung-through musical with music by Andrew Lloyd Webber. It is based on the 1939 poetry collection Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats by T. S. Eliot. The musical tells the story of a tribe of cats called the "Jellicles" and the night they make the "Jellicle choice" by deciding which cat will ascend to the Heaviside Layer and come back to a new life. As of 2022, *Cats* remains the fifth-longest-running Broadway show and the seventh-longest-running West End show.

[68] Alison Nastasi is an arts and culture journalist, author, and artist living in Los Angeles. Her writing has appeared in Angelus News, Darling Magazine, Gizmodo, Fandango, Moviefone, MTV, Pitchfork, RogerEbert.com, and more. She was a longtime editor for the website Flavorwire. Alison is the author of the popular books *Artists and Their Cats* and *Writers and Their Cats* from Chronicle Books (Source: https://www.alisonnastasi.com/about)

**Figure 2**

*The Vaporia Cats Café in the Homonymous Beautiful Neighbourhood of Ermoupolis, Syros Island (Archive of G. Eleftheraki & G. Tzamalis)*




Mr Vorrisis, on the occasion of the Netflix documentary about the “Syriani Cat,” spoke on SKAI TV and on the show, *I Love It* (2020) about his efforts and the efforts of his “collaborators” are making, in order to include this beloved animal, in the society of the island. He referred to the awareness-raising actions of the local community, both through the education spaces, and with other activities in order to have a global approach to cat protection, through adoptions, but also the sterilisation program that has been implemented in Syros for many years.

## Why Cats?

In Ano Syros, you find them everywhere ... in the picturesque stone streets... in the squares... in the small yards... on the thresholds of the houses... on the terraces... (Figure 3). Proud, with a sparkling look and bushy tail, they claim the attention and caresses of residents and travellers. Cute, mischievous, playful and friendly, they roam confidently or lie loosely showing off their shiny fur. Their number "competes" that of permanent residents. This, of course, remains to be proven when their registration/ identification is completed in the continuation of our research. Most have specific points that spend most of the twenty-four hours. The combination of protection from the weather and the generous offer of water and food by the residents make them feel like they are at “home,” they appropriate the space; make it their “own”. Friendly residents take care of the necessary vaccinations and sterilisations. The cats in Ano Syros are not stray animals, they are essentially people's roommates and comfortably break the boundaries between private and public space.

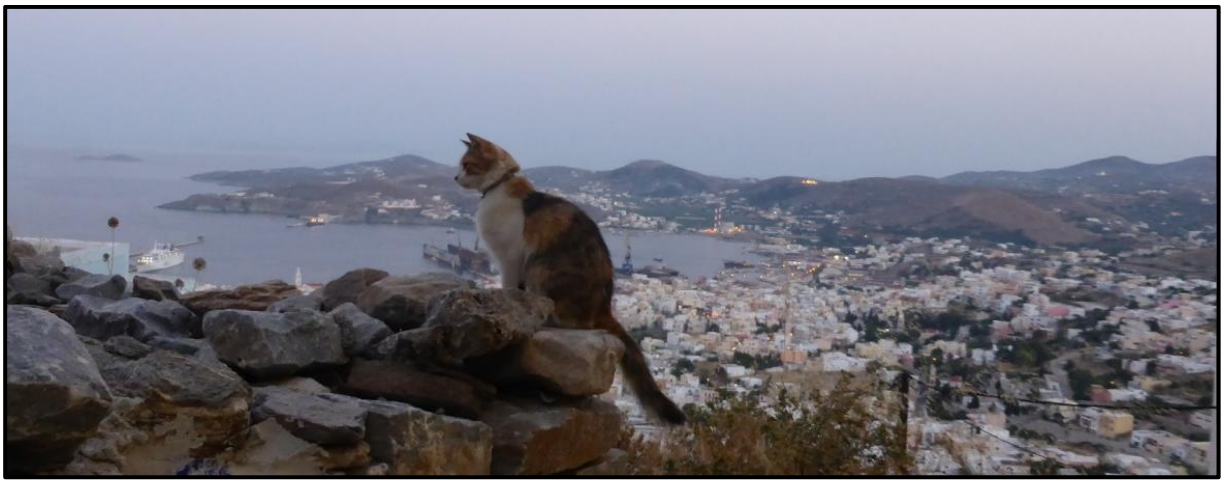
All this makes them ideal for the double role of observer/observed in the context of this alternative mapping. It is equally important that the cat, as an extremely beloved and popular animal, contributes positively to the promotion/acceptance of the ventures in which it participates. It is no coincidence that in September 2016 a group of creative people filled

London tube stations with photos of former stray cats from Battersea Dogs & Cats Home and Cats Protection shelters. They did it because they took it for granted that people love cats and want to see them, so they could more easily communicate the message that “when people want to, they can join forces to change the world.”

The presence of cats can enhance the dynamic of even the most famous landmarks. The case with the “famous cats of the Hermitage” is typical. It is one of the largest and most recognisable museums in the world, and the presence of its cats not only contributes to its stronger publicity, but is a powerful attraction in itself. In the same way, the cats of Ano Syros can become its symbol and its best ambassador worldwide.

**Figure 3**

*An Aegean Cat in Ano Syros (Archive of G. Eleftheraki & G. Tzamalis)*



## The Cat and Wandering in the Landscape of Ano Syros

From the first moment someone (passer-by, visitor, and traveller) finds himself in a place, he takes in a multitude of stimuli with his five senses. Corresponding feelings are created, inevitable comparisons are made with similar earlier experiences, perception is formed and finally the overall impression from the combination of these is registered in the memory, which will be added to the pool of memories.

Vision may be considered the dominant sense, but the final product results from multisensory processing. In several cases, a sensation takes centre stage: the smell of wet soil, the noise at a busy road intersection, the touch of warm sand on the beach in summer, the taste of a good wine. In other cases, the senses compete with each other on equal terms.

The observer is subjective to a very large extent, so any attempt to record/ capture/map a situation, a place, always contains subjective elements, despite any established standards that are followed. The conclusions can be very different, even for two people who experienced wandering in the same space together. Even the same person can form a different opinion

depending on his temporary emotional state and mood, interpreting and evaluating the same (theoretically) aesthetic stimuli.

The highlighting of this diversity and the approach with a “different look” is achieved in the present project by mapping (through) the cats of Ano Syros in selected routes. In this unusual approach, the cats of the settlement who are actually lawful permanent residents play the dual role of observer and object of observation. Through their multisensory stimuli, the cats become the new “eyes” for rediscovering the place, result in gin a description of the landscape from a new perspective. At the same time, however, they form an independent part of that cartography as a basic living element of the landscape.

Since cats are presumed to have high instincts and un biased emotional intelligence, using all five senses to understand their surroundings, the multisensory mapping becomes more objective by using the cats as the observers. Having the cats as the protagonists provides a more pure and primitive perspective. In addition, the existence of cats changes the urban and rural landscape and is an integral part of people's daily lives. Accepting them as equal “roommates,” provides more opportunities to describe the landscape (Hampshire County Council, 2012) and to disseminate information to the public.

## Around in the Picturesque Landscape of Ano Syros

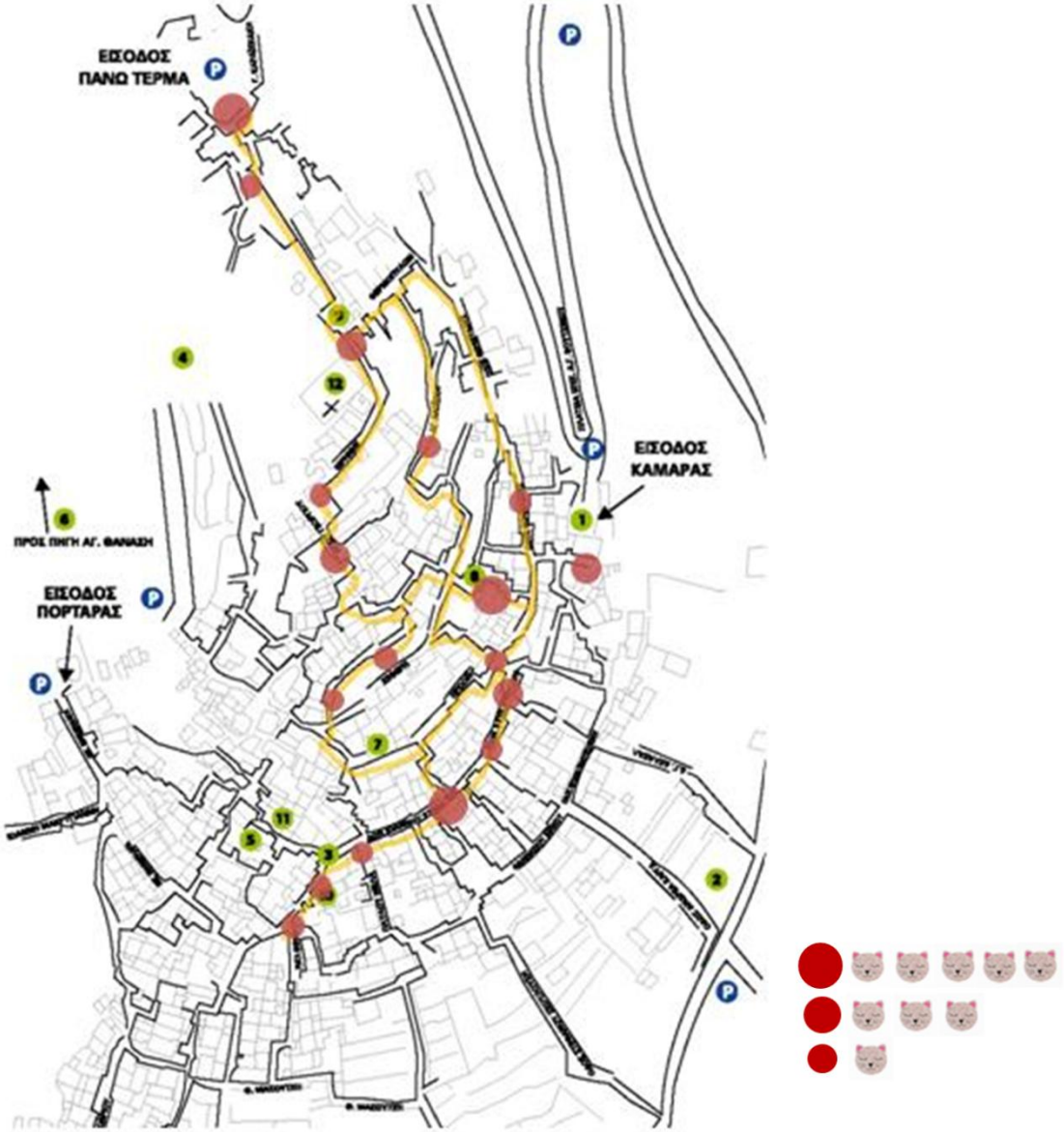
A cat count map was created showing the population density of cats on specific routes in Ano Syros (Figure 4).

## The Strolling of the Protagonists and Participants

A map was designed showing the most frequently visited/preferred posts of the most recognizable cats in Ano Syros (Figure 5).

**Figure 4**

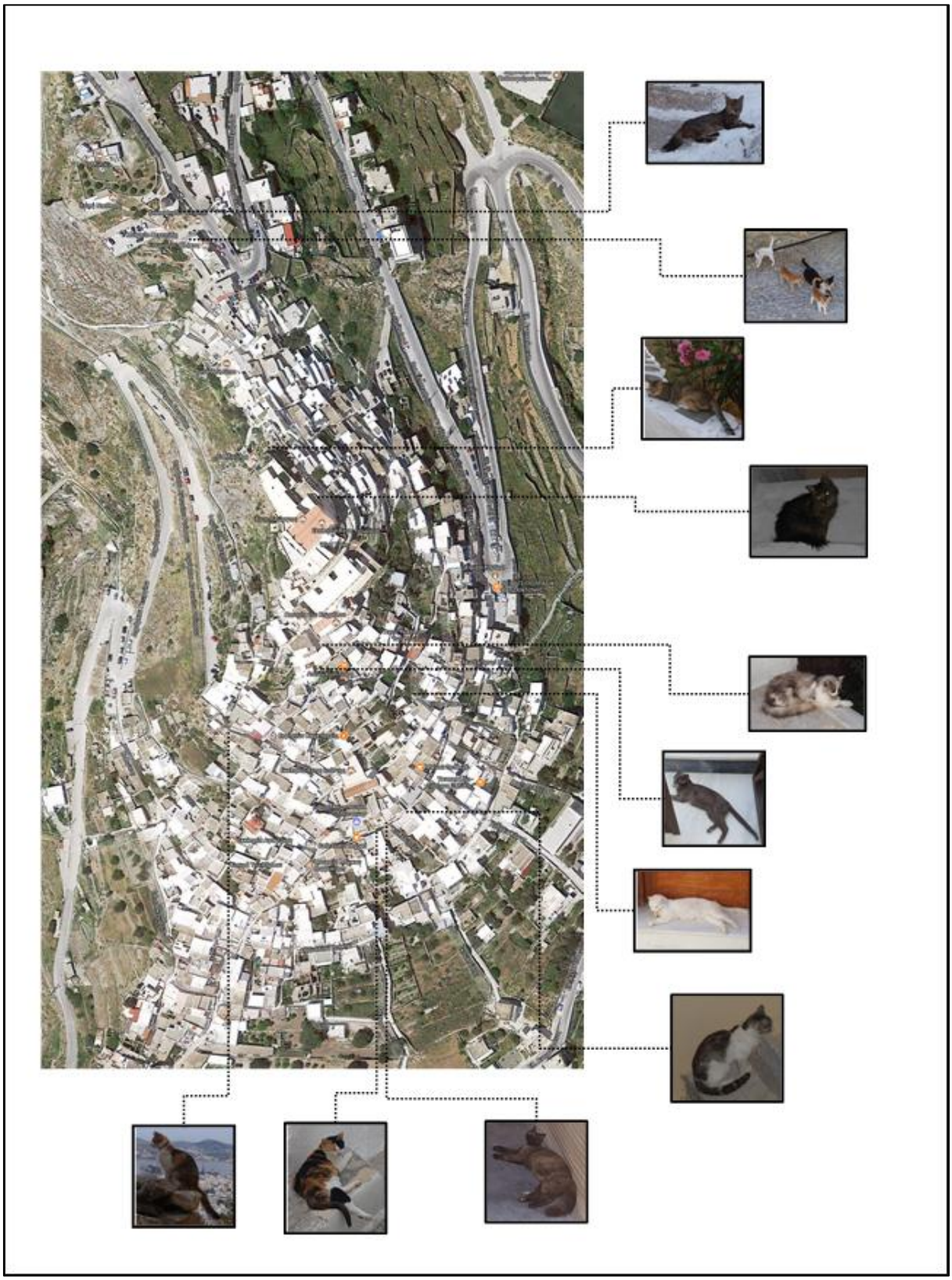
*Map of cat's concentration on selected routes in Ano Syros*[69] *(provided by the authors)*




[69] Map background: http://www.syrosagenda.gr/2012/07/blog-post_1899.html#.Wh8YrdJl_cs.

**Figure 5**

*Map With the Most Frequently Visited/Preferred Posts of the Most Recognizable Cats in Ano Syros (provided by the authors)*



## The Cats Narrate the Landscape of Ano Syros on a Hot Day of June

According to Suzanne Keen (2011), anthropomorphism as a human possibility appears to be able to enhance our empathy for non-human beings. Empathy in turn is the basis for developing an attitude of sympathy towards other animals. It could potentially develop a multitude of ethical reflections on the way we deal with everyday issues related to the environment, nature, flora or fauna.

**Figure 6**

*Poster: The "CATography" of Ano Syros. A Different Narration*




In this context, snapshots taken from various points of interest in the settlement of Ano Syros are then used to create a cute narrative of the landscape through the eyes of the cats

themselves, with the cats as the main characters (Figure 6). We created very short illustrated stories, giving anthropomorphic elements to cats. In these stories, the cats of the settlement describe what they perceive with their senses, such as the coolness of the breeze to the north part of the settlement. They talk about their feelings created by the contact with the human space, such as feelings of enjoyment, during a hot summer day, in the small shady courtyard of a residence of Ano Syros, the bliss from seeing the peaceful landscape of the port of Hermoupolis during the afternoon, the joy they feel because they will play with the other kittens, the peace of silence and much more.

An anthropomorphic approach, with these popular tourists – residents as the main characters in the photographic composition, can highlight the peculiarities of the region with humour and unexpected clarity. In addition to providing insight in to the local atmosphere, it also helps raise awareness of the importance of preserving and promoting the island's cultural and architectural heritage. Also, it can contribute to the protection and care of this precious domestic animal.

## Epilogue

This different narration is essentially a creative game of exploration and discovery of Ano Syros, inviting the spectator and, at the same time, potential visitor, to follow, study, discover or rediscover the *Genius Loci* (Norberg-Schulz, 2009), the physiognomy of the place and, ultimately, fall in love with Ano Syros.

**Figure 7**

*Design Representation of The "CATography" of Ano Syros by G. Eleftheraki & G. Tzamalis*



Place marketing consists of strategically designed processes that rely on a deep knowledge of place image and place identity (Deffner, 2012). According to Porter (2016, inside cover) “The Landscape – incorporating tangible physical space as well as intangible concepts, narratives, images, and experiences of place – is constructed by a number of creative industries”. Against this background and accepting that cats are an inseparable part of island life and landscape, together with the dynamics of these mass adorable and popular pets, the development of innovative digital applications that promote Ano Syros with a fun and playful spatial performativity can play an important role in place marketing and certainly constitutes one of the scopes of this project.

"The real journey of discovery does not include looking for new landscapes but having new eyes" Marcel Proust Quotes. (n.d.). BrainyQuote.com. Retrieved March 26, 2024, from BrainyQuote.com Web site: https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/marcel_proust_107111.

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# DIGITALSTAGE. Spatial Analysis of 21st Century Digital Scenographic Installations

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## Abstract

This paper aims to prove the interests, references, and objectives of the research project titled 'DIGITALSTAGE: Spatial Analysis of 21st Century Digital Scenographic Installations' (2022-2025), a project funded by the Ministry of Science and Innovation of the Spanish Government through its National Research Agency.

The main objective of the research project is to document, represent, and analyse, using digital architectural tools, the new spatiality that has been generated since the 1980s, particularly during the 21st century, in various scenographic installations (artistic, cultural, scenic, or audiovisual), due to the disruptive integration of digital software: videomapping, stagebots, sound environment, augmented reality, 3D modelling and projection, 360º vision, holograms, among others.

The aim is to provide the academic community with a cohesive analytical graphic methodology and documentation enabling, above all, the assessment of the significant spatial categories present in these stage configurations. In addition to the existing theoretical studies, it is expected to offer a new perspective by analysing their three-dimensional characteristics through procedures that have been already effectively used to comprehend and represent space in architecture, a discipline inherently focused on spatiality.

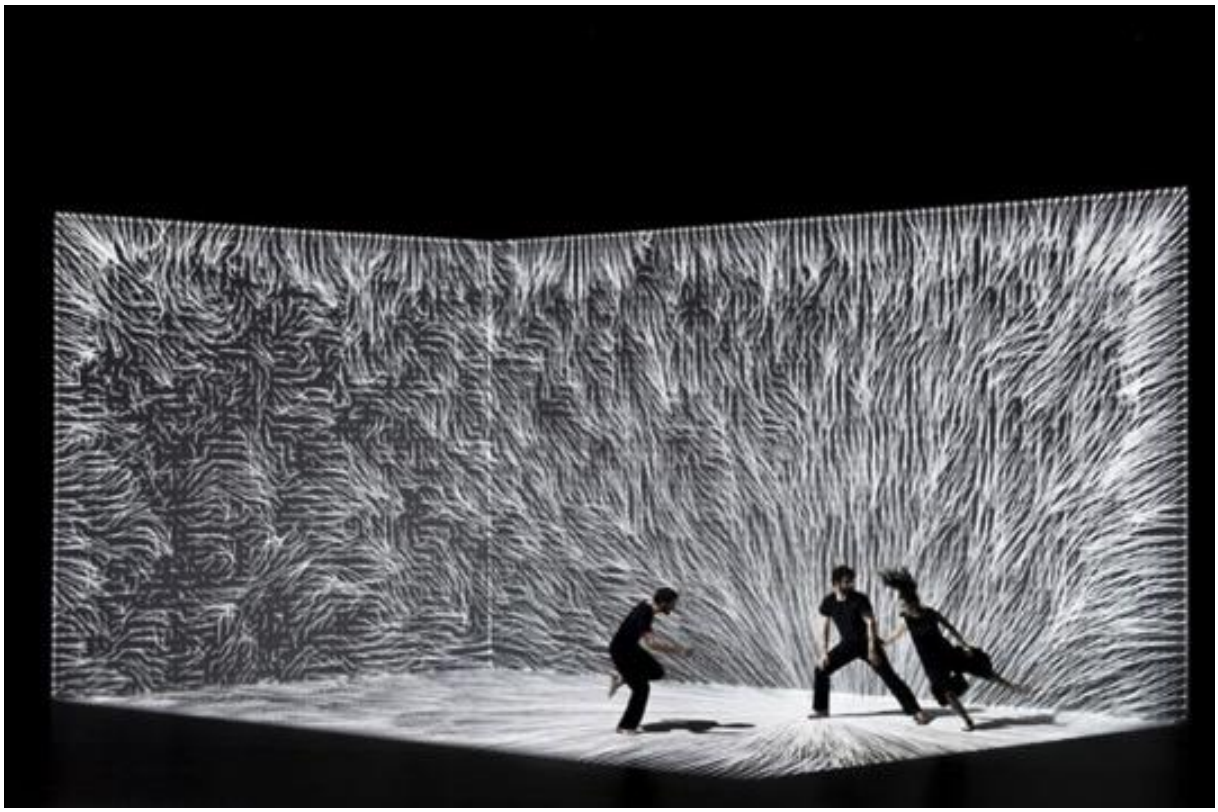
*Keywords:* Digitalstage, space, scenographic installations, research project.

## DIGITALSTAGE. Spatial Analysis of 21st Century Digital Scenographic Installations

The aim of this research project is to document, represent, and analyse, using architectural tools, the new spatiality that have emerged since the 1980s, particularly during the 21st century, in various forms of scenographic installations (artistic, cultural, scenic or audiovisual). These developments stem from the disruptive integration of digital software, including video mapping, stagebots, sound environments, augmented reality, 3D modelling and projection, 360° vision, holograms, among others. This innovative multimedia approach has unlocked unprecedented avenues of expression and plastic configurations. The digital stage thus attains levels of illusion and immersion akin to those observed in the Italian theatre, but paradoxically more interactivity.

**Figure 1**

Le mouvement de l'air, *2015. Adrien M & Claire B.*



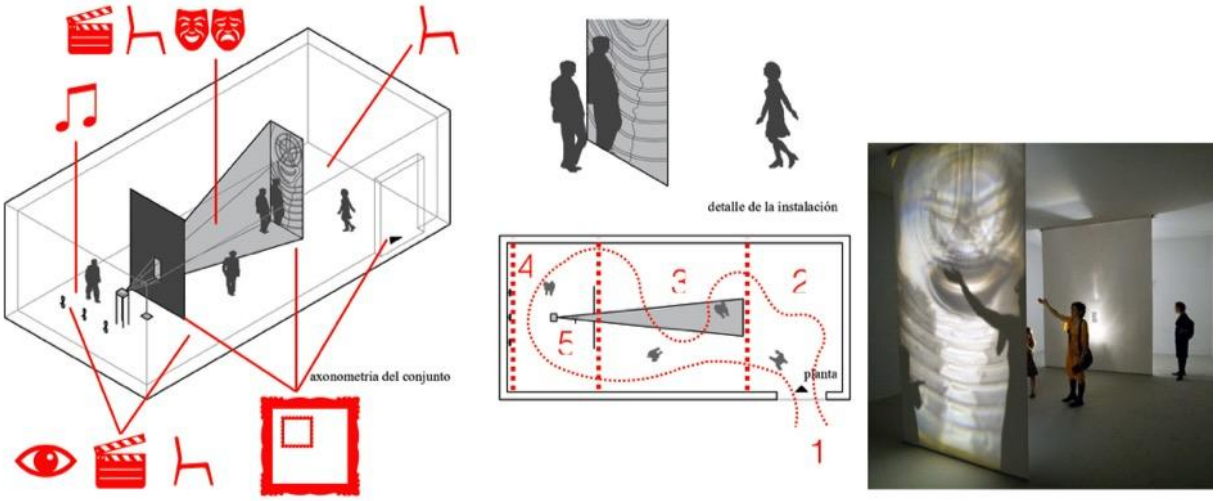
Digital scenography, if it doesn't fall into mere sensationalism, wields a spatial power previously unattainable. Firstly, it harnesses new technical resources, and secondly, it is a complex amalgamation of diverse media and disciplines, transcending the constraints of time and space, resonant with the "hypermodernity" of our era. Studying these installations can propel architecture beyond its self-referential confines. Furthermore, they represent experimental and flexible constructions, introducing innovative three-dimensional categories.

Analogous to brief essays, they diverge from architecture primarily in their more fictional essence, with a diminished emphasis on utility. These installations create the configuration of space not solely through geometric delineations, but also via phenomenological elements: light, imagery, graphics, atmosphere, and sound.

This architectural research project focuses on a contemporary form of scenography. Its methodology is predicated on a reasonably grounded assumption: the graphic tools employed in architectural analysis and spatial definition can offer valuable insights into understanding digital stage installations, which aspire to create both physical and illusory environments. This hypothesis has been substantiated through prior comparative studies examining the spatial dynamics across architecture and various artistic disciplines. With the collaboration of the international team of the University of Valladolid Recognised Research Group ESPACIar, the investigations have explored the interplay between architecture and diverse fields such as video games, graphic narrative, cinema, exhibition design, as well as the sculptural works of Oteiza, Chillida, Judd, and Christo & Jeanne Claude.

**Figure 2**

Anar-hi anant *(2000). Eugénia Balcells. Graphic and Planimetric Analysis by ESPACIar Research Group Diagrams.*




The field of digital stage installations serves as a rich source of insight for architectural practice, given its reliance on sketches and assembly instructions for design and execution. Over time, these drawings become vital resources for the analysis of the works. Thus, our research proposes to begin by compiling preparatory documentation from a curated selection of stage productions. Subsequently, to enhance and systematise this information, we aim to conduct spatial explorations employing dihedral, axonometric, and 3D systems, supplemented by dynamic digital models illustrating variations in configuration and lighting. This approach will not only facilitate the documentation and definitive definition of the works for permanent or

reproducible purposes but will also enable: 1) the analysis of their spatial attributes, 2) comparison across different installations, and 3) classification into various formal typologies.

To streamline the selection process for case studies, we will focus on digital stage productions staged since the year 2000 within the proximate European context (Spain, Italy, Portugal, France, etc.). This geographical focus is chosen because the researchers are embedded in this cultural milieu and have access to pertinent audiovisual documentation. Where feasible, preference will be given to works that are currently accessible for attendance or for which recordings are available. We aim to analyse a minimum of three examples from each of the primary modalities, including digital art installations, experimental theatre, musical events, urban video mapping, video-dance, entertainment shows, multimedia exhibitions, museum installations, circus performances, among others.

Some of the thematic lines to be explored include: the relational power of the void, the spatial value of shadows, projections and superimpositions, narrative and phenomenological space, ephemeral architectures, interaction with digital graphic, and the modelling of scenographies and the depth of the screen.

## Background and Conceptual Framework

In numerous technical and artistic aspects, digital stage resources diverge significantly from the traditions, even as they persist in the primal aspiration to craft illusory spaces for narratives and rituals – already implicit in the flickering shadows cast by fires in caves. However, conceptually, their genesis can be traced back to three pivotal innovations of the 20th century:
1) The post-dramatic theatre, which emancipates itself further from textual constraints.
2) The interactivity inherent in virtual environments within video games.
3) The advent of multimedia environmental formats epitomised by the art installation.

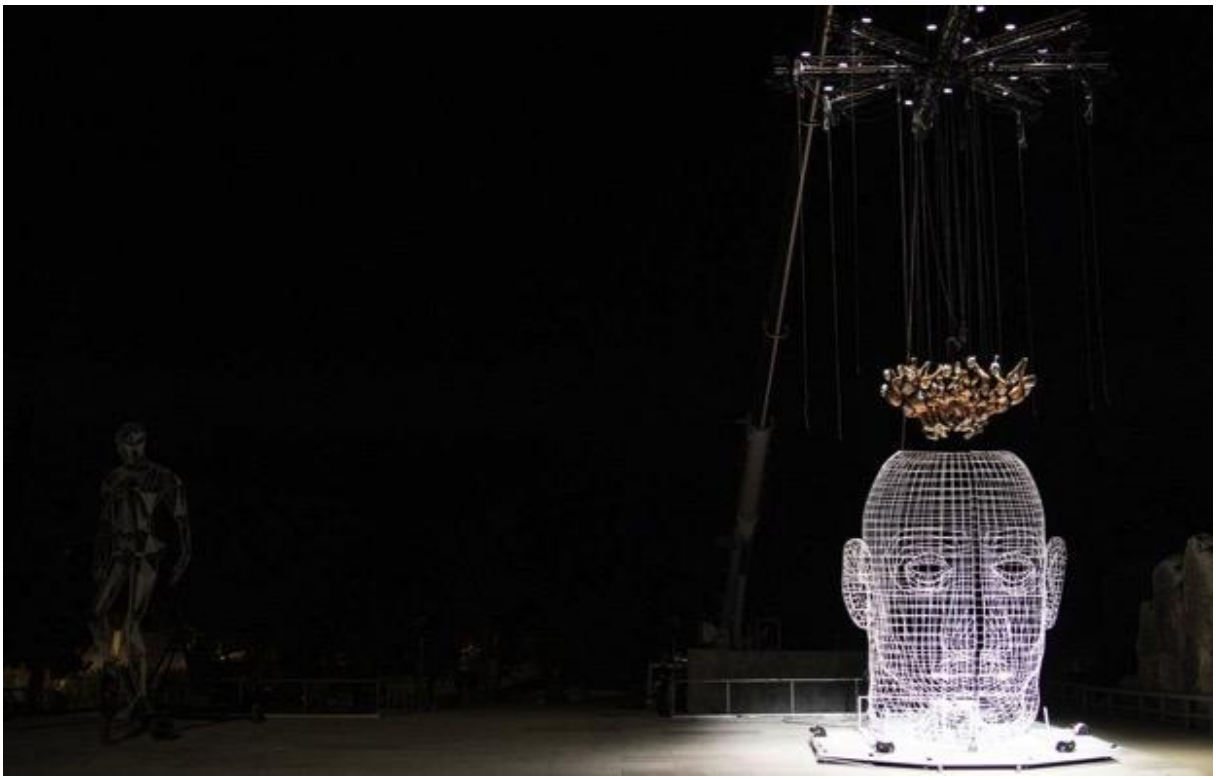
The research project will primarily draw upon the latter precursor of digital scenography: the art installation. This choice is motivated by the recent completion of another research project on the topic and by the spatial nature of art installations, which aligns even more closely with architectural design — the field to which most group researchers belong, including a member who has conducted his doctoral research on the spatial dynamics of video games.

In terms of dramaturgy, contemporary virtual stage designs continue the challenge initiated by Georg Fuchs in 1909 to "re-theatricalise the theatre", liberating the scenic aspect (mimesis) from the predominance of the verbal element (logos). This evolution has even ventured into performances solely reliant on imagery, light, rhythm, or sound environments, sometimes devoid of narration or live actors (Sánchez, 2002, p. 15). To achieve this, new audiovisual media have perpetuated the stage's ongoing rejuvenation proposed throughout the twentieth century, from the contributions of Appia and Craig to those of Wilson and Lepage,

who expanded the realm of theatre to include the objects, spectators, images, sounds, and lighting. This experimentation has led to innovative theatre models such as the Hellerau Festival House (1911) by Tessenow and Dalcroze, the Endless Theatre (1924) by Kiesler, the Total Theatre (1926) by Gropius, and Le Corbusier's "espace indicible" (1948), the "*boîte à miracles*", and the Philips Pavilion (1958).

**Figure 3**

Las bacantes *(2021). La Fura dels Baus*



As early as the 1960s, the Italian theatre witnessed the emergence of multimedia experimentation by artists such as Nono, Kaslik, and Svoboda (Venice, 1961), Puecher (Pavia, 1967), and Carmelo Bene (Milan, 1974). The 1980s saw pivotal developments with events like the Festival of Electronic Arts (Rennes, 1988) and the total-performances by La Fura dels Baus - justified their *Binary Manifesto*. In the 21st century, advancements in software have facilitated dynamic real-time interactions, closely intertwined with the immersive scenarios found in video games (Darley, 2002; Márquez, 2015).

As far as installations are concerned, digital scenography shares with them a new spatiality resulting from the interaction between container, object and viewer.

in order to introduce a diegesis or generate sound and visual atmospheres. This hybrid format is at the basis of the most innovative scenographic manifestations and can be used as a backdrop for the present project, thanks to the fact that the subject of this ESPACIar research group is the spatial categories in architecture, installations and other artistic disciplines.

In the realm of installations, digital scenography mirrors a novel spatiality stemming from the interaction among container, object, and viewer. This interaction aims to establish a diegesis and to create immersive sound and visual atmospheres. Such a hybrid format underpins the most innovative scenographic expressions and serves as a fitting backdrop for the current project because of the focus of the ESPACIar research group - on spatial categories within architecture, installations, and other artistic disciplines.

As a conceptual underpinning for the entire proposal, it is pertinent to consider the genesis of the two most innovative spatial aspects shared by installations, digital scenography, and video games:

1) Their multimedia format as a novel total work of art.
2) Their scenic dimension.

In New York during the 1960s, post-avant-garde movements, particularly Minimalism, initiated a revaluation of the art object, characterised by a focus on its specific environmental context, transcending "allusions and illusions" (Judd). The traditional concept of sculpture as a site-specific monument underwent revision (Maderuelo, 2008). The abandonment of pedestals and the prior notion of self-referential art became widespread. Artworks began to engage the spectator through scale relationships and sought to extend their influence into the surrounding space. This expansion of the artwork's sphere of influence and the progressive semantic convergence between architecture, sculpture, and scenography, encapsulated by Rosalind Krauss as the "expanded field," emerged slightly earlier than in the American context. Nevertheless, a group of Italian architects and artists, including Fontana, Baldessari, and Castiglioni, had already explored proto-digital exhibition installations in the 1950s, albeit still reliant on analogue media.

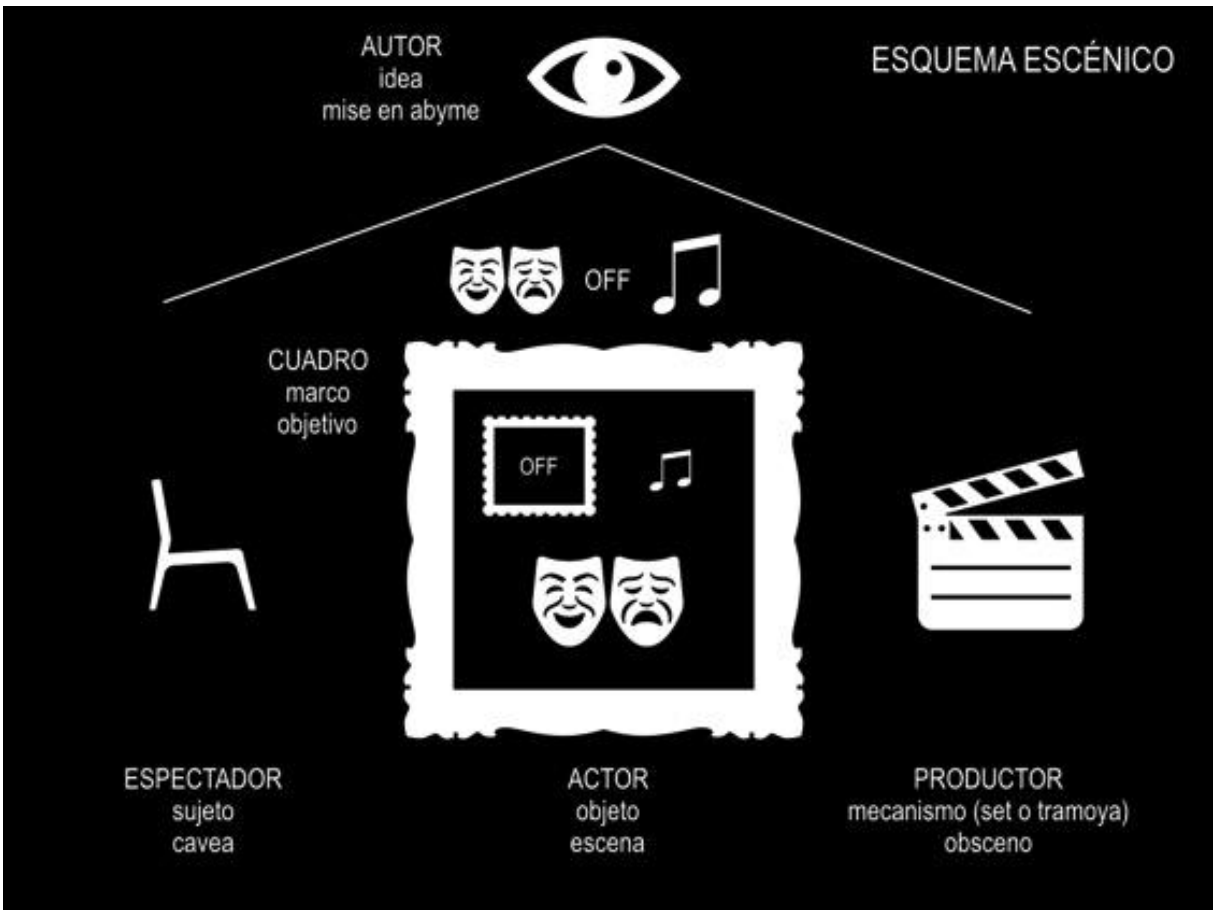
By the late 1960s, the exhaustion of the minimalist paradigm led to the “dematerialisation of the object” (Lippard, 2004), a hallmark of conceptual and project art. The significance of light (Flavin, Turrell, Eliasson) and video (Nam June Paik, Bill Viola) also surged and continues to influence artistic practice to this day. Subsequently, a new plastic medium began to emerge, known as installation, montage, or environment. This medium is characterised by its hybrid format and accentuation of its scenographic nature.

The latter part of the 20th century witnessed the culmination of the dissolution of disciplinary boundaries. The art object relinquished its centrality to become a component of a more intricate and virtual system, where the conveyance of messages and connections (McLuhan) assumed significance, reflecting the emergence of the communication society. This shift from the material object to the conceptual (Marchán, 1972) was also evident in installation art, which, owing to its scenic qualities, increasingly incorporated audiovisual media and prioritised ideas, texts, photographs, documents, and maps.

The interest in exploring the relationship between the artwork and its context inevitably led to a heightened sense of "theatricality," a notion that Fried critiqued Judd and Morris for in his text *Art and Objecthood* (1967). Within this framework, the artwork became receptive to spatio-temporal and subjective considerations that were inherent in architecture and the audiovisual domain and have since been amplified across various artistic disciplines. From these attributes of hybridisation and theatricality, the postmodern conception of artwork gradually evolved towards a relational, multifaceted, and audiovisual definition, which, in diverse manifestations, has persisted into the current era of hypermodernity.

**Figure 4**

*General Scenic Scheme. ESPACIar Research Group Diagram*



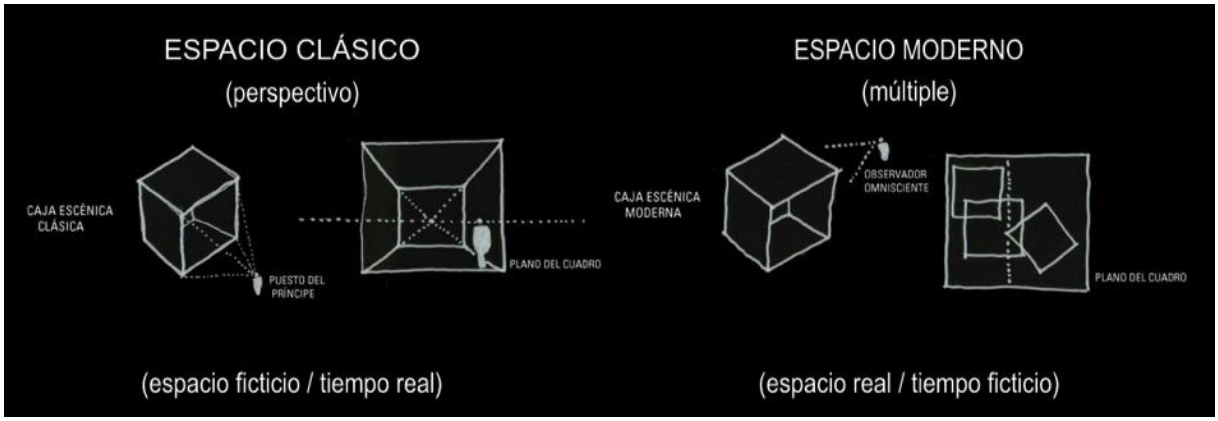

As a foundation for exploring the specific topic of digital scenography, it is pertinent to briefly delineate the fundamental elements that constitute the scenic event. This entails the framing of reality through a "frame," through which the "spectator" observes an "actor" who narrates using various resources provided by a "producer." Overseeing this entire mechanism is the "author," who creates, directs, and observes omnisciently. The author has at their disposal a "*mise en abyme*," which primarily encompasses three spaces (De Blas, 2009): 1) the "*cavea*," where the subject/spectator/camera resides; 2) the "scene," where the object/actor is observed but not directly seen, implying an offstage space; 3) the "obscene,"

which constitutes the production set, situated behind, above, or to the side of the stage, typically concealed from view.

This general framework has been manifested in various forms depending on the period and medium of expression, yet two primary configurations can be discerned (Suárez, 2010, p.163): the classical stage mechanism, characterized by its immersive nature, and the modern one, which tends to be more interactive or relational. In the classical model, the prominence of the text and the fixed focal perspective of the observer at the centre of the frame (“the prince's place”) are notable, with a clear separation between the observer, the scene, and the concealed props. On the other hand, the modern arrangement is more relational, encouraging a dynamic and omnipresent gaze that encompasses the stage, set, and scenery. Additionally, the traditional dominance of the dramatic text has been challenged, with an emphasis on incorporating imagery and engaging the spectator with the space, object, and author.

**Figure 5**

*Classical and Modern Scene Box. ESPACIar Research Group Diagram*




## The State of the Art

Digital scenography has a relatively brief history, with its inception being considered in the 1980s. However, the envisioned possibilities only became feasible with the advent of the 21st century, as advancements in software technology rendered them achievable. Consequently, the field is presently characterised by practical considerations from its creators, with limited analytical discourse.

Dramaturgical critics have primarily undertaken the task of theorising the characteristics of the digital scene in recent publications. Notable examples include *La escena moderna* (Sánchez, 1999), *La máquina escénica: drama, espacio, tecnología* (edited by de Diego and Vázquez, 2000), *Digital Visual Culture* (Darley, 2002), *Dramaturgias de la imagen* (Sánchez, 2002), *Escenografía aumentada* (Suárez, 2010), or *La escena del siglo XXI* (López Antuñano,

2016). Additionally, studies focusing on virtual space in video games and mobile devices are emerging, exemplified by works like *Una genealogía de la pantalla* (Márquez, 2015).

As for the academic architectural bibliography, digital space has received scant attention, although the reflections of Paul Virilio provide a solid foundation. Over the past two decades, there has been a greater interest in extracting spatial insights from stage events in general, as evidenced by titles such as *La escenografía: cine y arquitectura* (Vila, 1997), *La caja mágica: cuerpo y escena* (Quesada, 2005), *Des-velos* (Trovato, 2007), *El teatro como espacio* (De Blas, 2009), and *Música, color y arquitectura* (De Blas, 2010).

Given this context, it appears pertinent to undertake specific research into digital scenography from the perspective of space and architectural design. While drawing from the dramaturgical sources mentioned above and the literature on stage space, the primary focus will be on publications related to artistic installations. This choice is informed by the shared multimedia format between new virtual stage productions and artistic installations. Additionally, publications on space in architecture and other artistic disciplines produced over the last fifteen years by members of the ESPACIar research group will be incorporated.

## Originality, and Contribution to Knowledge Generation

In contrast to the aforementioned dramaturgical speculations on the digital scene or, more broadly, on scenographic and virtual space within video games, this proposal introduces a dual innovation:

1) It addresses the specific theme of the new spatialities within the multimedia scene.

2) It does so both conceptually and also through graphic and analytical architectural representation, employing techniques such as planimetric surveys, dynamic three-dimensional models, operational diagrams, or comparative typological tables. By adopting this approach, it facilitates the integration of architecture with external references beyond its traditional boundaries.

This aims to provide with a new methodology for graphic analysis and and to draw theoretical conclusions about digital spaces.

Therefore, the primary added value and innovation of the proposed research would stem from the application of architectural design resources, interpretation, and representation to a related field such as digital scenography, thus offering a less conventional perspective.

The timing of this proposal appears opportune due to the already existing perspective on the emergence of digital technology in stage performances since the early 21st century. Sufficient time has elapsed to evaluate the credibility of various creators, including Wilson, La Fura, Lepage, Katie Mitchell, Ivo van Hove, Guy Cassiers, Klaus Obermaier, or Adrien M & Claire B, who have amassed years of coherent, published, and critically acclaimed work.

In summary, the project seeks to combine the security of previously developed procedures with the innovation of applying them to a different discipline. While it builds on the foundation of a prior Research Projects focusing on related spatial themes, the new Project proposes employing the methodologies and conclusions derived from previous one in a new field, such as the scenic manifestations.

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# Digital Stages for a New Performative Space. The Work of Random International

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## Abstract

The main objective of the research is to analyse some artistic creations that, through the application of innovative technological and digital systems, have the capacity to promote a new performative spatiality. Something that is carried out on the basis of the digital projects of the creative studio Random International, as they constitute a good example in the creation of immersive experiences. Analysing this type of project involves understanding the terms in which the body is capable of responding to a device that interacts in real time, altering the reality of the space. Moreover, it should be added that the interest of these proposals is even greater when they are developed not only as artistic installations, but also as digital stages for a choreographic or performative action. With regard to the research methodology, we have selected those digital stage designs in which the relationships established with the architectural container of the exhibition or performance are particularly important. In this way, those spatial configuration procedures are discovered, which are related to the architectural supports of the wall, ceiling and floor. Procedures that seek action and narrativity, in proposals that integrate actors, spectators, digital devices and performance halls. In this way, the senses implicit in perception are incorporated into Random International's works, in bodily experiences from which a new spatio-temporal notion result.

*Keywords*: Action, body, digital stage, performative space, Random International.

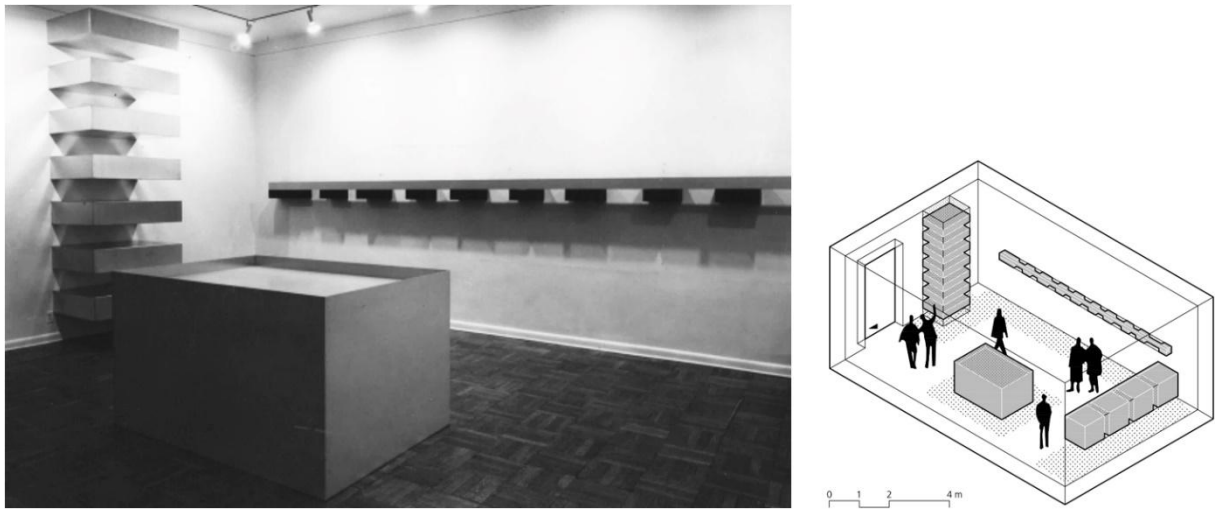
## Body and Space in Artistic Practices

In the analysis of the relations produced between the body and space in creative action, contemporary manifestations that rely on the digital acquire great prominence. Manifestations that challenge the limits between the human being and technology, with proposals based on the creation of immersive environments. Spaces of enormous surprising power, which define new criteria for the relationship between the spectator and the works of art. This would be the

case of the work carried out by creative studios such as Random International, with creations that can be defined as artistic installations of a digital nature. A type of creations that, given their possibilities of interaction with the public, are also understood as digital scenographies, used in actions for dance or performance. These are the proposals that are analysed with the communication, in accordance with the theme of the congress at which it has been presented.[70]

**Figure 1**

*Donald Judd Exhibition, Held at the Castelli Gallery in 1966*
*Source: https://www.castelligallery.com/; drawing by the author of the paper*



But before going on to make this analysis, it is necessary to present some antecedents that, in the artistic field, have determined the evolution of these relations between the body and space. First of all, it is worth looking at the contributions made by movements such as Minimal Art since the middle of the 20th century. Within this movement, artists such as Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris and especially Donald Judd based their creations on an investigation of the spatial relations established between objects, the body and the exhibition space. With regard to Judd, and as has been affirmed in recent studies (Llamazares Blanco, 2023), the minimalist objects proposed an activation of space, originating in this encounter with the spectators' bodies (Figure 1).

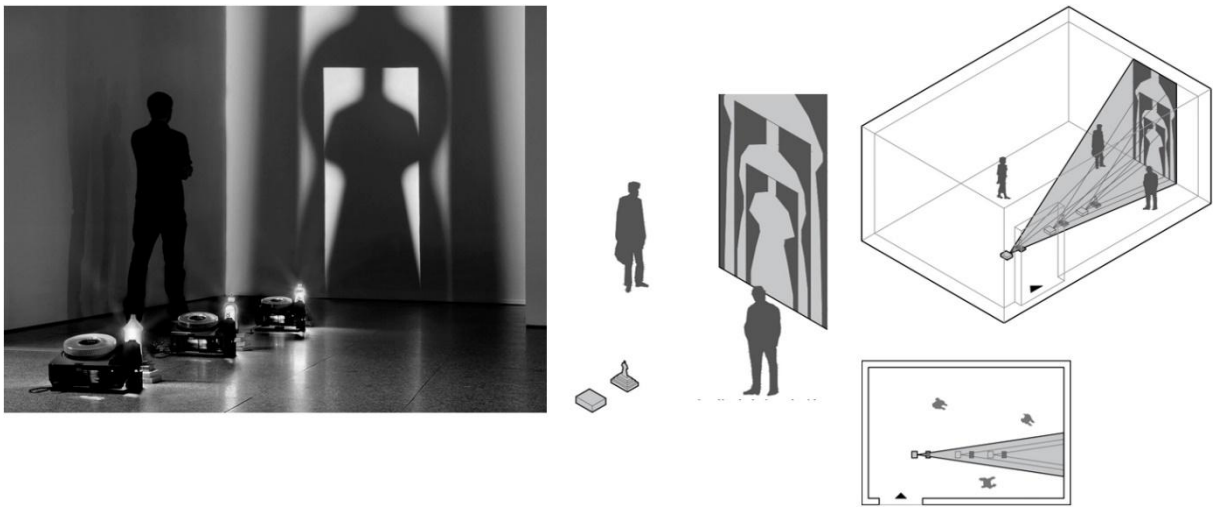
These possibilities of spatial interaction even led Donald Judd himself to participate in the creation of stage designs for dance. Designs where this relationship between the artistic elements he designed and the corps de ballet dancers who performed the choreographies was made explicit. Fundamentally, his participation in this respect would have taken place with Trisha Brown's dance company, for which he came to create the stage designs for three of her

[70] This paper was presented at the *"Digital Matters"* thematic session of the *Perfoming Space 2023 Conference*, which took place on 7-9 July 2023 in the city of Nafplio, Greece.

major events. Stagings that have also been the subject of recent research due to their uniqueness (Rosenberg, 2017; Perron, 2022).

**Figure 2**

*Eulàlia Valldosera,* Envases: el Culto a la Madre*, 1996*
*Source: https://eulaliavalldosera.com/; drawings by the author of the paper.*



After the spatial contribution brought about by the Minimal Art movement, different manifestations would come to give continuity to this artistic stance that relates the body and space. Creative manifestations that have been collected under the broad denomination of artistic installations, and which have recently been analysed by the author of this communication (Llamazares Blanco *et al*., 2021[71]). Some of these works were proposed merely as creations of action, while others, more complex ones, incorporated video or light projection. This is illustrated by the artistic installation *Envases: el culto a la Madre*, realised by Eulàlia Valldosera in 1996, which consisted of the projection of light on jars and containers of cleaning products, generating these spectres of feminine shadows (Figure 2). The graphic analysis of installations like this one has tried to recognise these spatial relations that are produced between objects and the public.

The most recent evolution in terms of these spatial relations has come about with the introduction of the latest technological and digital advances in art. Something that Random International echoes in its creations, incorporating an immediate response action in its artistic devices. A new milestone in the creations that propitiate this encounter of bodies and objects, due to their spatio-temporal implications. But before going on to analyse some of the works of

[71] This publication serves to illustrate the study in this regard developed with the R&D Project *ESPACIOINST. Análisis planimétrico, espacial y fotográfico de instalaciones audiovisuales pioneras en la Península Ibérica desde 1975* (ref. PGC2018-095359-B-I00). A project developed between 2019-2021 by the Recognised Research Group of the University of Valladolid *ESPACIAR. Categorías espaciales en arquitectura y otras disciplinas artísticas*.

the European studio, it is necessary to make an introduction to the key aspects that make up their proposals.

## The Work of Random International

There are several qualities that characterise Random International's work. Among others, and as mentioned at the beginning, the systematic use of new technologies, as well as electronic and computer devices. A resource with which the creative studio proposes an investigation into the relationships established between technology and the human being. This is a subject of study and work that is recurrently applied in various disciplines, and which artistic creation has not wanted to leave aside. Random International not only appropriates this theme as a *leitmotif*, but also makes it its main and most notable narrative and plot resource. This characteristic has meant that most of their artistic works promote a constant interaction between the devices they generate and the public that observes them. An interaction that takes on a special relevance due to the fact that it takes place in real time.

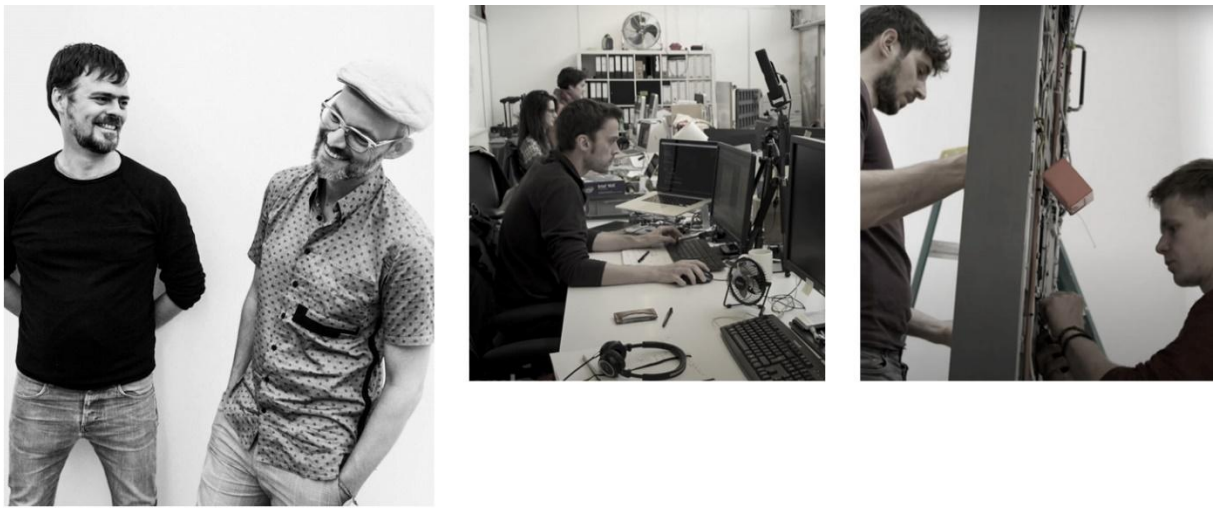
From a technological point of view, Random International's work would be picking up on a historical approach that began in the 1970s. This was a time when the performance of computer functions was improving and computer technology was becoming more accessible. All of this would have reached a high level of development, until the emergence of digital systems, thus characterising the formalisation of contemporary visual culture. A new development already identified at the end of the century as a distinctive feature of the information society, in which every stimulus is always accompanied by a reaction (Baudrillard, 1983). In this way, technology itself favours a system of response, which artistic creation would have taken advantage. As early as the 1970s, speculation was already beginning to develop about future forms of art that would be based on a novel interaction between works and spectators, and which could be called *direct contact art* (Davis, 1973). An intuition that would become a reality thanks to creative studios such as Random International, and others on the contemporary art scene.

But before going on to analyse some of the specific elements with which Random International configures its work, it is worth introducing the members of the creative collective and the profile of the team members who develop its digital installations. The Random International studio is directed by its founders, Hannes Koch and Florian Ortkrass, who began their artistic activity in 2005. A creative activity that from the beginning was oriented towards the development of large-scale interactive installations, including a wide variety of media such as sculpture, light, video or sound. As they themselves would have recognised, the handling of advanced resources such as custom *software* and *hardware*, circuit boards or behavioural algorithms, offers the possibility of creating immersive environments that challenge notions of

consciousness, perception and instinct (Escribano Tizziani, 2019). To achieve this, the team led by Koch and Ortkrass is made up of a number of specialists in various disciplines (Figure 3), including art, computer science, technology and industrial design.

**Figure 3**

*Hannes Koch (1975), Florian Ortkrass (1975), and Computer and Technical Developers of Random International. Source: https://www.random-international.com/*



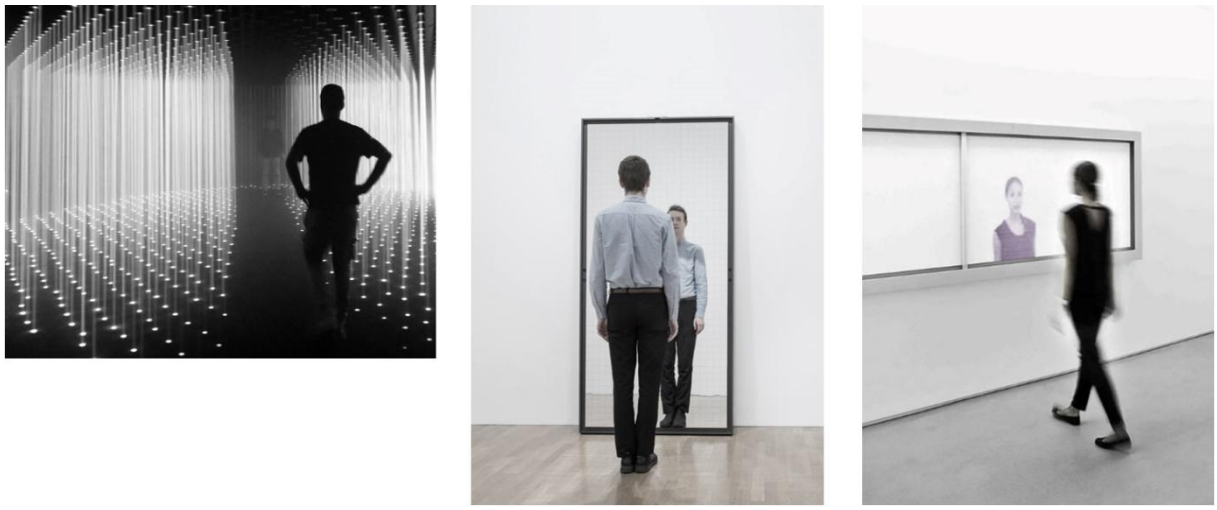
However, despite Random International's eminently technological approach on the contemporary art scene, the fusion of these new media with more traditional media is quite remarkable. Among the most frequently used and common in most of Random International's productions are lights, mirrors and frames (Figure 4). These are elements that appear again and again in their installations, seeking a connection with the spectators who are confronted with the devices. As these elements are easily recognisable to the public, they act as a nexus for the transmission of a digital and technological narrative that is much more intense than might be expected at first. This would be a strategy widely used in the most current digital creation, which has also been employed by other figures such as the artist Es Devlin in her renowned scenographic productions (Llamazares Blanco, 2022).

However, the recourse to these more classical media by Random International and others is connected to a long international artistic tradition. A tradition that would have its origins in the European avant-gardes of the early twentieth century, and which experienced its greatest development in the last third of the century in the American context. These would have been proposals that took as a resource some of these media such as frames, mirrors and lights, to promote an experience of enormous transcendence in the spectator's perception. Effects of great surprising power, which gradually resulted in what art historiography has called the dematerialisation of the artistic object (Chavarría Díaz, 2002). Thus, it is possible to find paradigmatic cases such as Robert Irwin with the use of frames and screens, Robert Smithson with the integration of mirrors, or Dan Flavin with the spatial arrangement of light fixtures.

Examples and references that underlie the new proposals of creative studios such as Random International, which incorporate the effects brought about by technology and the digital into these media.

**Figure 4**

*Random International,* Living Room*, 2022;* Blur Mirror*, 2016;* Self Portrait*, 2010*
*Source: https://www.random-international.com /; https://carpentersworkshopgallery.com/.*



Having defined the resources used by Random International in the creation of its proposals, it will now be interesting to analyse the relationships that are promoted between the body and space. A relationship that, through the incorporation of the digital, defines a new three-dimensionality, which is modified in real time in response to the stimuli received. These works have acquired a notable scenic dimension, which has led to their use as stage devices for dance and performance actions. These will be the works of most interest in the search for some of the new spatial-temporal keys that define the scenographic creation of the 21st century.[72] A challenge with which to test the role of digital and technological media in the stage creation proposed by the European team.

## Digital Stages for Performative Action

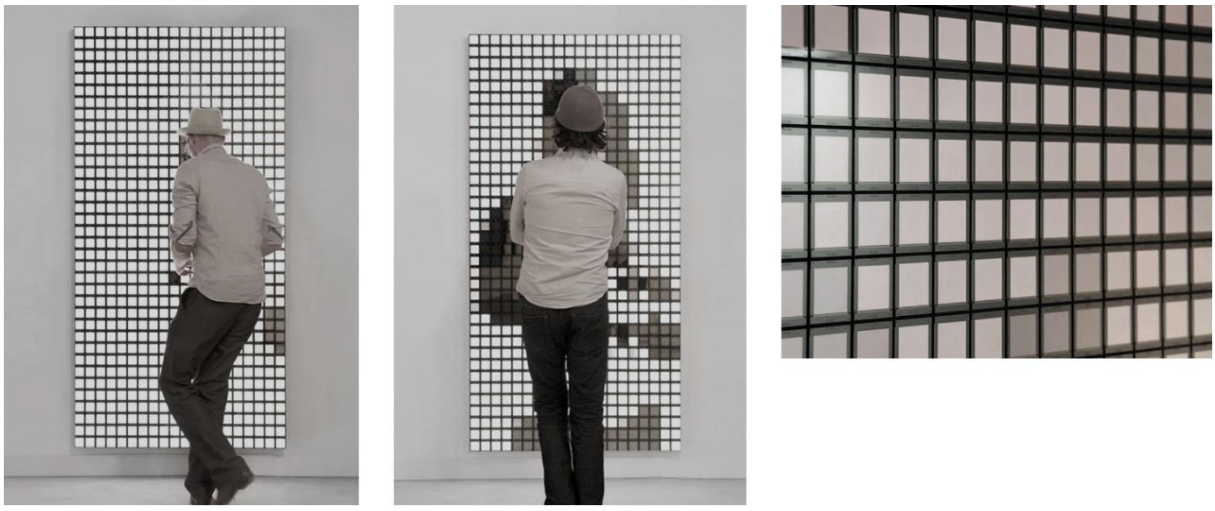
The first scenographic arrangement that is of interest among those used by Random International is the one that has to do with the classical arrangement on the wall. A frequent resource in traditional artistic creation, where the works are placed on the wall. This is a classic set-up which, since the mid-1970s, sought a hybridisation between architecture, sculpture and

[72] As a continuation of the research referred to in the previous footnote, the *ESPACIAR* Group of the University of Valladolid is currently involved in the R&D Project *DIGITALSTAGE. Análisis espacial de instalaciones escenográficas digitales del siglo XXI* (ref. PID2021-123974NB-I00). This is the reason why the study presented with this paper was carried out.

scenography. Thus, over time, the simple confrontation between the artistic object and the exhibition space led to other formats that could be understood as installations, montages or environments. An effort defended by many artists, such as the Spanish artist Eugènia Balcells, who defended the maxim of trying to *"take the image out of the wall"* (Campo, 2012). It is for this reason that this artistic will to generate a transgressive spatial relationship between wall and image could be recognised. Two two-dimensional elements that clearly define the position of the spectators in the exhibition space, as well as their possibilities of interaction with the creations on display.

**Figure 5**

*Random International,* Study of You*, 2011.*
Source: https://carpentersworkshopgallery.com/



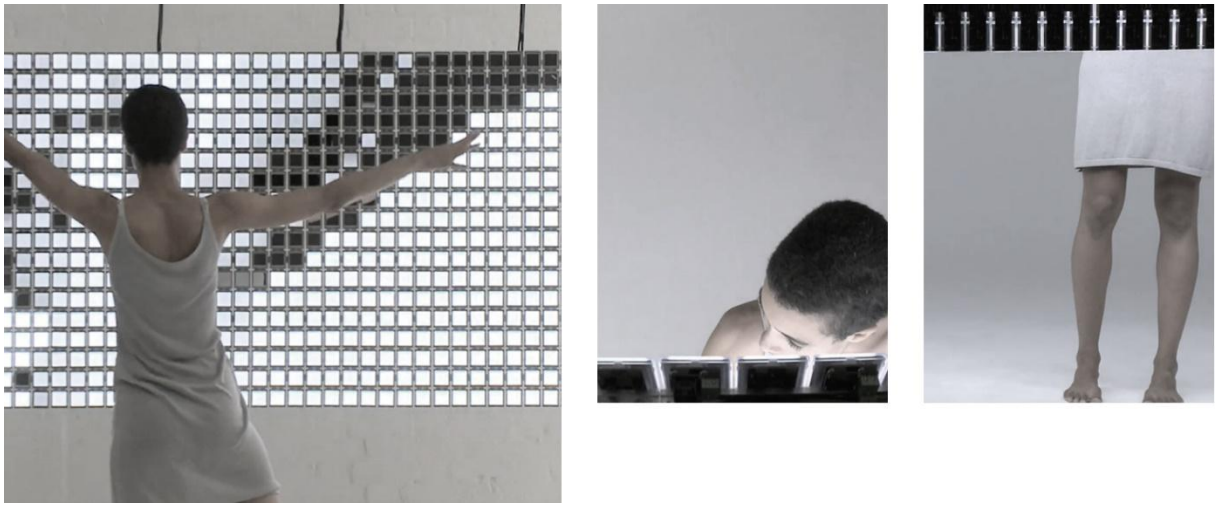
Throughout their career, Random International has worked on numerous occasions with these elements. A resource that, more specifically, would have given rise to the series of works known as the *Light Plate Series*. This is a group of creations based on the generation of a screen from smaller elements that emit light. This would be the case of the work *Study of You*, from 2011 (Figure 5), whose title was already a declaration of intentions of what the installation seeks or pursues. The device has a whole series of intelligent sensors that recognise the figure of the spectator in front of it, reproducing all his movements in real time. It can be said that the image proposed by the installation, despite being located on the wall, is no longer a two-dimensional and static image. On the contrary, it becomes a three-dimensional element, with a spectator who, by interfering with its reflection, also becomes the object of the installation. Nevertheless, and despite the fact that the wall acts in its traditional role as a support for the image, the proposal is interpreted as an illusory window or interactive painting.

Given the possibilities of interaction of this type of proposals, Random International has used them in the generation of digital stages. Scenic presentations such as *You Fade To Light*,

from 2009 (Figure 6), which, with the same device as the previous creation, generated a screen of light with which the dancers interacted. In the specific case of this proposal, its dimensions lead us to understand the work as a wall independent of the support of the room. Thus, this wall of light acts as a theatrical or scenographic backdrop, which the actors can question and modify in real time. Despite the novelty of digital image generation, the theatrical or performative representation scheme responds to the traditional arrangement of elements. A frontal action, organised from the arrangement of the screen on the architectural support of the wall. In front of it, the dancers or actors who perform the action, sharing the space of representation with the spectators. This results in a total immersion of the audience, who witness a dematerialisation of a front wall, which changes its appearance with the action of the dancers or actors. The greatest achievement of this type of scenography therefore consists of detaching itself from the wall and extending its influence on the surrounding environment. In turn, it ceases to act as a backdrop and acquires an immersive three-dimensionality.

**Figure 6**

*Random International,* You Fade To Light, *2009*
*Source: https://www.random-international.com/*



In the exploration of some of the spatial categories that Random International tries out with its proposals, we come across a new formalisation. This is a new category which, in its relationship with the main limits of the room, is linked to the ceiling plane. It is well known that the ceiling is not so important in the generation of a space, as would have been claimed from the theories of visual thought (Arnheim, 1979). Fundamentally, architecture has historically

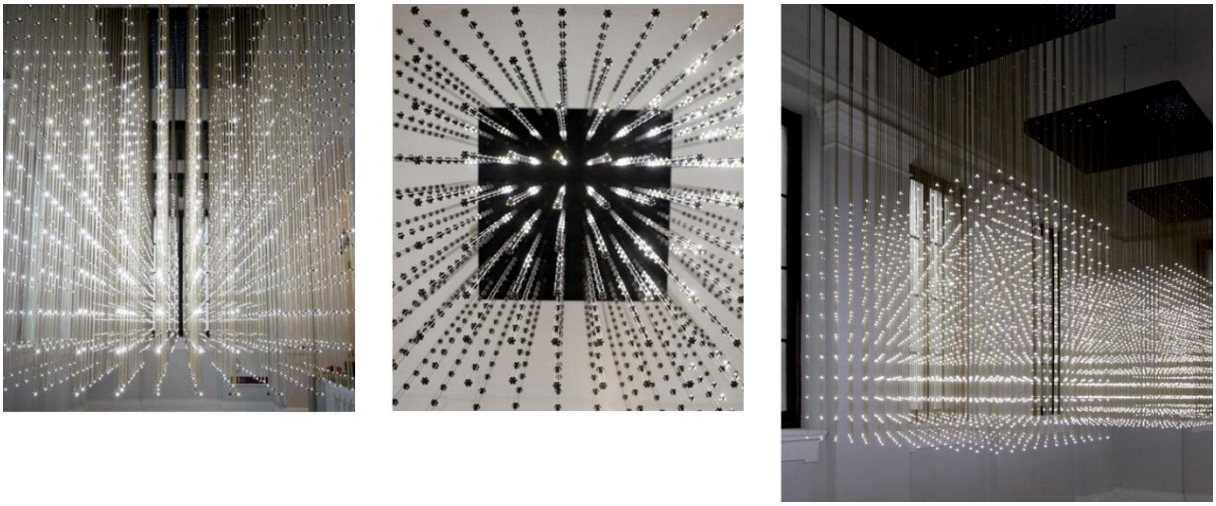
been established from a floor plane, with its subsequent delimitation in the form of an enclosure. This is why, in a related way, the format of art installations has been concerned with proposing a work in relation to the floor and walls, and less so to the ceiling. Nevertheless, there are interesting examples based on this relationship with the upper plane, such as some

of the proposals made by the Spanish artist Cristina Iglesias. Installations such as *Alabaster Room* from 1993 or *Tilted Suspended Ceiling* from 1997 exemplify this, suspending different planes from the ceiling that manage to dematerialise the work. The recognisable limits of the room are thus altered, with the generation of a new three-dimensional element, creating what could be called “a fiction of a place that is not present” (Rodríguez *et al*., 2018).

Faced with the challenge that the incorporation of the ceiling in proposals of an artistic nature implies, Random International resorts to it in some works. Specifically, it is a resource employed in series such as *Swarms Study Series* (Figure 7). A series proposed in the form of very thin bars or filaments, suspended from the ceiling, and which incorporate different aligned points of light along their length. The particularity of works such as these is that these points of light have the capacity to be activated in response to the spectator's stimuli. In short, the suspension of these creations from the ceiling and the novel incorporation of light, refer to the set of lights and spotlights that are placed on a traditional stage where some kind of action is performed.

**Figure 7**

*Random International*, Swarm Study III, *2011*
*Source: https://www.designboom.com/; https://www.random-international.com/*

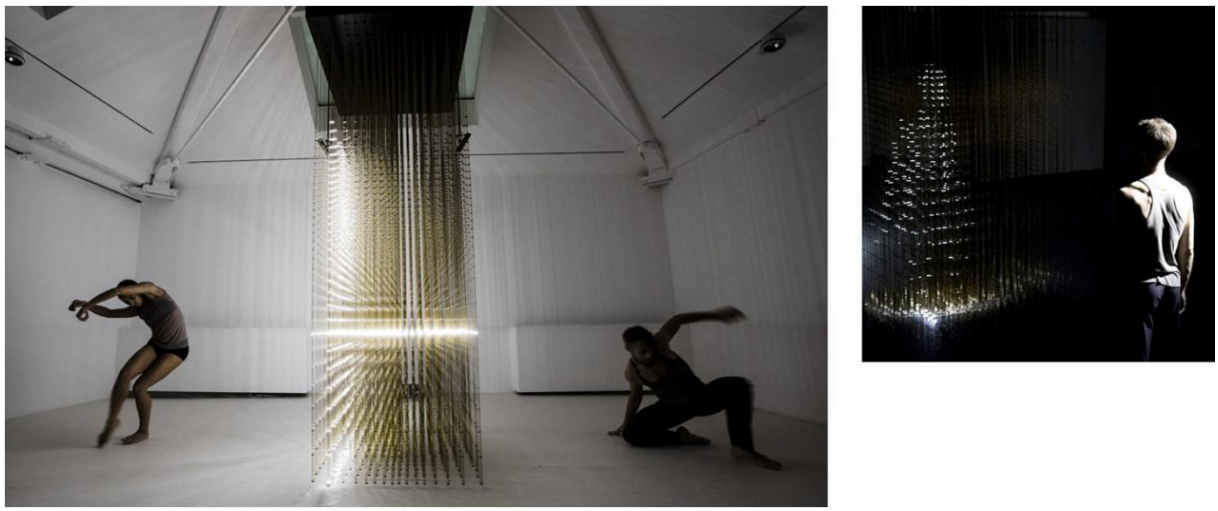


It is in these terms that Random International has created scenographies that have served to propose a performative action around an interaction device hanging from the ceiling. This would be the case of works such as *Future Self*, produced in 2012 (Figure 8), in which the mechanisms used can be appreciated. The elements with light that are suspended from the ceiling create something like a kind of scenic and virtual curtain inside a room, which again modifies the conditions of spatiality. Thus, the digital device is able to reproduce in real time the movements of the dancers. A dialogue of great visual interest, which would lead to question the limits in the relationship between human beings and technology, as Random International

intends to do in all their work. Regarding the scenographic disposition of the whole set, it is necessary to say that here it is modified with respect to the devices that were related to the wall. The scenic device created here can acquire a central position in the performance hall, making the dancers perform the action in its perimeter. Something that would also happen with the spectators, whose position remains unclear and undefined, allowing external movement around them. This means that the ceiling is no longer a forbidden support to perception, as in classical theater, allowing to contemplate those elements that make possible the physical suspension of the scenography in space.

**Figure 8**

*Random International*, Future Self, *2012*
Source: https://www.random-international.com/; https://www.dezeen.com/



Finally, and in third place, it is worth paying attention to the capacity of the floor to generate space and time. A resource also used by art installations, given the dynamic spatiality it produces, at the service of the diegesis or narrative development. The horizontal plane acquired a great protagonism with the Minimal Art movement, as Donald Judd himself would have expressed: “Placement on the floor and the absence of a pedestal were inventions. I invented them. (...) My work on the floor was a new form, creating space amply and strongly” (Judd, 2016, pp. 839-841). From there, the sculpture descended to the plane previously reserved for the viewer, thus altering those relationships between elements. The circulations of the public came to interfere with the works, annulling the distant vision and involving all the elements in a scenic movement. From that key moment in the history of art, the floor plane has favored a conjunction of room, object and subject. A conjunction that favors a diegetic action, characterized by the incorporation of time. A circumstance that already in the 1960s, with the Minimal Art emergence, led critics to consider the *“*theatrical*”* condition of this type of creations

(Fried, 1995). An interpretation based on the use of objectual elements on the floor, on the same plane that is shared with the space reserved for the public.

This third resource is again used by Random International, in some works that materialize as objects and are arranged on the ground plane. Some of these works are those that would integrate a new series, which could be called *Glass Sheet Series* (Figure 9). A series whose works are configured as sheets of glass overlapping at close range, and whose interstices again include hundreds of aligned points of light. Its compact organization leads to read these works as unitary objects, on the horizontal surfaces of the rooms. A kind of element, like an *atrezzo*, in charge of responding, as in other series, to the stimuli provided by the public. Due to their scale, these objects not only have their own artistic dimension, but also refer to a functional condition. To a kind of furniture related to the spectators. In these terms, the floor plane enables the direct encounter between the work and the public, enhancing the action in the exhibition space. The reproduction of the spectator's movement in the digital device favors a greater connection between object and subject, coexisting in the same scenic space of representation. A space that acquires a remarkable temporality, as a category of modern architectural spatiality.

**Figure 9**

*Random International,* Swarm Study, *2017*
*Source: https://fondazioneberengo.org/; https://www.random-international.com/*

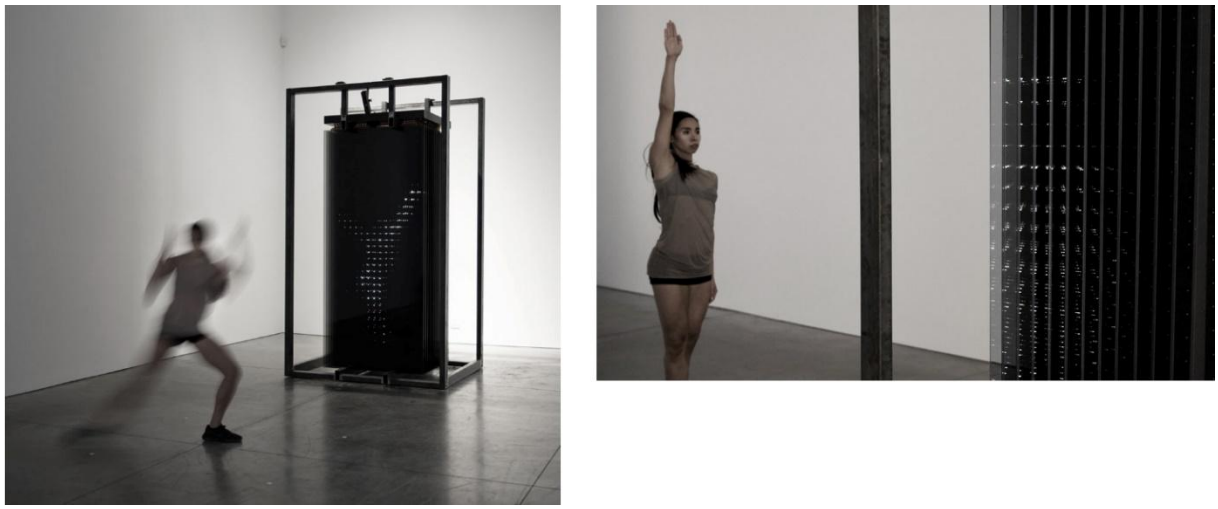


Random International has also found in the digital installations that made up this series a great scenic potential. Given the real-time reproduction of the body's movement and its placement on the plane of representation, these devices have been a new avenue for the realization of dance and performance events. As objects, the effects become even more surprising than the previous series. All this can be analyzed from works such as *Self and Other*, presented in 2016 (Figure 10). The superimposition of glass sheets, with the incorporation of

hundreds of points of light, generates as a result an effect of virtual three-dimensionality, where the movements of the dancers are reproduced in an exact way. This type of device produces a minor modification of the limits of the room, but a greater notion of time comes into play. The dialogue between object and subject is intensified, and thus the scenic representation acquires a greater degree of narrative and temporal sequencing. In the case of the spectator's point of view, it is again the same as that identified in the suspended devices, but here the audience is more intensely linked to the device. The fact that the narrative development takes place on the same plane of representation and that the scale is related to the human body, favors this linkage.

**Figure 10**

*Random International,* Self and Other*, 2016*
*Source: https://www.random-international.com/; https://design-milk.com/*



## Conclusions on Performative Space

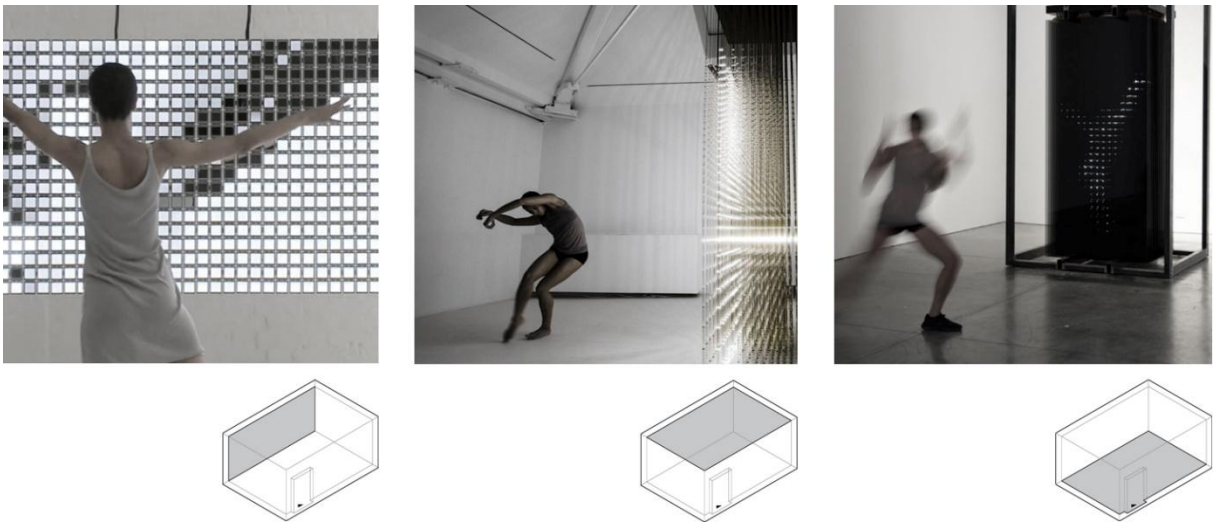
First of all, and in view of the above, it is necessary to note Random International's recourse to certain spatial categories, which are of great interest for architecture. These categories have been previously identified in artistic installations carried out since the 1970s (Zaparaín Hernández *et al*., 2022), in proposals that combine different media and formats. In addition to the usual use of light and sound in this type of creations, Random International has incorporated the technological and digital in their works, enhancing the immersive nature of the experiences they propose. These experiences have been developed from artistic stagings that, due to their scenic possibilities, have given way to digital stages for dance and performances.

Based on this, and with regard to the performative space that Random International proposes, it can be said that it is resolved as a total scenography. A presentation where actors, spectators, digital devices and spaces of representation are integrated. A fact that gives greater

action and narrativity to what is represented, with the consequent interest in the notion of time. This makes Random International's digital devices good scenic resources in the configuration of narrative discourses, with new spatial-temporal keys. In this interest in action, and as we have seen, we have analyzed the different procedures they use. From the screen that is presented as a new wall to the object that is placed on the plane of action itself, as well as other types of devices that hang from the ceiling (Figure 11). In any case, and apart from the distinction between procedures, what all the configurative options share is the circumstance of pursuing a scenographic synthesis of space and time.

**Figure 11**

*Random International,* You Fade To Light*, 2009;* Future Self*, 2012;* Self and Other*, 2016*
*Source: https://www.random-international.com/; drawings by the author of the paper*



And beyond all those elements that make up Random International's scenic proposals, it is worth mentioning the importance of the dialogue they seek in their proposals between actors or spectators, and digital technology itself. A dialogue based on the relationships established between human beings and technology, as a theme present in all their artistic projects. A circumstance that leads us to affirm that Random International's digital scenographies manage to blur the limits of reality, presenting a new way of experiencing space. A new milestone in contemporary artistic creation, which takes the digital as the main resource for creation and design.

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# Adrien M & Claire B's Design Strategies for an Interactive Digital Space

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## Abstract

Contemporary digital technology is shaping a new form of spatiality. The interactive space, proposed by Adrien M & Claire B, offers an escape from contemporary uncertainty by displaying that interactivity can be a legitimate and autonomous contemporary aesthetic pursuit. AM&CB's creations, which respond dynamically to body movements in real-time, encourage dialogue between the body, digital projections, and space. This interactive spatiality also reflects a contemporary conception of space as a relational entity that no longer dominates over the body but rather can be inhabited by it.

Adrien M & Claire B's designs initially isolate the viewer from everyday reality, creating an environment that negates external stimuli and establishes internal logic based on visual principles. They employ a metalanguage of simulation and the representation of digital elements to captivate the audience. All this culminates in a spectacle that distorts, transforms, or even deletes the previously created virtual space. The transmission of emotional information and spatial perceptions occurs through a visual language combining gestures, dance, and digital elements.

*Keywords*: Adrien M & Claire B, digital, interaction, spatiality, body.

## Digital Interactive Space

Digital technologies are changing how individuals engage with the space that surrounds us – both physically and virtually. Furthermore, the digital revolution is transforming the foundations of contemporary aesthetics. Through the reinterpretation and recontextualization of pre-existing information –including text and images– the digital medium helps the creation of new images and meanings. The term "simulations" is shedding its negative postmodern connotations and is increasingly becoming a familiar concept. Another aspect of the digital era is the potential for interaction with non-human entities. From an aesthetic perspective, this may

be one of the most expressive resources in the *Society of Spectacle* (Debord, 1984) and visual culture (Darley, 2000; Mitchell, 2005). It is the case that, in our contemporary Western society, interaction seems to have developed as a genuine aesthetic ambition.

With all of this in mind, we can hypothesise that interactive space is more than a multimedia scene (Paul, 2003). It is a new spatiality. This is because interactive spatialities introduce a shift in the relationship between the individual and space. Traditionally, we have accepted the concept that human bodies exist *within a* space (Van de Ven, 1987). However, due to recent developments in the visual arts, this idea is no longer the only possibility. In a post-metaphysical era –as Vattimo (1991) would say–, digital spatialities allow for a more horizontal and relational connection between space and bodies. Interaction means engaging in a dialogue. It implies that when an action is performed, there is also a response at the other end. When applied to a spatial environment, this dialogue requires a physical materialisation. It must take the form of a visual message and therefore requires its own code and language.

All of this is perfectly exemplified through the creations of the Adrien M & Claire B Theatre Company, founded in France in 2011 by Adrien Mondot and Claire Bardainne. Their artistic creation revolves around a digital, interactive, and simulated space, conveyed primarily through the movement of the bodies –dance– as the medium of communication (Dixon, 2007). It is essential to note that the proposed interactivity is authentic. The digital projections interact in real time with the movements of the performers. This feature is significant as it provides a fluid and perceived accuracy, and, in doing so, the simulated environment feels authentic. By analysing Adrien M & Claire B's entire production –so far, ten scenographies and nine art installations– their design strategy can be summarised in three phases. First, there is the need to abstract from reality; this strategy serves to cope with the context. Secondly, a new visual code is implemented; the new digital universe needs a model of relationship between body and space. Thirdly, on extremely specific -and intense- occasions, the virtual world that has been established is surpassed, broken; such occasions are the climax of the spectacle, instances of true fascination and amazement.

## Abstraction from Reality

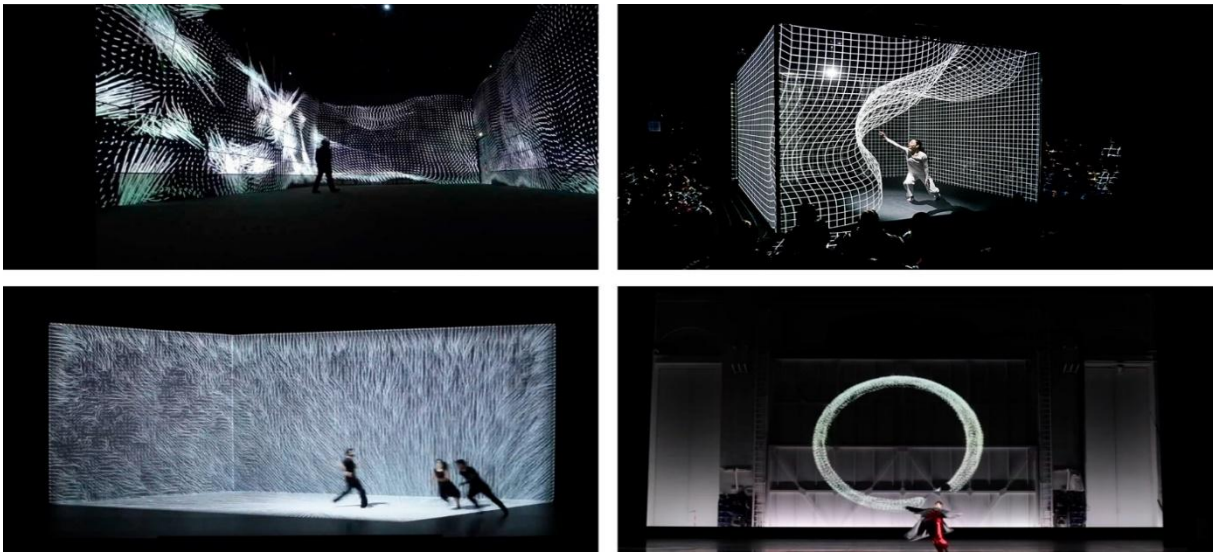
In most of their proposals, the container in which the event takes place (the architectural space) has a single purpose: to function as a barrier to the outside reality. To establish a physical boundary for this new space appears to be crucial. A controlled environment is essential for the digital interactive space to be fully deployed. Apart from this, the architectural container is as meaningless as the outside world. When the audience is confronted with these spectacles, the only spatiality acknowledged is the simulation; everything else is negated.

Adrien M & Claire B seek total abstraction when working in a room or a theatre. They first darken all surfaces and avoid objects or decorations that might contextualise the scene. The result is a clear sense of emptiness, essential for the realization of their complex projections. In fact, on those occasions when it is not possible to dematerialize the architecture (either because it is impossible to hide the structural reality or because it is impractical to apply a black surface), the immersiveness of the space is reduced.

The most straightforward method to achieve immersion is to associate the proposed new spatiality with the entirety of the place where it is found. For example, this approach used to create *Core* (2020) (Figure 1.1). However, other shows prove that this kind of directness is not necessary. It is enough to create an interior space as long as it is clearly delimited. An example of this is the production of the new cubic space built with four digital walls (translucent screens onto which projections can be made), such as the one exhibited in *Hakanaï* (2013) (Figure 1.2). An alternative definition of space can be achieved through a trihedron, which offers greater spatial dynamism and opens new possibilities for the interaction between body, projection, and space. This approach is exemplified in *The Movement of Air* (2015) (Figure 1.3). In order to create a new space within an existing one, the stage backdrop remains the most essential and conventional method. In *Scary Beauty* (2017) (Figure1.4), a translucent screen is used which becomes opaque or transparent depending on the projections and the degree of illumination of the architectural space behind it. Although essential, this spatial configuration allows for the creation of depth, thus increasing the possibilities for interaction.

**Figure 1**

*Adrien M & Claire B. 1.1 (top left):* Core *(2020), 1.2 (top right):* Hakanaï *(2013), 1.3 (bottom left):* The movement of air *(2015), 1.4 (bottom right):* Scary Beauty *(2017). Source: AM&CB.*



In other instances –and only valid for art installations– to achieve this “abstraction from reality,” they use the strategy known as “virtual” or “augmenting reality” (Thurow, 2017). They add digital and three-dimensional elements to the space we already inhabit. In these cases, reality coexists with simulation in the same space, but, contrary to what intuition would suggest, this is actually a very restricted form of interactivity. The interaction does not feel fluid in any case –and this is a key condition– because it is mediated. A device is needed to perceive the transformed spatiality: a mobile phone or a screen of any kind. The success of augmented reality strategies relies on the technical fascination they produce, but that is usually all. The most important possibility of this strategy is that it allows working in a pre-existing context, but, unfortunately, it does not seem that Adrien M & Claire B are particularly interested in exploring that.

## A New Visual Code

The interaction proposed by Adrien M & Claire B is authentic (Figueras-Ferrer, 2021). They employ real-time detection and recognition technology to adapt the digital animations to the performance. It is not a trick, neither a choreographed action that precisely synchronises dance, music, and visual projections. Rather, it is a projected virtual space that instantly adjusts to the movements of the performer. This brings a precision that is perceived, turning the interactive space into a universe that feels real.

The fluidity and veracity of the interaction are fundamental conditions for the immersion of the spectator. We must add music and ambient sound, which are equally important to achieve an immersive atmosphere. The combination of all this prevents the audience from being on the lookout for the flaw that dismantles the deception. Their focus is on deciphering the laws that govern this new visual reality. The spectators, once abstracted from their physical reality, need to find a logic that gives order to the simulated universe in front of them. In Adrien M & Claire B’s creations, these will be visual laws (Charlet, 2015).

To elaborate on this point, we will take as an example the work of art *Pixel* (2014). Although it is early in their career, they already employ this visual language based on interaction and fascination. The scenography features a basic dihedral spatial disposition and several digital projections. The space is defined by a floor and a screen – which define the extension and limit the backdrop. The texture of the screen allows it to become transparent according to the light and the digital projections. This resource makes it possible for the actor to situate himself behind this veiling, an ability which, as we shall see, proves to be fundamental. The space, defined by the floor and the wall, serves as the basis for achieving three modes of interactive dialogue, three visual principles:

### *The Virtual Space Reacts to the Body*

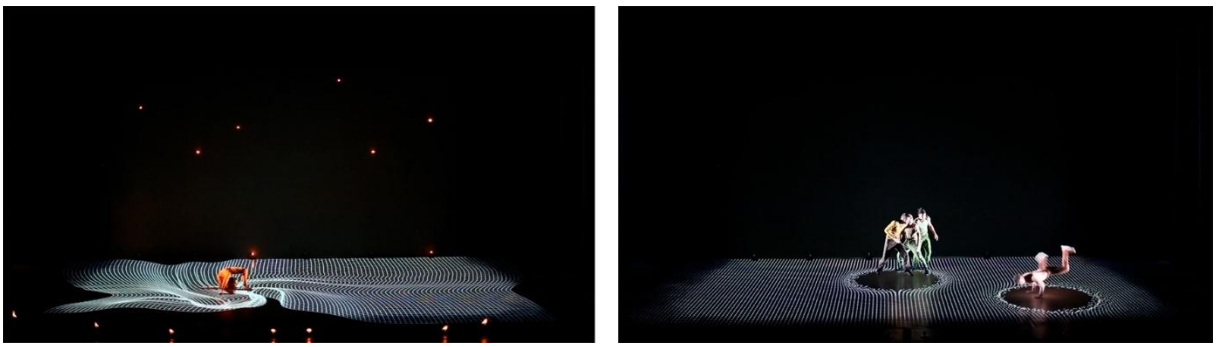
In a digital interactive space, all actions performed by the body will receive a response from the digital projection. The virtual shapes are transformed, sometimes even deformed. However, it is never seen as an aggressive imposition. On the contrary, the process unfolds with hypnotic calm and slowness. The aesthetic aspiration of this interaction is to provoke the fascination of being listened to by an entity – a simulated universe that acts as a living being. This experience encourages engagement, prompting the user to remain immersed in the environment and explore the multiple possible responses to their actions.

In this first modality (Figure 2), the relationship between the body and the digital is on the same level. Both elements recognise the presence of the other and set up a connection, but neither of them tries to take over the other. Projections are responsible for shaping the space and create its limits. Representations of two-dimensional patterns are used, which give dimension to the space and, at the same time, keep it abstracted from all contexts. The projection proposes a spatiality that is recognised as a *container*. Therefore, if the digital forms handle setting an external limit, then the body will be placed “inside.”

This concept forms the basis of every interactive space created by Adrien M & Claire B (Charlet, 2015). Their aesthetic approach is based on this rule, regardless of whether it is a stage production or an art installation. Although it may be considered basic, it sets the tone for a playful and peaceful dialogue environment. There are no grandiose gestures, but still, the simulation achieves a serene immersion of the body.

**Figure 2**

*Adrien M & Claire B.* Pixel *(2014). Source: AM&CB*



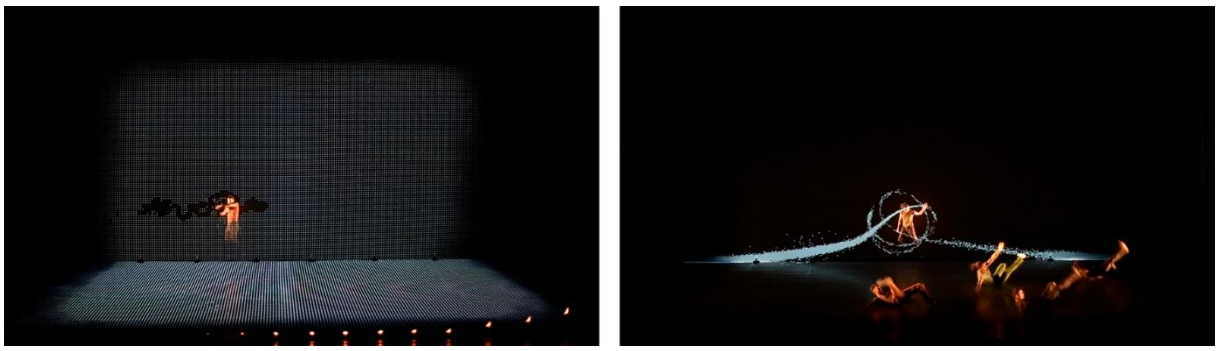
### The Body Controls the Virtual Space

This time, the digital shapes are placed at the service of the body, which controls them at will. The digital is an extension of the body’s corporeality (Figure 3). A visual dance is created that is only possible in a simulacrum: the body manipulates some kind of force field. The shapes allude to planetary or universal elements -such as wind, water, smoke, or gravitational fields- that would otherwise be uncontrollable outside the digital realm.

Unlike the previous category, here the digital projection ceases to define space. Space is abstracted, expanded, and identified with the idea of an infinite void (a kind of simulated universe). The digital component, on the other hand, is conceived as something objectual. The performer's body is no longer situated *in* the projection, but *above*, *behind* or *beside* it. The audience can recognise that the body and the projection exist in the same space and dimension thanks to the perspective. The scene is perceived as a three-dimensional interaction that establishes a visual link between the actor's body and the digital projection, especially when the performer is standing behind the backdrop screen. This strategy overcomes the two-dimensional aspect inherit in any projected image. As a result, the simulation is more captivating, thus intensifying the fascination experienced by the audience.

**Figure 3**

*Adrien M & Claire B.* Pixel *(2014).* Source: AM&CB



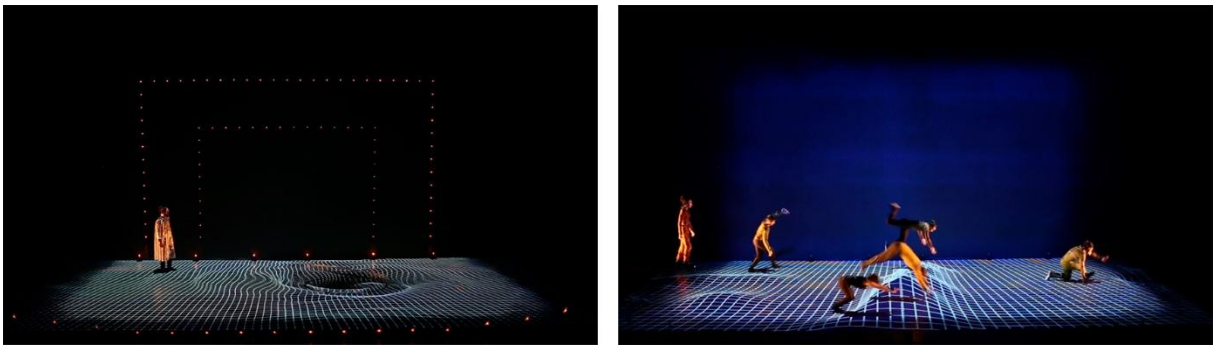
## The Virtual Space Triggers the Body

Finally, the domination is reversed; the digital projection exerts control over the performer. For example, analysing *Pixel* (Figure 4): What should we expect if a black hole appeared in the simulation and gradually consumed the frame of the digital universe (bearing in mind that we are working with a two-dimensional projection and, therefore, an optical illusion)? And what if there were hurdles in the scene moving towards the performers? They would be compelled to retreat. The human beings -performers- need to evade them and leap. In other words, the simulation triggers the body's survival instinct. Again, we can see a playful universe. We can even define it like a playground. The performers are in some-kind of videogame interactivity; they play to survive the gymkhana into which the space has evolve. They must jump, move, or turn.

However, in this case, we must not ignore the fact that this interactivity is not real. The performers are only synchronised with the projections. And again, the feeling of interactivity is only credible from the audience's point of view. The digital projections are distorted to create that impression. It is a two-dimensional projection and therefore everything is an optical effect.

**Figure 4**

*Adrien M & Claire B.* Pixel *(2014). Source: AM&CB*



The degree of immersion needed to make this effect credible is so high that it appears achievable only within the context of a tightly controlled stage production. As in the second mode of interaction seen before, the degree of fascination is much greater than in the first case (when *the virtual space reacts to the body*). However, in the same way, its verisimilitude is only possible from the point of view of a third party -the audience-, the only one capable of visually unifying body and digital forms in the same space.

## Simulation Exceeded

So far, the success of the interactive space relies on it being perceived as a credible universe. To achieve this, first, the audience is isolated from their everyday reality, and then, the new space is endowed with visual laws that give it internal logic. One last design strategy is still to be analysed, which, curiously enough, makes the opposite proposition. Nevertheless, it is probably the point of greatest interest (with a certain paradoxical perception).

In Adrien M & Claire B's productions, there are moments in which the digital universe exceeds the limits of simulation. These are moments in which the digital projections do not follow the established logic of the simulated space. On rare occasions, the limits in which the universe is held are exceeded, causing even greater fascination in the audience. We could argue that overcoming the simulation provokes in the spectator an awareness that they are, in fact, just in front of a simulation. At the same time, curiously enough, it is when it feels more real. All this occurs in just an instant, a couple of seconds in which the spectator experiences being fully inside the simulation.

## Three More Examples, as a Result of Pixel's Analysis

At one point (Figure 5), the projection is on the vertical screen and creates the effect of a digital cloud inside which the actors -situated behind the curtain- appear to be immersed. So far everything is normal, in the sense that it is within the expected possibilities of the imposed visual logic. Suddenly, however, the cloud of dots is thrown towards the audience as a falling

wall. The result is the displacement of the projection to the floor, an aggressive and surprisingly expressive scene transition. The audience instantly goes from dreading being crushed by the digital cloud to being fascinated with the understanding that it was a visual trick.

At another point (Figure 6), the audience is presented with a similar scene. This time with a more three-dimensional effect, a spherical cloud of digital dots invades the vertical dimension of the space. Again, we find two dancers behind the backdrop who are placed right in the middle of this strange anomaly. In this case, the surprise arrives when the dancers are frozen in space (they stop their movement as if they have been transformed into living statues). However, both -performers and digital projection- begin to rotate, first to the right and then to the left. The dancers, despite being petrified, turn with great fluidity (the effect of being on a rotating platform) and with them also the whole simulated space. It happens so fast that there is no time to process how this is happening. Everything appeals to intuition, to quickly understand that which escapes all logic. The audience, in tenths of a second, can only assimilate that it is they -from the seating area- who are revolving around a scene frozen in time.

Finally, Pixel closes with a shocking scene, both visually and symbolically. It ends leaving the audience with the sensation of having been left in a void (Figure 7). The spectators, after spending seventy minutes immersed in this simulated universe -which was meant to feel so real- must leave it. The scene seems to be projected with this idea in mind. An ending that can be aggressive or even cathartic. The scene begins with the space configured by a digital grid. The sense of three-dimensionality is amplified by a subtle optical effect of distortion. And in this spatial frame, there is, in the centre, a black square. An element that can be compared to a black hole that gradually absorbs the simulation as it moves towards the performer and the audience. Nothingness takes over the space. The show implodes. The simulated universe has disappeared, and the show is over.

## Conclusions

In the interactive space, the digital projections (and the music that supports it) are as important as the body. Without the action of the body, the projection would remain an image (with a visual style of simulation). And vice versa, the projection allows the immersion of the body in a space that reacts (dialogues) to its gestures. Both are necessary for interaction to take place.

This interaction is set up through a visual dialogue. This, in a way, limits the communicative ability of the body, which is forced to resort to gestural action. Gestures which, on the other hand, will always be close to dance (consciously or not) due to its condition of body language. This is the most expressive channel available to the body to communicate in this simulated space. Image, sound, and body synchronise in a dialogue that can be scripted, as in stage performances (dance); or it can be just a total improvisation.

“Historic time” plays no role in the aesthetics of interactive space. Timing, on the other hand, does. The control of the rhythms in which a work develops is a condition that has always been considered in any artistic proposal, and interactive space is no different. The peculiarity here is that any manipulation of temporal perception will be done based on the aesthetic criteria of visual culture. That is in favour of fascination and superficiality. Shocking effects are sought that differentiate the simulation from the -dull and chaotic- reality. Sometimes, a fleeting development of events is proposed that prevents the assimilation of what has happened.

But, most important, in an interactive space the movement of the body is necessary. Without the action of the body, the projection would still be an image, but it could never feel like a real space.

**Figure 5**

*Adrien M & Claire B.* Pixel *(2014). Source: AM&CB*



**Figure 6**

*Adrien M & Claire B*. Pixel *(2014). Source: AM&CB*

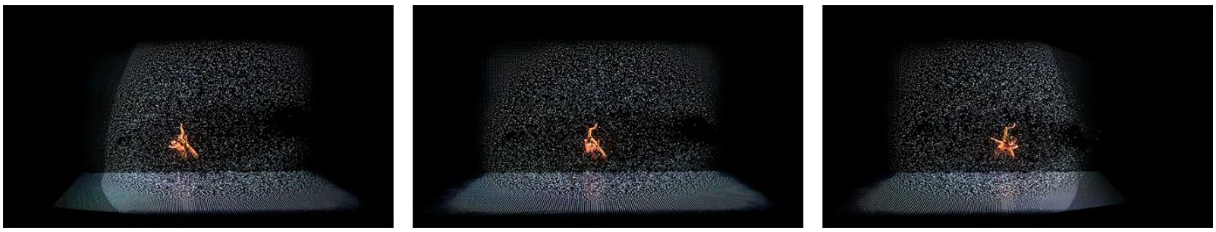
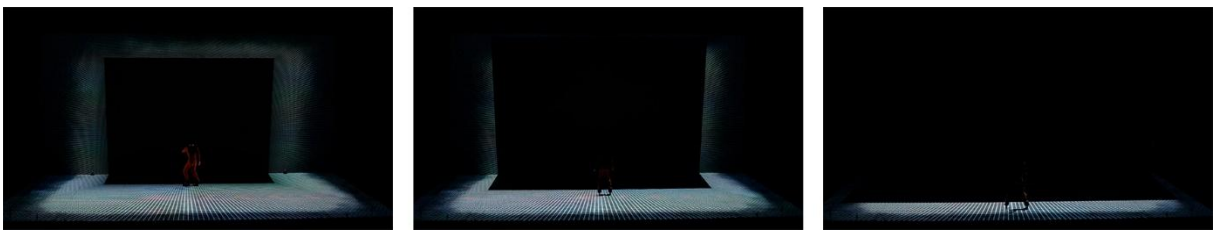


**Figure 7**

*Adrien M & Claire B*. Pixel *(2014). Source: AM&CB*



**Acknowledgements**

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# Virtual Spaces of Music and Dance. The TRaMIR Project on Intangible Heritage

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## Abstract

Since 2021, I have served as the scientific coordinator of the TraMIR (traditional music instruments room) project which aims to create a music room for discovering, learning and interacting with traditional Greek music instruments and dances. The project involves the development of a portable room equipped with a platform where visitors can experience the traditional Greek musical instruments through VR glasses, engage with interactive content to acquire knowledge, and even try their hand at dancing traditional Greek dances using a machine learning system. The Music Room offers visitors a live, dynamic and evolving experience of traditional Greek music and dances departing from static and outdated methods. It serves as a powerful tool for blending culture, education, heritage and tourism. In this paper, I will describe where the Music Room stands as a project on humanities and technology. Furthermore, I will delve into the methodological choices made during the project's proposal phase, particularly focusing on how I aimed to represent different geographical areas and digitally blend them with current performance practices and spaces. This discussion will shed light on how the digital space of the project has been transformed into a virtual museum of performing arts. Finally, I will add some critical reflections on the incorporation of 3D technology and artificial intelligence in traditional music and dances within this project -a rarity in Greek culture and traditional performing arts. Additionally, I will explore how an anthropological approach has contributed to overcoming social science deficits encountered through the project's development.

*Keywords:* Space, digital culture, AI, music, dance, geography.

## A Note on Geographies of Music and Space

> For what is geography, if it is not the drawing and interpretation of lines? The only quality that makes my geography unusual is that it does not limit itself to the study of visible things. Instead, it tries to foreshadow a cartography of thought. To practice this art, however, is incredibly difficult, for any attempt must face the challenge of being abstract enough (Olssen, 1991, p. 181).

Gunnar Olssen posed this rhetorical question, as he concluded his book *Lines of Power*. His radical ideas and approach on geography served as inspiration for me when introducing new theories and concept in my music geography class.[73] In the anthropology of music, terms like borders and lines have not been widely embraced. Instead, we are keenly interested in fluidity and plasticity aiming to dismantle the barriers between music, dance and everyday life and to highlight multiple music and dance identities. This interest is largely due to our recognition of the fact we inhabit a digital world where the boundaries between “here” and “there are constantly blurred. In this unique process of blending, space emerges as a protagonist, continuously produced and reproduced culturally. It transcends traditional boundaries embodying memories and emotions, and operating within broader cultural contexts.

Music, by its very nature, serves as a “spatial enabler”, granting individuals the power and the capacity to construct, shape and transform space through experiential means, tapping into the intricate network of their emotions and memories. The manner in which transcends natural geographic boundaries and imbues both open landscapes and built environments with significance through human experiences, introduces us to a nuanced understanding of human geography within ethnomusicology. Specifically, I refer to a mechanism intricately intertwined with the continuum of traditional music and dance forms and their contemporary expressions across diverse cultural performances. Deconstructing this mechanism through classical and multisited ethnography has provided me with deeper insights into how space continuously oscillates between its myriad manifestations and identities -from the tangible, pragmatic and perceptual to the abstract, intangible and idealized. These identities, though not mutually exclusive, are encountered in varying intensities through the medium of music and dance. Understanding this inherent heterogeneity of space through performing arts is essential for

[73]At Spring Semester of 2018, I taught a course entitled *Music maps and networks* at the Department of Music Studies, National and Kapodistrian University of Greece. As a part of the teaching requirements, I submitted a proposal outlining new theories and methodologies for the field of music geography. The framework proposed was subsequently integrated into the official curriculum of the course. [(https://en.music.uoa.gr/undergraduate_studies/)]. Please note that the provided translation contains errors, including the misspelling of Gunar Olsson’s surname and the absence of an exact excerpt from his book.

navigating the diverse lived dimensions of space and seamlessly transitioning between different spatial modes.

## Why Tramir? A Flashback

Greece boasts a diverse array of musical traditions that have originated and evolved over different periods, in various geographical regions, and with within distinct cultural contexts. These Greek musical traditions continue to be performed, revived and transformed within contemporary society. In the 1990s, a groundbreaking interdisciplinary project focusing on traditional Greek music and dances emerged known as the “Thrace” project.[74] Prior to this initiative, recordings of Greek traditional music were relatively scarce. Traditional music was not perceived or studied as performance art -as something dynamic and evolving. Instead, research and publications were primarily focused on linguistic aspects such as song lyrics, often neglecting instrumental music and failing to recognize music, singing, and dance aw performing arts in their own right, beyond mere literary expressions.

Another significant gap in research was the lack of systematic recording of dances using contemporary notation methods. Additionally, there had been no previous attempts in Greece to undertake a comprehensive study that integrates text, music and movement within a historical and cultural context. This research need was addressed by the scientific team of the program, imbuing the study with a comparative and interdisciplinary approach. Recognizing the interpretive specificity of all elements within musical culture, the group sought to emphasize the two fundamental dimensions of interpretating and performing musical practices: place and time as both perception and expression (Droulia and Liavas, 1999). This shift from a mono-dimensional to a multi-dimensional view of performing arts was innovative, marking the first instance in Greece of an ethnographic and cross disciplinary approach to the performing arts, breaking away from an established tradition of narrow research focus. Recordings were concluded during fieldwork, and for the first time, ethnographic data underwent digital transformation, a cutting-edge development within the Greek research context. This innovation led to fieldwork and its representation in a database. The innovation led to extensive discussions, collaborations, and disagreements, as it represented the initial attempt to bridge the humanities with technology. Countless hours were spent in meetings and discussions, aiming to integrate and transform the performance spaces into structured databases.

This exploration of space, place, geography, digitization, and performing arts led me to conduct ethnographic research on spatial dynamics, alongside the development of an educational project focused on performing arts and technology as part of my doctoral

[74] The research program of the “Friends of Music Society” funded by Stavros Niarchos Foundation http://epth.sfm.gr/Default.aspx

dissertation. To introduce children to the diverse music traditions of Greece, I collaborated with the Dance Workshop of Filoproodos Enosi Xanthis (FEX, Progressive Union of Xanthi[75]), located in the city of Xanthi in Northeastern Greece.[76] During my study of the Workshop's performances, rehearsals, materials gathered from the teachers' fieldwork, public presentations, festivals, and everyday lives of workshop's members, I worked on integrating and utilizing lived experiences and spaces with digital tools for educational purposes. In the years 2005-2007, using a smart board, such as the Sony one I employed, was considered innovative, and touch boards and pads were still uncommon. By combining digital fieldwork materials with a touch board, the 'ethnomusicology at schools' project became the first ethnomusicological program for schools in Greece, bringing fieldwork directly into the classroom. The initiative incorporated digitized materials of traditional music and dance, reimagining the classroom as a new fieldwork setting.

The experience, experimentation, and innovation gained from the afore mentioned projects, culminated in the preparation, submission, and ultimate acceptance of the TraMIR project proposal for funding.[77] As the scientific coordinator of the project, I presented TraMIR at the Xanthi's Folklore Museum, describing it as a Music Room designed for the exploration, learning, and interaction with Greek traditional musical instruments and dances. TraMIR is envisioned as a portable room where visitors engage with traditional instruments using VR glasses, access interactive content for knowledge acquisition, and attempt to learn Greek traditional dances through a machine learning-based system. This innovative concept immerses visitors in post-space combining sound, imagery, music, and dance to showcase both material and immaterial cultural heritage, alongside digital transformation, artificial intelligence, and performance. It represents a hybrid post-world with anthropos -human presence- as its core across all dimensions. The room features instruments taught, crafted, and played by musicians in contemporary concerts, festivals, and celebrations. These musicians shared melodies and rhythms through their instrument performances, transforming the materiality of the instruments into immaterial cultural expressions, and subsequently digitizing them. As a result, TraMIR offers a unique opportunity for visitors to engage with the worlds and stories of contemporary traditional music and dance communities. In this way,

[75] The research and educational project described as "carnival as a living element of our cultural heritage". (Sirakouli V. (2009)., Carnival as a living element of our cultural heritage. In Browne & Kreiser (eds) Popular culture values and the arts: Essays on elitism versus democratization. (pp.60-69) McFarland Publisher and V.Sirakouli (2006) "Η εθνομουσικολογία στη σχολική τάξη: Η δημιουργία και εφαρμογή ενός σχολικού εθνομουσικολογικού προγράμματος" (Ethnomusicology at school: Creating and applying and ethnomusicological project at school). Πρακτικά Συνεδρίου «Λαϊκός πολιτισμός και εκπαίδευση».

[76] FEX Organization retrieved from https://fex.org.gr

[77] TraMIR project retrieved from https://tramir.bookscanner.gr/

TraMIR stands as a pioneering project, seamlessly combining 3D technology, artificial intelligence, music, dance, and applied public anthropology.

## Reality of Virtuality?

Space has always played a central role in ethnomusicology. As researchers, we engage in 'fieldwork', shaping and framing our field as we move through villages, cities, countries or even continents to conduct ethnographic studies. Despite our constant navigation of different spaces and places, the concept of space was largely avoided until the early 2010s due to its complexity in capturing personal and shared experiences and memories. Traditional interpretations often depicted space as the location where specific sounds are heard. However, more progressive perspectives have emerged, deconstructing space based on how individuals experience music within it. This latter viewpoint offers insight into the interplay between music and physical geography transforming our understanding of space from a mere backdrop to a dynamic component of human geography.

The second perspective served as an inspiration for the TraMIR project, where physical geography served as not just the starting point, but also the motivation and methodological approach to creating a platform were musical instruments and dances intersect with Greece's physical landscape, revealing deeper dimensions of humanistic experience and geography. The musical instruments selected for TraMIR are not only integral to, but also informative representations of, various aspects of the system of classification established by Erich Moritz von Hornbostel and Curt Sachs.[78] However, any system reliant on the categorization of instruments is inherently complex. Within the Hornbostel-Sachs system, instruments are often presented in a manner that reveals little beyond their basic structure as sound-producing tools or cultural artifacts, abstracted from the broader and more intricate contexts in which they exist. TraMIR avoids the limitation of musical instruments to merely indexical functions, static museum presentations, or simplistic optical representations divorced from their cultural significance. Instead, it emphasizes the everyday life of the instrument and their dynamic interrelations between the instrument, performance, and music.

The subsequent digitization of Greek traditional music instruments in 3D form marked the first time such instruments had been rendered digitally, resulting in a multi-faceted digital identity that reflects the diverse characteristics. Initially, the instruments are presented as objects, focusing on their form and attributes. This includes providing descriptions of their shape, function, and significance to make them accessible to users who may be unfamiliar with the everyday cultures from which they originate. The collection features instruments that

[78] Hornbostel E. M. and C. Sachs. (1914) *Systematik der musikinstrumente Ein versuch*. In *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*. 46(4-5), 553-590.

bear visible signs of use, acknowledging their ‘life’ in the hands of contemporary musicians’ during practices and performances. These instruments showcase the relationship between the performer and the object, highlighting the tangible connection the instrument and the intangible realm of performing arts. This methodological choice is crucial in a connection between the physical instrument, and the artistic expression it facilitates.

The sound operates on two levels corresponding to the shape and form of the instruments. Firstly, it consists of a collection of audio files featuring the sound of the selected instruments played by the musicians, the majority of whom contributed their instruments for photography and digitization. Secondly, the sound archives are supplemented with a selection of audio and audiovisual performance files from the project’s collaborating entity, the Folklore Museum of Xanthi. While articulating the performance environment – encompassing sound, image, and text –, the emphasis is not solely on the technologically three-dimensional representation of instruments, but also on the multidimensional nature of the musical space. This encompasses physical space, time, and the dynamics of music and dance performance, such as occurring during public events like festivals and celebrations. Public performances serve as indicators of change in the realm of traditional music, as they transition from everyday contexts to the stage. The project’s flexibility extends beyond the selection of geographical areas within Greece represented by musical instruments; it also lies in the approach taken, enabling connections between a broader range of music genres, instruments and dances that have been digitized. This opens up possibilities for incorporating music and dances from other regions of the country in the future.

The videos of the performances from the dance workshop of the Folklore Museum serve to portray it as a living organism, where traditional music is not just a relic of the past but a vibrant part of present-day experience. The accompanying information texts are focused on emphasizing this relationship, a connection further underscored by interactive features such as quizzes offered on the platform. For instance, these quizzes may include brief narratives about the life histories of musicians. By recognizing the form of the material object and the context in which it is situated, the function of each instrument in specific situations becomes apparent, shedding light on how it is perceived and utilized. Through the stories shared by musicians, a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness between the instrument, the performer, and the object is established. As the memories, perceptions, and understanding converge, the realms of space and music align. This alignment fosters deeper levels of spatial comprehension and musical appreciation.

In the realm of digitization and digital humanities, numerous questions arise regarding the constitution of reality. Anthropologists considering everything as data, are challenging the notion of culture being virtualized. To truly comprehend the diversity of existing lifeworlds on

their own terms, the persistent idea of digital cultural formations being somehow less authentic than other cultural forms must be revaluated (Boelstorff, 2016). TraMIR contributes to this notion by asserting that digital culture is not merely a quantifiable and mappable collection of objects and practices, but rather a complex blend of the real and the virtual. Ultimately, it breaks down the traditional separation between qualitative and quantitative knowledge.

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# Performing Democracy. Site-Specific and Forum Theatre in Spin Time, Rome

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## Abstract

In this paper, I describe a theatre project that took place for several months in 2019 in Spin Time, a nine-storey occupied building on via Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in the Esquilino quarter at the centre of Rome, that has housed more than 450 people and 25 different ethnic groups since 2013. I outline the creative process of a collective emotional and intellectual development journey of a large group of people, starting from the Theatre of the Oppressed, critical ethnography and critical pedagogy, passing through ethnodrama, documentary theatre, site-specific performance, delving into the theatricality of popular assemblies. “Can theatre serve as a reflection tool of political imaginary for the members of a multicultural community by facilitating the process of continuous reinstitution?” was one of our research questions. Driven by the tangible needs of participants, we arrived at devising a hybrid theatre, suspended between reality and potentiality, between heteronomy and autonomy, which attempts to examine and reinvent the rituals of democracy within specific performance spaces appropriately designed.

*Keywords*: Theatre of the Oppressed, ethnodrama, documentary theatre, site-specific performance, critical performance ethnography, critical pedagogy, autonomy, radical democracy

## Performing Democracy

> “Theatre can reenact, enact, preenact assemblies. It can create a space of analysis, of reflection, of imagination -but the moment it becomes a real assembly, realism ends and reality begins. With all its theatricality.” (Malzacher, 2019, p.199)

Recapturing the thread of an old debate initiated by Piscator and Brecht in the German interwar period, the last decade has seen intense artistic research which examines the performative dimension of the assemblies and the possibility of theatre as an agonistic space,

as a sphere of radical imagination, and as an assemblage space of active spectators and subjects of independent thought (Fisher & Katsouraki, 2017; Malzacher, 2019, 2023; Robson, 2018). Artists as Milo Rau, and groups as Punchdrunk, Ontroerend, Public Movement, and Rimini Protocoll investigate political actions, study and create public choreographies, forms of social organisation, audience experiments in immersive theatre performances, "overt and covert rituals as 'pre-enactments' of possible rituals of the future" (Malzacher, 2019, p.188).
Far from criticising the performative aspect of democracy, as Plato did by calling democracy 'theatrocracy' (Laws, 701a-b), there is an extensive debate of the political as performative and the performative as political both in social studies and in theatre and performance studies scholarship and by radical political thinkers and philosophers such as Chantal Mouffe, Jacques Rancière, and Judith Butler.

**Figure 1**

*View to the Esquilino quarter, Rome, from Spin Time on via Santa Croce in Gerusalemme*.



This paper presents a social theatre intervention that took place in 2019 within a multinational and inclusive community in the Esquilino quarter, Rome. This intervention was based on combined artistic- ethnographic research, aiming at creating a multiple and dynamic mirror of the reality examined, useful to its protagonists but also to those who wish to ponder the possibilities of intertwining performing arts with a democratic political imaginary and citizens' self-institution.[79]

**Figure 2**

[79] A more detailed account of the project and its methodology can be found in Zoniou (2023b) (in Italian) and Zoniou (2021) (in Greek and in English).

*The nine-storey building of 17,000m$^2$ in the centre of Rome, where the "Spin Time Labs" project takes place.*



I outline here the demanding, creative process of a collective emotional and intellectual development journey of a large group of people, starting from the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO), critical ethnography and critical pedagogy for adults, passing through ethnodrama, documentary theatre, site-specific performance, delving into the theatricality of popular assemblies. Finally, driven by the tangible needs of participants, we arrived at devising a hybrid theatre, suspended between reality and potentiality, between heteronomy and autonomy. We use the term *autonomy* according to the definition given by Cornelius Castoriadis (1983, 1998), that is, as an imperative of imaginary self-institution, self-empowerment and legal-political self-determination, as opposed to the existing status of hetero-determination and *heteronomy*.
The artistic research process was partly documented in the documentary film *Spin Time: Che fatica la democrazia!* by actress and director Sabina Guzzanti, who embraced our working hypothesis with enthusiasm. Part of our dramaturgy was turned into a script and filmed as a dramatised documentary on authentic locations, in an original experiment to establish a dialogue between the language of the Theatre of the Oppressed and that of the cinematic narrative of Guzzanti.

**Inside 'Spin Time', a Social-Housing Worksite of Urban Regeneration**

Spin Time is a nine-storey building on via Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, some five hundred metres from Termini Station in Rome and at least as far from the Colosseum. The occupied building on 55, via Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, a building of 17,000m$^2$ and nine floors, is located in the Esquilino quarter at the centre of Rome. It used to house the headquarters of

the former National Institute of Social Security and Assistance for Public Administration Employees (IN- PDAP), and had been left empty and abandoned for a long time after the merge of insurance funds and the privatisation surge of State-owned assets in the 2000s, initiated by the Berlusconi government and the infamous “creative economy”, with a hint of conflict of interests, by Finance Minister Tremonti. During the same period, because of the financial crisis, many inhabitants and families in Rome ended up in the streets after being evicted or being unable to find affordable housing. The building on via Santa Croce, like other abandoned public buildings in the Italian capital, was squatted in by the “Action” housing movement; its use was changed under the guidance of architects and architecture students thanks to the intensive work, volunteering, and know-how of hundreds of people.

**Figure 3**

*A building hosting a huge “social-housing worksite of urban regeneration”.*



The building has housed more than 450 people and 25 different ethnic groups since 2013. Through hard work, the offices and spaces of the former State agency were turned into 180 living quarters –small apartments, common kitchens, bathrooms, a gym, a study hall, a play area and other common spaces– intended for people of very low income, families with a single parent or many children, low-income pensioners, former drug addicts, homeless and dispossessed people, who now occupy the seven overground storeys. The ground floor and

the two basements have been turned into 29 laboratories and cultural spaces[80], beautiful and functional spaces used by dozens of Roman citizens, who act, create and work at Spin Time without necessarily living in the building: leftist autonomists with thirty-year social movement experience, anarchists, Catholic women activists belonging to missionary orders, devout Muslims, alternative and mainstream artists, LGBT activists, environmentalists, unionists, anti-fascist punks, researchers, hackers, cooks, labourers, former city councillors, parliamentary candidates, members of various "anti-movements", academics from different Roman universities in a bizarre co-existence.

**Figure 4**

*The Theatre of the Oppressed Group inside Spin Time.*



As described by the protagonists themselves, this building is a "social-housing worksite of urban regeneration" (Gerundino, 2019), the so-called "Spin Time Labs", widely known as "Spin Time" supported by the "Action" housing movement as well as labour, political, activist, artistic, religious and research collectivities. Their goal is to claim the right to housing, along with other rights, such as the right to decent work, to culture, equality, education, social security, cultural identity, and freedom of expression. Any collectivity with an artistic idea, a proposal for collaborative work, an inclusive action, a political intervention can request space in the building from the Spin Time assembly.

On the 2nd of May 2019 the police had cut the power supply following orders from the all-powerful Minister of the Interior, Matteo Salvini. To everyone's surprise, Cardinal Konrad

[80]200-seat auditorium, restaurant, library, rehearsal spaces, concert space, club, sewing and arts laboratories, carpentry, beer brewing laboratory, mental health centre, self-organised afternoon school, publishing house, youth centre, large co-working space for independent workers equipped with computers, etc.

Krajewski, a top aide to Pope Francis, who had just returned from his mission on the Greek island of Lesvos, personally reconnected the current himself so that electricity would return to the occupied building after a week of desperation, protests, violent demonstrations, and suppression, leaving veteran activists and politicians of the Left in the Italian capital stunned and causing a diplomatic incident between the Italian State and the Vatican.

**The Artistic Research Project at Spin Time, Rome**

During my stay in Rome, as a visiting professor at the Department of History, Anthropology, Religions, Performing Arts at the Sapienza University of Rome invited by Professor Guido di Palma, we implemented, in cooperation with a group of students and the significant support of colleagues,[81] an artistic research project of *social theatre* (Bernardi, 2004). This was mainly based on the *Theatre of the Oppressed* and other theatrical methods: *ethnotheatre* or *ethnodrama* (Saldana, 1999, 2005; Mienczakowski & Stephen, 2006), *documentary theatre* (Forsyth & Megson, 2009), *devised theatre* (Oddey, 1994), *site-specific performance* (Kaye, 2008)[82].

**Figure 5**

*Image theatre.*



[81] This research project was realised thanks to Guido Di Palma, Noemi Massari, Irene Scaturro, Cecilia Carponi at the SARAS Department. In addition, our colleagues Riccardo Silvi and Walter Balducci contributed to the video documentation of the project.

[82] For a detailed description of the theatrical methods, we implemented within the framework of this artistic research, see Zoniou (2018) and Zoniou (2023b).

Our intervention was of an intensive format, lasting from March to October 2019. We organised workshops and presented interactive performances based on collective dramaturgy resulting from an anthropological-ethnographic research process. More specifically, our approach towards the reality under examination and artistic interaction with the latter followed the ethics and methodology of the hermeneutic research paradigm and, in particular, the trends of *critical participatory ethnography* (Carspecken, 1996) and *performance ethnography* (Dennis, 2009; Denzin, 2003), as well as *arts- based research* (Glesne, 2018, pp. 362-399)[83]. The theatre workshops involved 25 out of the approximately 450 residents of Spin Time; they were members of 11 out of the 25 ethnic groups as *social actors*. This process was documented in a film, entitled *Spin Time: Che fatica la democrazia! (Spin Time: What a trouble democracy is!)*, a dramatised participatory documentary film by the well-known Italian actress and director, Sabina Guzzanti – a film selected and screened in the Giornate degli Autori-Venetian Nights section of the Venice Film Festival in September 2021.[84]

**Figure 6**

*Image theatre.*



Spin Time is a complex reality: those who join the community prompted by an urgent need to survive and find housing (the residents of the upper floors) co-exist with those who do so because they see Spin Time as a place of social struggle or are motivated by ideological or artistic inspiration (i.e., the users of the ground floor and basements). The “ones up” and the

[83] A beautiful example of recent research inspired by the same principles under the guidance of Canadian colleagues is outlined in Gallagher et al. (2020).

[84] See the film presentation at the 78th International Venice Film Festival 2021- Giornate degli autori 18th edition: https://www.giornatedegliautori.com/film.asp?id=38&id_ film=1553&lang=eng

"ones down" are two so different that they can hardly mix. Social conditions at Spin Time are conditions of plurality and multiculturalism, offering a truly wide range of languages, cultures, backgrounds, social circumstances, political choices, and stories and rendering this experience truly unique and exceptional. It is almost impossible to find similar conditions of heterogeneity anywhere else.

The research project in question went beyond the familiar implementation framework of a social theatre project with a group of vulnerable people, a group of immigrants, people struggling to get by, who more or less share the same background, the same culture or/and the same geographical area -a project aiming at inclusion.[85] Contrary to this approach and our initial expectations, our intervention involved an equal process of gradual identification of researchers-facilitators and students with citizens who strive to achieve a utopia of cultural and political co-existence, aspiring to operate along the principles of dialogue and equality and constantly threatened by fear, racial hatred, and bigotry. While attempting to intervene, we became part of a reality and its transformation process.[86]

The questions of residents and other members of Spin Time became our own research questions, too. Using participant observation of the reality under examination as a starting point, and experiencing our interaction with it, four questions for our artistic-social research emerged in the course of the process that had not occurred to us before our contact with the community, namely:

1. How can we give voice to people who have learned to keep quiet when faced with the dominant "culture of monologue", which is so powerful that it prevails even in a potentially libertarian-democratic community?
2. How can we build communication bridges between people from the fields of arts, science and political action and those who fight for day-to-day survival without any similar previous experience?
3. Can theatricality become a tool for observing and analysing ourselves and the surrounding reality from a critical and distanced perspective so that the complexity of human co-existence and different aspects of reality can be treated in a creative rather than disruptive way?
4. Can theatre serve as a reflection tool of political imaginary for the members of a multicultural community by facilitating the process of continuous reinstitution?[87]

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[85] For example, members of the United African Women's Organization, a migrant women's group in Athens, devised a forum theatre performance entitled *No to Racism from the Baby's Cot!*, following a social theatre workshop that lasted eight months during 2011-2012. Shedding light on the lives of African women as citizens, the performance toured the neighbourhoods of Athens during a critical period of growing neo-Nazi movements, see Zoniou and Papadopoulou (2021) and Zoniou and Boemi (2013).

[86] Our first concern was to avoid the traps of folklore representation of the difference in intercultural theatre. See Zoniou (2024).

[87] That is, the community should be able to constantly invent new institutions and rules of self-management in response to the new needs of its members. A common concept in Castoriadis' thought.

For the dramaturgical processing of these questions, we combined various theatrical techniques, arriving at collective decisions through a direct-democratic process, based on theatricality and the principles of critical pedagogy for adults and the concepts of *empowerment* and *ownership*.[88] In the next sections, I will outline an evolutionary process of *coscientisation*,[89] from a performance of oppression and *heteronomy* towards a gradual achievement of a theatricality of *autonomy*.[90]

**First Phase of Artistic Research: Residents as Narrators and as Spect-Actors**

Our research project was divided into two phases. During the first phase, after the completion of a course at the university to prepare participating students, we, the outsiders of the reality of Spin Time, came into contact with the community, maintaining a strictly ethnographic approach.

The first phase of research aimed at establishing a dialogue with the residents of the building in order to understand their needs and desires through participant observation: it was a long process learning to listen, establishing personal contact and participating in the social, cultural and political aspects of their lives. We gave ourselves the time to get to know a complex reality in a systematic and in-depth manner. Consequently, our goal was to motivate residents to participate in the theatre workshops. However, the road ahead was not easy. We soon realised that placing a piece of paper on the notice board that read something like “Come join the TO workshop!” was pointless. A different system was required. There had been earlier attempts by other groups to convince the residents to participate in theatrical experiments; the call to “participate in theatre activities” held downstairs had received no response; therefore, this time we reversed the process and mentality, i.e., for the first time, the theatre would move to the higher floors and the apartments of building residents.

We organised the first public theatrical event in June 2019: we were going to present a performance that reflected at a dramaturgical level, the results of the first phase of our research at Spin Time. On 9 June 2019, a promenade and interactive performance entitled *Let’s shed some light on us! (Facciamoci luce!)* was presented to the residents-spectators by students-actors. The performance wandered across the corridors and apartments-former offices on the different floors of the Spin Time building; initially the theatrical form was that of a *site-specific performance*, in a poetic reconstruction of everyday life within the building, using words taken

[88] For the concept of *empowerment*, see McLaren (1989) and Sleeter (1991). For the concept of *ownership*, see Mavrocordatos (2009).

[89] A basic term used by Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal and the aim of their practice. It is a pedagogical process of developing critical consciousness of familiar social reality through learning and *praxis* (the term *praxis* involves informed action and reflection upon it), aimed at revealing the social structure of problems, social myths as well as the function of dominant ideology, see Freire (1998).

[90] I use the term *autonomy* according to the definition given by Cornelius Castoriadis, that is, as an imperative of imaginary self-institution, self-empowerment and legal-political self-determination, as opposed to the existing status of hetero-determination and *heteronomy*. See Castoriadis (1983, 1998).

from the stories narrated by the residents themselves, who were now spectators at this performance. The theatrical scenes presented were structured as open questions addressed to the audience, who gradually broke the ice, became an active audience, i.e., *spect-actors* (Boal, 2002), and was given the opportunity to provide answers in a dynamic, multi-dimensional, and dialogical way during the "forum", i.e., the second, interactive part of the performance.

Justice or legality? We attempted to shed light on the darkness that had gathered in the preceding period due to propaganda against Spin Time: fake news, prejudiced statements, bigotry and politics of hatred and death. We investigated issues related to the housing emergency, the ethics of collective cohabitation and respect for differences.

**Figure 7**

*A forum theatre performance as a collective decision-making process.*



The dramaturgy of this specific performance derived from a systematic process combining the method of research with a poetic-artistic perspective. Data collection for our research was realised through participant observation, numerous open-ended interviews, and accurate recording of workshop interventions, improvisations and concerns expressed by participants. The next step was data analysis based on the *grounded theory* rationale[91]: repeated ideas put forward by respondents were grouped into themes-broader categories for analysis, presenting

[91] In the research methodology called *grounded theory*, working hypotheses derive, "arise" inductively from analysing data and processing categories and are not pre-formulated, see Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) and Malagon et al. (2009). Note, however, that an artistic research paper, such as this one, primarily aims at delving into or/and proposing new performative forms rather than studying social phenomena; therefore, this research methodology was more useful in the first part of our research as a working method and mentality to assess the reality under observation rather than as a strict methodology for producing a social theory.

the issues that had emerged as the most important for the residents themselves. In other words, the external university group tried not to impose their preconceived vision –expressed through pre-formulated working hypotheses– regarding the reality under observation, but, instead, form a vision by listening to the main concepts expressed by the participants, to reflect the narration back to the narrators, like a multiple and dynamic mirror of their own reality, in a spirit of respect and active listening. These categories of analysis gave rise to the initial theatrical scenes, following the dramaturgical principles of ethnodrama and forum theatre.[92] We identified hubs and mechanisms of oppression, protagonists and antagonists, and watched hope and expectations for a better life turn into conflict and defeat. Other scenes were created by following the rationale of devised theatre and site-specific performance developed as a dramaturgical response to stimuli arising from the space itself i.e., the place where people live their everyday lives, the corridors, the bathrooms, the 'sentry box' at the building entrance, the veranda, the kitchens, etc.

Indeed, this method of approaching the Spin Time community proved effective. Many people recognised their own words and their reality being translated into a symbolic and poetic language; they laughed, they experienced aesthetic pleasure and satisfaction and saw the possibilities of expressing issues deriving from their basic needs in this kind of theatre.

**The Second Phase of Artistic Research: Residents as Actors**

After this first performance, in a moving general assembly of building users, many residents, survivors, people from a tough background of homelessness, persecution and addiction, having drawn inspiration from the performance about their lives and overcoming powerful cultural obstacles, decided, with the support of the entire community, to become active participants and join the theatre workshop to take place from June to October 2019, where they could talk, with no mediators, about the issues that concerned them. After all, the Theatre of the Oppressed is not presented by the non-oppressed to the oppressed, but by the oppressed to the oppressed!

The second phase of our intervention aimed at creating the conditions for realising the vision of rendering the Theatre of the Oppressed into a tool to serve reflecting on this complex reality. Through various theatrical techniques, we began to collect dramaturgical material in order to analyse the surrounding reality and the residents' main issues of concern regarding their community; this was based on conventional TO dramaturgy outlining the tension between two opposing and uneven poles, namely the Protagonist-Oppressed and the Antagonist-

[92] "Forum theatre" is one of the most significant methods of the Theatre of the Oppressed. Other methods include "image theatre", "invisible theatre", "rainbow of desire", "legislative theatre", "newspaper theatre", see Boal (2002). In this particular intervention, we combined all of the above TO methods.

Oppressor, watching the former's struggle against the power relationship with the latter.

**Figure 8**

*Collective dramaturgy through games: "The image of the perfect Spin Time inhabitant".*



During the theatre workshop, as we delved into a critical reading of reality through *Image Theatre* (Boal, 2002) and trust was being built, it emerged that the majority of the oppression stories recounted by the participants using the various techniques hardly concerned the conflict between the outside and the inside world, as we had initially thought, but, mostly, focused on the power imbalance within Spin Time itself arising from ethnicity, sex, education, language, age, bodily integrity and similar factors. It was certainly confounding for our expectations. Despite hard, tangible efforts to overcome inequality within the community, most stories related tough intercultural relationships, abuse of power, invisible privileges and the unequal relationships between persons involved in political management -veteran members of social movements in the Italian capital- and building residents, usually people with no previous political action or experience. Once again, it emerged that, unless there are safety measures in place, once somebody is given the opportunity to exert power over someone else in collective management systems, issues of friction, conflict and abuse are bound to arise pretty soon. This establishment of power relations played a major role in the lives of residents because it was a decisive factor. For example, non-compliance with certain rules of the community and imposition of penalties could even lead to someone's expulsion from the building, which, in effect, meant they had to go back living in the streets. Who decided about

the severity of misconduct and the penalty to be imposed? What was their motive? How are alliances built? For the participants in the theatre workshop, this was the primary issue of oppression they wanted to investigate.

The first phase of the workshop involving the residents of the building on via Santa Croce aimed at alleviating tension and overcoming the initial distrust among members, who might have been fighting until recently at the meeting or the common kitchen about political matters or everyday problems. The theatre workshop operated as a safe and welcoming space, where everyone could 'expose' themselves without being judged and without hiding disagreements under the rug; instead, they were considered, their connection with broader social problems were recognised and there was a macro-level of analysis. Participants would often burst into tears of emotion during this process of gradually abandoning the social façade they had built in order to survive their difficult daily life.

**Figure 9**

*Deconstructing power structures inside Spin Time community by its members through forum theatre performance.*



Various techniques, exercises, and games, drawn from different kinds of social theatre and TO,[93] enabled us to explore the following questions: Is there justice? What is injustice? Where does each person's responsibility lie? How do you communicate discomfort or gratitude? Who acts as an oppressor and why? How can we build a fair and functional

[93] The exercises that were used are described in detail in Zoniou (2023b).

community? How are rules set out and how do we react when they are broken?

Apart from the residents, many people affiliated with Spin Time, the “ones down”, contributed to this entire process: the members of the Spin Off theatre collective offered continuous support with organisational and artistic aspects; the wonderful musicians of the famous classical music orchestra of Spin Time, i.e., the Orchestra Notturna Clandestina, performed live the atmospheric music composed for the performance by maestro Enrico Melozzi; and comedian actress Sabina Guzzanti appeared as a guest star in the role of an oppressor, namely a journalist for a populist far-right newspaper, a part she knew very well, having also been a victim herself.

**Figure 10**

*A dialogue between reality, its cinematic and theatrical reconstruction, and fiction. Sabina Guzzanti shoots her film Spin Time – Che fatica la democrazia!*



*Ci sono case che capitano! (There are houses that hap-pen!)* was the title of the main performance, which took place on the evening of 4 October 2019 at the Auditorium of the building on via Santa Croce in a public celebration of community: young and old, children and babies, men and women in their ‘Sunday best’ came from the seven floors and the ground floor and basements to anxiously watch the story of Anna (which they already knew, of course, since many of them attended rehearsals) and to intervene with proposals, taking her place on stage, battling oppression and offering solutions, but also taking, through the parts, a stand in front of their community.

**True Democracy and a Performance of Democracy**

The Theatre of the Oppressed performative techniques constitute intellectual and aesthetic journeys for both actors and spectators (Ganguly, 2010), resulting in intellectual uplifting, as artists and non- artists, experts and non-experts, become *spect-actors* and learn from each other, *together*, through dialogue, through breaking the monologue culture in some kind of "transportation", during which participants "are transported" only to return to themselves and their daily lives transformed (Schechner, 1984, 2002).

**Figure 11**

*Stage and film process for self-determination*



Our working hypothesis, which arose through the process that confounded our initial expectations, as already mentioned, was to provide the residents with the opportunity to move beyond merely complaining about the things that did not work in their community and the mentality of delegating power to leaders and change their situation through processing the proposals put forward during the workshop and the performance and using the theatrical space as a testing ground, a rehearsal venue for real life, so that they could regain their dignity and the strength necessary to deal with external attacks.

We suggested that theatre should be systematically used as a tool by the General Assembly of building users, with the theatre group processing all conflict issues and presenting them in the form of a forum/legislative theatre to the General Assembly as a way for finding solutions. The Quorate General Assembly took place the next day at the same place where

the performance had been presented. This perhaps concretely expressed the concept of Forum Theatre per Boal and even evoked the single-issue meetings of the Athenian Ecclesia of Demos, namely the Assembly of the People, after the dramatic contest of Great Dionysia. The Assembly commented on the events depicted in the performance and expressed their enthusiasm in an unprecedented atmosphere of unity. Its members affirmed that they would try to ensure the rules of procedure would gradually incorporate proposals for the community organisational review as they arose and would arise from future workshops and performances; this would lead to fairer, more democratic, and participatory self-management of the community. Immediately after that, the same General Assembly went on, with the familiar heated atmosphere and usual disputes and power games, onto complaints about the Comitato and the shifts, disputes over the violation of community rules, rave parties that provoked neighbours, fourth floor versus seventh floor, Eastern-Europeans versus Africans, Sonia, who had yet to pay her monthly contribution to the common expenses coffer, etc.

It is not a coincidence that ancient Greek drama came to cure human passions being born in the agonising process of self-determination of a people who, without kings, hierarchs or holy books, sought to decide for themselves while also having to face all the tension produced by the tragic human condition of dealing with a multidimensional truth (Castoriadis, 1983).

These initial performing activities were followed by others, accompanied by a desire to imagine, and perhaps establish, a new kind of institution in the community, which would allow for a theatrical investigation of any issue for discussion and even, at times, could substitute the endless tiresome assemblies that often reproduce the monologue culture. The residents' desire to continue experimenting using these means has been expressed in every way and was reignited after September 2021 by the screening of *Spin Time – Che fatica la democrazia!* viewed both at the building and at cinemas across Italy.[94]

## Conclusions

In conclusion, starting from the Theatre of the Oppressed, we arrived at a proposal for a new hybrid theatrical form driven by the actual needs expressed, a theatrical form that could address the questions raised for the artistic research.[95] We arrived at devising a hybrid theatre, suspended between reality and potentiality, between heteronomy and autonomy, which attempts to examine and reinvent the rituals of democracy within specific performance spaces appropriately designed. The essence of Athenian tragedy lies in the fact that politics acts itself

[94] This dialogue between reality, its cinematic and theatrical reconstruction, and fiction is commented on by many film critics, see for example Baffoni (2021).

[95] For us, the conclusions –the answers to the research questions and the discussion of the findings of this specific research, which follows the tradition of arts-based research (Glesne, 2018, pp. 362-399)– were the dramaturgy of the theatrical performances and the film directed by Sabina Guzzanti. The evaluation of the impact that these artistic products have on the community is ongoing.

out as a live performance before citizens, taking place in the exact same way (*speech* and *action*) as democratic politics experienced by Athenian citizens in their daily lives (Pigkou-Repousi, 2012). According to Castoriadis (2008), as well as other philosophers and scholars, ancient Greek tragedy constitutes a poetic reconstruction of the political issues and concerns faced by the citizens of democratic Athens on stage; it was born in a society founded on a continuous process of self-institution (Pefanis, 2012).

**Figure 13**

*Posters*







Starting from the Theatre of the Oppressed, we tried to explore the political consequences of our aesthetic choices, on the one hand, and to break new ground for the aesthetic depiction of an imperative, on the other. We used the imaginary dramatisation of a different political and social structure, inspired by the Athenian city-state, the Agora (Forum) and the Ecclesia of Demos and invented a theatricality of self-determination and autonomy. Choosing the term in its ancient Greek sense, we could, perhaps, call this ongoing theatrical process *theatre of autonomy*.

We sought to give voice to people who are shaped within a culture of monologue created by the media, political parties, religion, employment, family, and politics as well as movements. Our work sought to help these people grow intellectually, break free from passivity, transcend hetero-determination and acquire emotional and spiritual strength; we aspired to reconstruct

oppression and heteronomy in order to understand and overcome them.

We attempted to enact new political rituals, to create a culture of dialogue, a truly democratic and participatory space, a theatrical community that reflects and is transformed by mobilising the collective wisdom of people. These rituals were born inside a specific space but could inspire new architectural projects of newly built or renovated spaces appropriately designed for performing democracy.

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# Of Real and Mythic Places
# Performing In Archaeological Sites in the Argolid

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## Abstract

This paper is an account of my creative experience in mounting the site-specific devised play *Journeys of Water (Five Myths form the Ancient Argolid)* in the archaeological sites of Ancient Mycenae, Ancient Tiryns and the Sanctuary of Asclepius, in Epidaurus. This project was a collective creation by the multicultural Okypus Theatre Company and took place around the Argolid area, in May 2012.

In *Journeys of Water* -a dramatisation of local ancient myths related to water and the site-specificity of both the natural and the architectural environment of the local archaeological sites became central to the creative process. The need to make use of the region's renowned historical heritage provided the company with an outstanding material that shaped this theatrical creation. Hence, all the theatrical components (dramaturgy, *mise en scène,* musical creation, scenographic concept and the interaction with the audience) derived from the selection of these sites, which were finally used as the actual performance spaces. Materially and symbolically separated from urban and daily life, the archaeological sites became a vast stage, radiating the very special energy from the traverse of mythical, historical, sociopolitical and cultural stories through time.

*Keywords:* Site-specificity, *mise en scène,* scenography, archaeological sites, mythology

## Performing in Nafplion and the Argolid Region: Theatre Outside of the Theatre

In recent years, archaeology and theatre have established a dialogue, in order to work with concepts that both disciplines are interested in: the concepts of body, space, object, memory, and narration. Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks have generated this "disciplinary dialogue" in their book *Theatre/Archaeology* (2001). The result of this interaction is, on the one hand, a "hybrid" discipline that uses theatrical methods to examine archaeological material and

archaeological methods to approach the art of theatre. On the other hand, archaeological sites are used for the creation and mounting of site-specific performances: the topography, the special cultural, social, political, and religious metaphors of archaeological sites are used as part of the dramaturgy, *mise en scène*, and performance design.

Finding relevance in "Performing Space 2023"'s theme[96] and in the performative aspects of space, I chose to present my personal creative experience in mounting the site-specific, devised play *Journeys of Water (Five Myths form the Ancient Argolid)*, in the archaeological sites of Ancient Mycenae, Ancient Tiryns and the Sanctuary of Asclepius, in Epidaurus. This project was a collective creation by the multicultural Okypus Theatre Company and took place around the Argolid region, in May 2012.[97]

Creating site-specific works has been one of the main artistic aims of the Okypus Theatre Company that was founded in Nafplion, in 2006. Okypus means "swift-footed" in Ancient Greek and emerged from the encounter between the Balkans and Latin America: artists from Greece and Croatia, Chile and Argentina, Colombia, Mexico and Cuba collaborate and explore the creative possibilities of cultural syncretism.

In particular, the group's basic aims are: to make use of the rich historical and cultural background of the region of the Argolid in its stagings, to create performances based on the ideas of interculturalism and multilingualism, and to experiment on staging new, unperformed dramatic texts or devised plays based on world mythology. To sum up the company's creative urges, I am borrowing the term "glocal", as it has been defined by Richard Schechner: "the powerful combination of the local and the global" (2013, p. 25).

Serving as the company's artistic director and due to my background as performance designer, since the beginning of the company's theatrical activity in 2007, I wished to give a special emphasis on performance space as one of the main motifs in the creation of our productions. A conventional theatre space was considered to be too limiting, and this is the reason for choosing alternative spaces that shape the company's performances in terms of dramaturgy, *mise en scène*[98] and the visual aesthetic.

Towards this end, the company's base in Nafplion proved to be ideal. The town itself and its surrounding area have been home of major ancient Greek myths and important historical

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[96] The conference's theme focuses on "exploring the mythical, natural and urban landscape of the Argolida" (Performing Space, 2023).

[97] Creative team: Iliana Pazarzi (stage version), Despina Nikiforaki (Ancient Greek translation), Athena Stourna (direction, performance design), Mariana Kútulas-Vrsalović (musical composition), Myrto Kosmopoulou (assistant designer). Performers-musicians: Savvas Kovlakas, Mariana Kútulas-Vrsalović, Federico Nieto-El'Gazi, Iliana Pazarzi, Alexandros Vamvoukos.

[98] I prefer to use the French term "*mise en scène*" and refer to it as a concept reclaimed by Patrice Pavis in his seminal book *Contemporary Mise en Scène: Staging Theatre Today* (2013). Within this theoretical framework, Pavis incorporates the multidisciplinary nature of both theatre direction and performance creation, while the *mise en scène* is considered a form of total art.

events, spanning from the prehistoric period until the present day. Some of Greece's most impressive archaeological sites are to be found in the Argolid. Added to these, the region's capital, Nafplion, is considered a town of important historical significance due to its long history that is still apparent in the well-preserved historical centre. The town has witnessed turbulent historical events, as it passed successively under Frank, Venetian and Ottoman occupation, until it was taken over by the Greeks, in 1822, following the outburst of the Greek War of Independence. Between 1829 and 1834, Nafplion was named the first capital of the newly-found Greek state.

**Figure 1**

*Performance at the Archaeological site of Tiryns. The gods Hera and Poseidon fight over the protection of Argos. Performers: Savvas Kovlakas and Iliana Pazarzi (Photo: Angelos Gounaras)*



When the company was formed in 2007, the only option for staging plays in Nafplion was the historical building Trianon, an old mosque at Syntagma square, turned into a cinema in the 20th century and now housing the town's only covered theatre. Back then, I had felt that the conversion of a historical monument into a proscenium arch theatre was a kind of "wound" to the building and, and for this reason, I looked for alternative spaces. Indeed, Nafplion is a vast open-air museum and home to numerous museum foundations, with different thematic areas.

Hence, museums became our alternative theatre spaces; for example, our company performed a devised play for children based on myths form Latin America, at the Museum of Childhood in 2009 and a contemporary Greek play, *Berlin* by Stamatis Polenakis, at the

National Gallery a year later. In this paper I will focus on the use of local archaeological sites as outdoor performance spaces, in a project that took place in 2012.

## Brief Presentation of the Project *Journeys of Water (Five Myths form the Ancient Argolid)*

Ancient Greek mythology became the source of inspiration for the project titled *Journeys of Water (Five Myths form the Ancient Argolid)*, a dramatisation of local myths related to water and the aquatic element. The devised play was performed in May 2012, on the grounds of the main local archaeological sites: (i) the sanctuary of Asclepieion, an ancient healing sanctuary devoted to Asclepius, the god of medicine, which includes the Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus; (ii) outside the fortified citadel of the Ancient Mycenae, and (iii) alongside the prehistoric fortress of the Ancient Tiryns, both of them being the two most important cities of the Mycenean civilisation. Performances were scheduled to be presented to pupils of local primary schools.

**Figure 2**

*Performance at the Archaeological site of Tiryns. Perseus rescues Andromeda in Ethiopia. Performers: Federico Nieto El' Gazi and Mariana Kútulas Vrsalović. (Photo: Angelos Gounaras)*



The narrative thread of the story is as follows: The gods Hera and Poseidon both claim to be the protectors of the city of Argos (Figure 1). They set up a contest in which the three local river gods, Inachos, Kyfisos and Asterion, are invited to choose the winner. While waiting for the rivers' judgment, Poseidon accuses Hera of mistreating her priestess Io, daughter of river Inachos, with whom Zeus had fallen in love. In order to protect Io from the wrath of his wife, Zeus transformed her into a white heifer. Tormented by a gadfly sent by Hera, Io fled from

Argos and wandered across Europe and Asia, crossing the Ionian Sea (named after her), swimming the strait that was later called Bosporus -meaning ox passage and eventually reaching Egypt. Her descendants ruled there for many generations, and one of them, Danaos, returned to Argos and became king.

Back to the two gods' dispute, we learn that Hera wins the contest and so, Poseidon punishes the area with drought. Danaos sends his daughter Amymone in search of water. Poseidon, once he had rescued Amymone from the clutches of a satyr, leads her to the spring of Lerna, and she, in gratitude, agrees to couple with him. And thus, is born Nafplios,[99] whose son, the brave warrior Palamedes, later offered important technical innovations to humanity. Lastly, we follow the course of Perseus, who slews Medusa and journeys as far as Ethiopia to rescue Andromeda. He later becomes King of Tiryns and founds Mycenae (Figure 2). The play ends when Poseidon accepts having lost the protection of Argos and departs in sorrow.

## The Archaeological Sites as Places with a History and a Life

In *Journeys of Water*, the site-specificity of both the natural and the architectural environment of the archaeological sites became central to the creative process. In dramaturgical terms, all of the myths' dramatic places refer to the selection of these sites that were finally used as the actual performance spaces: Tiryns, Nafplion, Mycenae, and Argos could be seen in their present state and perceived through their mythical existence throughout the performances.

Hence, these open-air sites became a vast stage, radiating the very special energy stemming from the traverse of mythical, historical, sociopolitical and cultural stories through time. According to Yannis Hamilakis and Efthimis Theou, archaeological sites are "Materially and symbolically demarcated from the space of daily life" (2013, p. 181). On top of that, the project offered a different use for these spaces: archaeological remains are usually populated by hordes of tourists, guides, and guards, during opening times, and are deserted as soon as darkness falls. In this case, the performance became part of the site's "daily life" with the invasion of tourists (and even animals) (Figure 3).

Added to this, the weather conditions offered an unpredictable element to the experience, since the performances took place in daytime, just like in ancient times: the hot morning sun, the strong wind, a cloudy sky, or a rainy day altered and shaped each performance, calling the actors-musicians for constant readiness and alert.

The sites of Ancient Mycenae, Ancient Tiryns, and the healing sanctuary devoted to the God Asclepius in Epidaurus became the setting, where the five local ancient myths related to water and the aquatic element revived the history of the region. The aim was to raise water-related issues that have been a serious threat for the region of the Argolid since the prehistoric

[99] The city of Nafplion is named after him.

era and are still devastating the area nowadays, in various forms: floods, water-shortage and poisonous water.

In a journey through time and space, ancient gods and mythical figures revealed the timeless human effort to tame nature, to improve living conditions through innovation, social and political organisation and wise governance, as well as to fight for love and justice. Moreover, the mythological material unveiled the way in which the local populations merged with foreign ones, travelled and migrated all over the world, from Argos to Bosporus, Caucasus, Egypt, and Ethiopia, thus exchanging political, economic and cultural elements.

**Figure 3**

*Performance at the Archaeological site of Mycenae. The invasion of tourists and animals as the site pursuits its daily life. Performers: Federico Nieto El' Gazi, Iliana Pazarzi and Mariana Kútulas Vrsalović. (Photo: Angelos Gounaras)*



The original musical compositions[100] outlined this journey: the musical instruments comprised of ancient Greek ones (in reconstruction), such as the lyre and the *pandura*, and their descendants (guitar and bouzouki) as well as instruments from the countries visited by the heroes in the play, such as Indian and Egyptian musical instruments. Music helped to create an acoustic scenography, where the different settings and situations of the play were designated by distinctive sonic environments, performed by the actors-musicians.

This cultural syncretism, formed by local and global elements, was used by the creative team, comprised of Greek, Croatian and Latin-American artists, who brought in their own distinctive cultural and artistic backgrounds, thus embodying and re-inhabiting the ancient myths and historical sites. In this way, borders were shifted and boundaries were lifted, underlining the political dimension of space as a *locus* for dialogue, exchange, diversity and the acceptance of a plural identity.

[100] Composer: Mariana Kútulas Vrsalović.

These elements of cultural pluralism acquired a political tone due to the contemporaneous political developments in Greece, at the time of presenting this work for the first time. Indeed, the performances took place a few days after the general elections of May 2012, right in the middle of the country's financial crisis. It was the first time that a neo-Nazi political party – The Golden Dawn – entered the Greek parliament. The party's fascist and xenophobic rhetoric was a threat to our international and multicultural theatre company that treated Ancient Greek Mythology as a cultural gift belonging to all. The political meaning of space, and particularly the meaning of performance space was underlined, since the archaeological sites became a meeting ground between us and our young audiences in especially difficult political times.

Kathleen Irwin, in an unpublished text about *Journeys of Water*, enhances the correlation between politics, society, space and performance and the development of important issues through time:

> Furthermore, the performance simultaneously reflects a mapping of the ancient travel ways plied for trade and defence and suggest the newer routes of contemporary pilgrims, refugees (1.5 million) and tourists alike (17 million annually), who cut other paths, cut across the land. Indeed, the performances, staged as they are amidst the wayfarers that flock to these sites, require us to consider the complexities of tourism in a time of economic downturn. While mass tourism contributes 15% to the nation's Gross Domestic Product, the influx of wealthy Europeans, Chinese and Japanese (among others) to these historic sites serves as much to protect and preserve them as to trample and destroy them. In addition, the summer surge of thirsty visitors to mainland Greece and its islands is particularly problematic in regards to a seasonal scarcity of water and a changing climate – such circumstances are catastrophic to agriculture and fundamental quality of life (Irwin, 2014).

Indeed, Irwin tackles how significant matters regarding human life and nature are echoed in the ancient myths (migration and water-related issues), while she presents how they are mirrored in the present condition of the archaeological sites where the performances took place.

## Vestiges of a Past Life

Archaeological sites have a rich "past life", which is still visible in the ruins – the vestiges of human and natural activity rounded off with the passage of time. According to Paul Allain and Jen Harvie "(…) heritage sites invoke the site constructively as a memory trigger for events that happened there; more problematically, they suggest that the sites' meanings transcend both time and change." (2014, pp. 175-176). In fact, it was very important for the company to underline this continuity in time and space, not necessarily as a linear one but as a circular one, under different circumstances and new developments throughout history.

By the very title of this paper, “Of real and mythic spaces”, I owe debt to Michel Foucault and his seminal lecture of 1967 “Des espaces autres” (Of Other Spaces), which did not appear in published form until 1984. I will thus conclude by referring to his notion of “heterotopias” – real places that function as counter-sites that challenge the social order of human engagement. I am thus considering archaeological sites as heterotopias, which, like museums and libraries, function as “heterotopias of indefinitely accumulating time”, in which “time never stops building up and topping its own summit” (1984, p. 26). While libraries and museums function as general archives that “enclose in one place all times” (p. 26), the archaeological sites do not count on a diachronic accumulation of objects, but rather testify the passage of time by the way it is traced on the space itself.

Through performing in these sites, the Okypus Theatre Company proposed an alternative way of reinhabiting them, while their past life, both mythical and real, tangible and phantasmatic, was resuscitated and circulated among the ruins and the bodies of the performers and the young spectators. This was an affective type of theatre outside of the theatre that exemplified, as Kathleen Irwin suggests “the complex relationship between performing body, site and spectator” (2014).

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# Unveiling Nottingham's Hidden History through Augmented Reality

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## Abstract

The research identified and tested the use of Augmented Reality to investigate and restore the forgotten yet unique identity of Nottingham (UK). Since the building of the Nottingham Castle in 1068 by the French Normans, until the eighteen Century, two populations lived almost segregated in Nottingham: the Anglo-Saxons in the English borough, and the French-Normans in the French borough on the opposite hill. The two Boroughs were divided by the Market Wall that was acting as an administrative and legal boundary of the boroughs but also a physical division of the Saturday Market. Data collection was finalised to the mapping of all historical architectural and archaeological data into layers, and they had been investigated using locative media on a website platform. The research team included researchers from Confetti Institute of Creative Technologies, that recreated a 3D version of the Market Wall into an Augmented Reality App to be used with smartphones. The aim was to allow the citizens to visualise the Wall in its original position and size in the Old Market Square, discovering and experiencing the 'unknown' roots of the city through virtual immersive archaeology. Specifically, the aim was to realise a user-friendly digital tool to enable a broader dissemination of the research output embracing young generations. The research demonstrated the possibility to effectively share, display, and promote heritage to improve both community awareness, and the visitor economy of Nottingham. It argues that revealing the intangible heritage of Nottingham could act as a stimulus to enhance and re-vitalise social and cultural engagement.

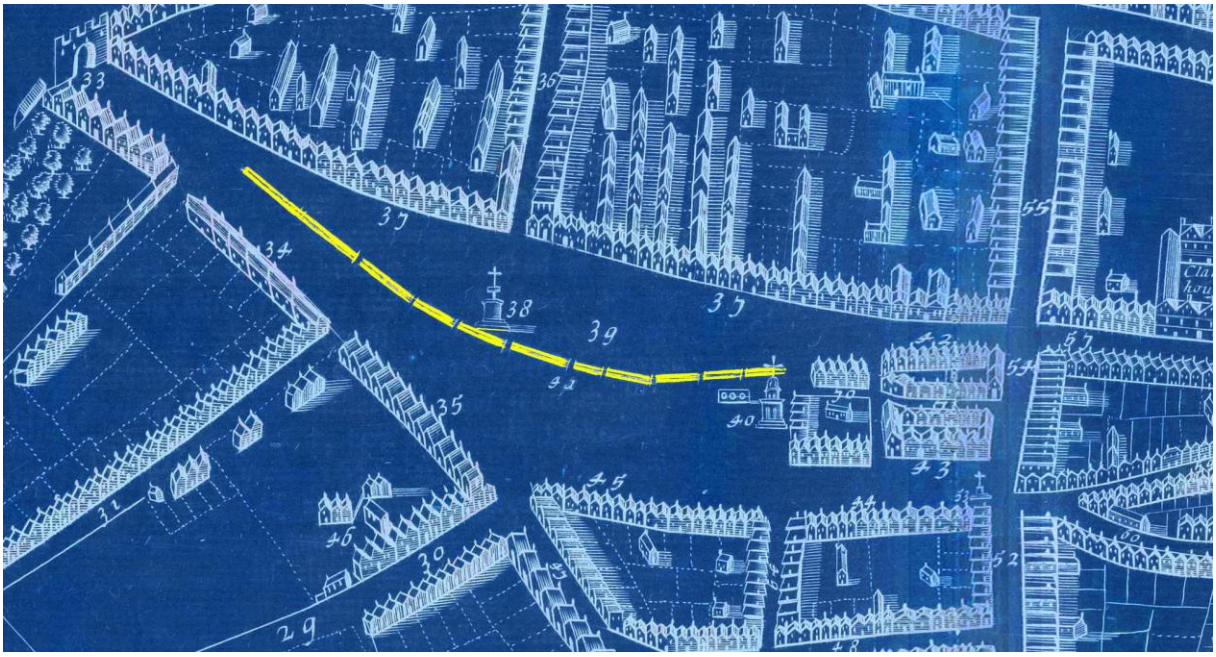
*Keywords:* Augmented Reality; Mixed Reality; Intangible Heritage; virtual archaeology; virtual museum.

## Nottingham Secret Heritage

History, like layers of sediment, often conceals fascinating narratives beneath its surface. Nottingham, renowned for its association with Robin Hood and his Merry Men, for over seven centuries stood divided into two distinctive boroughs, each inhabited by different cultures. The Old Market Square, the pulsating heart of Nottingham, was a unique crucible where these two boroughs met and mingled, separated not by hostility but by a breast-high wall. In this paper, we embark on a journey to uncover Nottingham's hidden history and explore the creation of an Augmented Reality (AR) app designed to resurrect this obscured heritage. Beyond the realm of entertainment, AR has permeated sectors like retail, interior design, education, logistics, and healthcare. It has birthed new paradigms, making its presence felt in cultural and heritage preservation, blurring the lines between the past and the present. In the years since the 2016 phenomenon of Pokémon Go app, AR technology has evolved significantly, and its applications have deepened. Notably, it has taken a critical role in the domain of Virtual Tourism, breathing life into historical sites and enigmatic stories that time has hidden (Mads, 2017). The present paper delves into the evolution of Virtual Heritage through AR and the profound impact it has on preserving and sharing cultural legacies.

**Figure 1**

*The Market Wall (highlighted in yellow) represented in the Thoroton's Map of Nottingham in 1677 (Source: author's elaboration of Thoroton's historical map published in 1790).*



In 2021, the author led a research team to unearth the concealed history of Nottingham through research funded by Nottingham Trent University which lasted two years. Through the review of historical maps, archaeological findings, and use of digital locative

technologies, this team embarked on a quest to recreate the Market Wall, a vestige of history that had long been forgotten.

The vision was to present this historical marvel through the lens of an AR app to enable the citizens and visitors of Nottingham to journey back in time, immersing themselves in the historical tapestry of the city through the lens of virtual archaeology. The app extended its reach to encompass two other historical treasures: the Malt Cross and the Ducking Stool, each offering a unique window into Nottingham's bygone era. The research which is presented in this paper underscores the significance of bringing historical research to life using digital locative technology, emphasizing how it can fortify societal bonds and cultivate a shared sense of history, purpose, and identity. With the relentless progression of smartphones and their capabilities, AR technology opens endless possibilities, potentially transforming every corner of the city into an interactive museum of Intangible Heritage.

## The Role of Digital Locative Technology for Heritage Preservation

World Heritage sites are not merely static relics of the past but living, breathing entities that play a pivotal role in sustainable human development. They align with the 2030 Agenda put forth by the United Nations in 2015.[101] Yet, the physical facets of our heritage, wrought by time and vulnerable to the ravages of wars, natural calamities, urban expansion, and the sands of time, face a relentless onslaught. The research was then directed at exploring the vital domain of heritage preservation and the transformative influence of Augmented Reality in upholding and disseminating these cherished cultural legacies. Cultural heritage is a precious aspect of our history that reflects the customs, traditions, and values of our ancestors. Preserving and sharing this heritage is vital, as it connects us to our roots and provides a sense of identity and continuity. Nottingham, a popular city in the United Kingdom has a rich, mostly unknown history with a unique multicultural heritage that has contributed to its distinct identity. In recent years, augmented reality technology has emerged as a powerful tool for preserving and showcasing cultural heritage. Nottingham, a city synonymous with the folklore of Robin Hood, paradoxically conceals a fact as intriguing as any myth - it was a city divided for seven centuries. In 1068, the Normans' arrival started a settling process in the space left between the castle and the Old Anglo-Saxon borough which led to the creation of two distinct boroughs, one inhabited by the Normans and the other by the Anglo-Saxons. The demarcation line was the Market Wall, a physical embodiment of unity rather than division. This research scrutinizes the concept of

[101] See further definition of Intangible Cultural Heritage on: UNESCO. n.d. “World Heritage and Sustainable Development.” Accessed October 10, 2023. https://whc.unesco.org/en/sustainabledevelopment/

selective history, illuminating how critical elements can fade into obscurity and underscores the multifaceted multicultural heritage that discreetly shaped Nottingham's destiny.

## Preserving Cultural heritage

Cultural heritage encompasses the material and immaterial aspects of our shared history. Material heritage consists of tangible artifacts such as historical sites, artifacts, and monuments. These elements serve as tangible connections to the past. Nottingham, like many cities, boasts a wealth of material heritage, reflecting the different periods and influences that have shaped its history. In Nottingham's case, the remnants of the Market Wall hold a significant place in the city's history. This wall that once marked the division between the Norman and Anglo-Saxon boroughs was indeed not limiting the exchange and movement of people and goods, because its purpose was to define the boroughs' administrative boundaries and different laws. While the physical structure no longer exists, its historical significance remains intact, reminding us of the city's complex past. The preservation and interpretation of this type of material heritage are essential for maintaining a sense of continuity and identity. The immaterial aspect of cultural heritage is equally crucial. It encompasses the traditions, customs, language, stories, rituals, and intangible knowledge that are passed down through generations. These elements define a community's cultural identity and are integral to understanding its history. In Nottingham, the cultural exchanges between the Norman and Anglo-Saxon populations have significantly influenced the city's intangible heritage. This multicultural heritage is what sets Nottingham apart, making it distinct from other cities. By embracing both material and immaterial heritage, Nottingham could better recognise and celebrate its multicultural identity embracing social cohesion. Preserving cultural heritage serves as a bridge between the past, present, and future, allowing us to appreciate our history and gain insights into the development of societies over time.

## Augmented Reality and Heritage

Augmented Reality (AR) technology has emerged as an innovative and powerful tool for preserving cultural heritage and making it accessible to a broader audience. AR combines the physical world with digital information and interactive experiences, enabling users to explore and interact with historical sites, artifacts, and stories in new and engaging ways. This technology has gained popularity in various sectors, including education, tourism, and entertainment. The emergence of Augmented Reality in the context of heritage preservation is a testament to the evolution of virtual archaeology and virtual tourism. This digital alchemy has empowered museums, monuments, and ancient archaeological sites to extend their boundaries and create immersive virtual experiences that captivate a diverse audience, from

curious children to inquisitive elders. Augmented Reality bridges the chasm between the tangible and the digital, transmuting traditional museums into a new dimension where the past is not just observed but inhabited (Scianna et al, 2019). The research was in fact aimed at probing the two primary approaches to heritage preservation: recreating existing heritage sites and reconstructing lost history as it would have been. AR applications typically function through smartphones, tablets, or wearable devices, using their built-in cameras and sensors to overlay digital content on the real-world environment. This content can range from 3D models and animations to audio and textual information. In the context of cultural heritage, AR offers several significant advantages. Accessibility, with AR apps can be easily downloaded and used on common mobile devices, making cultural heritage accessible to a wide range of people, including those with physical disabilities. This accessibility is a crucial factor in promoting inclusivity. Interactivity, because AR enables users to actively engage with historical sites and artifacts. They can explore 3D reconstructions of ancient structures, interact with virtual objects, and even participate in guided tours or educational games. Education, because AR can enhance educational experiences by providing historical context and in-depth information about cultural heritage. It's a valuable tool for schools and museums to engage students and visitors in an interactive learning experience. Preservation, where AR can contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage by creating digital records of historical sites and artifacts. This is particularly valuable when physical preservation is challenging or when sites have been lost over time. Storytelling, with AR allowing the creation of immersive narratives that bring history to life. Users can follow historical characters, experience events, and gain a deeper understanding of the past. Tourism, due to the fact that AR can provide visitors with engaging and informative experiences at historical sites. This can lead to increased tourism and revenue for heritage locations.

## The Nottingham as Melting-Pot

Nottingham's rich history has been carved by many different civilizations that brought there their language, food, commerce, laws. The establishment of Nottingham Castle in 1068 marked not only the creation of the castle but also the foundation of a French borough in Nottingham. Positioned between the Anglo-Saxon borough on Lace Market Hill and the imposing Castle Rock, this French borough, despite its initial military intent, would go on to shape Nottingham's destiny significantly. Three churches, namely St. Nicholas, St. Mary, and St. Peter, were founded within this dynamic “double town.” By 1086, all recorded land holdings in the Domesday Book were located within the bounds of the French borough, underscoring the growth and significance of this new borough. The space that bridged the two boroughs, fondly known as “The Sands”, would emerge as the Saturday Market, the second-largest

market square in all of Britain (Holland Walker, 1931). For over seven centuries, the Market Wall bisected this vibrant square, but not as a rigid barrier. Instead, it served as a facilitator of trade and cultural exchange, nurturing the rich blend of Norman and Anglo-Saxon heritage (Mastoris, 1981; Lomax, 2013). The unique essence of the Market Wall is the fact that was not a physical barrier of segregation, differentiating it from infamous dividing walls like the Berlin Wall, for it was a symbol of unity rather than division.

The proximity of the French Normans spurred the importation and adaptation of various aspects of French culture into the fabric of British life. For instance, it was in Nottingham that malt liquor gained its distinction, turning the city into a household name in the malting industry. Public proclamations, the Civil War declaration, and even the meting out of punishments all found a common stage at the “Malt Cross” in the Market Square, where malt was not just a commodity but a symbol of shared history (Roffe, 2015). It was possible to dig deep into the lingering influence of Norman culture on Nottingham's identity, exploring the subtle ways in which history leaves an indelible mark on a city's soul.

The research encountered several challenges during the collection of historical data. Nottingham's historical archives have presented numerous obstacles due to the fragmented nature of the available records. Most of the old documents were preserved in the archives of the old Corporation, consisting of local court records, royal charters, and original grants from various individuals. All relevant documentation of the city’s life and administration was collected in the “Red Book”, a comprehensive volume where the Corporation of Nottingham meticulously recorded essential matters, orders, customs of the town, and community decisions. However, this invaluable resource was tragically lost in a fire that engulfed the Town Clerk's office in 1724, resulting in the destruction of all crucial information regarding the Market Wall's origin and development. In the absence of the “Red Book,” researchers have had to rely on surviving detached documents found within the Corporation of Nottingham's archives (Anon, 1882). These documents were meticulously compiled in the late nineteenth century into nine volumes entitled “Records of the Borough of Nottingham” (Anon, 1882), presented in Latin with English translations. The span of these extracts covers a wide range, starting from 1155 and reaching up to 1900. The earliest references to the “Saturday Market” (in Latin: Foro Sabbati) and the Week-day or Daily Market (in Latin: Foro Cotidiano) are found in the Charter of King Henry II (1155-1165). Interestingly, “Foro Sabbati” eventually evolved into the “Seterday market” as documented in a source dating back to 1353. Specifically, the sixth volume, covering the period between 1702 and 1760, provides valuable insights into the Market Wall. The first mention of the Market Wall is recorded in 1529 as the “Markyt walle”, with subsequent entries regarding repair works in 1627, 1673, 1696, 1705, and 1709. In 1714, the Corporation of Nottingham made the significant decision to “pull down the Markett Wall” to facilitate the paving of the Market Place. However, it appears that the complete demolition of

the Market Wall did not occur until at least 1727, with repair works carried out in 1714, describing the Wall as “the Stone Wall” (Deering, 1751). One critical aspect for the reconstruction of the Market Wall is the identification of its material. The available archival evidence points to the Market Wall being constructed of stone. This fact was pivotal for the development of a 3D model for the AR app, as no visual representations of the Wall in drawings or paintings are available. However, a significant discovery was made in 2007 during the repaving of the Old Market Square when a portion of the Wall was unearthed. Archaeologist Gavin Kinsley's Watching Brief reported that this section of the Wall was made of bricks, not stone, dating back to the seventeenth century (Kinsley, 2006). The apparent contradiction in materials used can be explained by historical context. Bricks were not available in Nottingham until the late 1500s. Prior to this, houses and structures were primarily constructed using materials less substantial than brick or stone. It was only during Nottingham's “urban renaissance” between 1688 and 1750 that brick became more readily available, signifying a shift in the town's development. Before this urban flourishing, Nottingham's town centre primarily featured medieval timber-framed structures, including Elizabethan and Stuart period houses, owing to the limited availability of building materials, such as stone (Beckett, 2000). The conclusion can be drawn that the portion of the Wall discovered in 2007, made of bricks, likely represents a repaired section of the Market “stone” Wall, reflecting the evolving architectural landscape of Nottingham. Apart from these archival findings, two other notable sources provide valuable information about Nottingham's history and further confirm aspects of the Market Place and its Wall. Robert Thoroton's “The Antiquities of Nottinghamshire” (1677) and Deering's “Nottinghamia Vetus et Nova” (1751) offer comprehensive accounts of the region. Unfortunately, no illustrations depicting the Market Square before the demolition of the Market Wall had been found during the research, leaving a visual gap in the historical record.

## A *Digital Window* to the Past

The research team was composed by staff from Nottingham Trent University and Confetti Institute of Creative Technologies. They used a combination of historical maps, archaeological data, and 3D modelling to identify the size and shape of the Market Wall, including its accurate positioning in the current Old Market Square, and to reconstruct the physical aspect of the wall and its neighbouring structures. This process involved meticulous research, data collection, and collaboration with experts in history, archaeology, and digital technologies. The AR application called “The Market Wall App” was tested during the Covid-19 pandemic and finally presented to the public in June 2022, which sparked the interest of the local and national UK media (BBC News, 2022; Moneta, 2022; Notts TV, 2022). A launch event was in fact planned

to present the research with the aim to invite people to download and use the app, and to step back in time and experience Nottingham's rich history.

**Figure 2**

*The Market Wall Research Team during the AR app Launch event. Left to right: Gin Rai (Confetti), Andrea Moneta (NTU) and Yven Powell (Confetti). (Source: personal archive)*



By simply pointing their smartphones or tablets at specific locations of the Old Market square, users can now visualise the Market Wall, the Malt Cross, and the Ducking Stool as they once existed as a three-dimensional, interactive experience. This immersive experience provides insights into the daily life, culture, and architecture of medieval Nottingham using a simple tool that is now available to anyone who possesses a smartphone. The importance of this project extends beyond the novelty of AR technology: It's a celebration of Nottingham's multicultural heritage, showcasing the blending of Norman and Anglo-Saxon influences that contributed to the town's unique identity. Through the AR app, citizens and tourists can now appreciate the interactions and exchanges that occurred in the very heart of Nottingham, where different cultures coexisted and shaped the town's character. These important facts are mostly unknown by Nottingham citizens. The AR app unfolded a rich tapestry of history, enabling users to interact with virtual archaeology. Users can step back in time to witness the Market Wall in its full glory. As they explore the Market Square, moving around and along it, they can experience and better understand the significance of this unique landmark. The app also extends its reach to the Malt Cross, where users learn about its important role for public announcements, a sort of *broadcasting centre* of the local authority of the time; but also its role

of public display of punishments, beyond the malt's brewing traditions that still shape Nottingham's identity.

**Figure 3**

*The Malt Cross as visualised with the AR App in the Old Market Square, Nottingham (Source: personal archive).*



The Ducking Stool, used for specific punishments, completes the triad of historical experiences as shown in Figure 4. It was reserved for women accused of scolding or backbiting and was shaped so that a person could be bonded to a chair fixed on a pole and then immersed in the Market animals' pond. The AR app was made available to users from the research website which includes all the historical maps (Badder & Peat, 1744; Bankes, 1609; Overton, 1714; Speed, 1610; Thoroton, 1790), which graphically depicted the shape and position of the Market Wall in the 17th and 18th Century, before it was finally demolished.

Beyond its role as an exploratory tool, the AR app could also serve as an invaluable educational resource. It enables schools and colleges to incorporate immersive history lessons into their curricula. Students can delve into Nottingham's past, understand the intricacies of medieval life, and appreciate how historical sites intertwine with contemporary Nottingham. Moreover, this app offers an exciting opportunity for public education and engagement. Workshops, guided tours, and educational programs could spring up around the AR app, driving home the importance of Nottingham's heritage enhancing cultural awareness, historical understanding, and fostering a sense of local pride. The Market Wall AR application has then been made available to the public following easy step-by-step instructions:

1. Download and Installation: Users can download the Market Wall AR app from the project's website (www.themarketwall.com). It's available for Android devices only at the moment, with possible development also for iOS devices.

2. Launching the App: After installation, users can launch the app on their smartphones or tablets. The app's interface is user-friendly and intuitive.

3. Point and Scan: To activate the AR experience, users need to point their device's camera at the Old Market square in Nottingham. The app uses GPS and image recognition technology to determine the user's location and orientation.

4. Immersive AR Experience: Once the app recognizes the Old Market square, it superimposes 3D reconstructions of the Market Wall, onto the live camera view. Users can explore these structures from different angles and distances.

5. Historical Insights: While exploring the AR-rendered environment, users can access historical information through interactive hotspots. Tapping on these hotspots provides detailed descriptions, historical context, and stories related to the structures and the people who once lived in Nottingham.

6. Educational Features: The app offers educational features such as voice over description and the link to the research GeoBlog website with all info about the research. These features make it an excellent tool for schools and educators, enhancing the learning experience by making history engaging and interactive. The use of AR in education is a growing trend, and the Market Wall AR project highlights its potential impact in this area.

**Figure 4**

*The Ducking Stool as visualised with the AR App in the Old Market Square, Nottingham (Source: personal archive).*



The screenshots in Figure 6 were captured using the Market Wall AR app exemplify how AR can contribute to the tourism economy, cultural awareness and history education, making heritage and history accessible, engaging, and informative for learners of all ages.

**Figure 5**

*The AR App user interface showing its main page and the map with locations of the three experiences (Source: personal archive).*

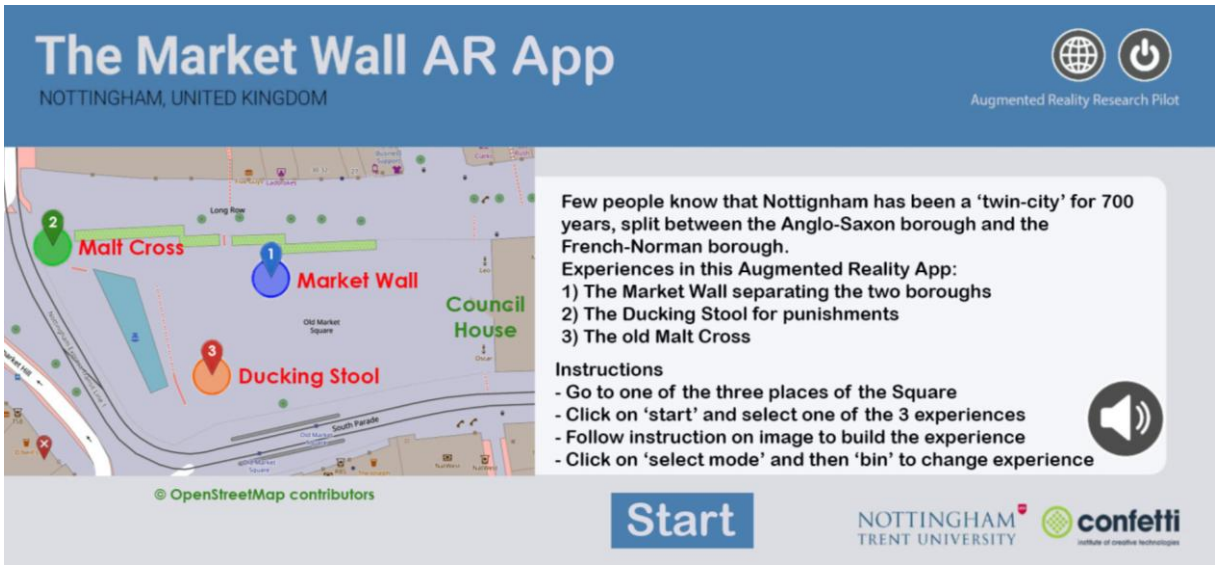



**Figure 6a**

*AR App screenshot showing the Market Wall as it appears in Old Market Square (Source: personal archive).*



## Reshaping Cultural Preservation

The story of Nottingham's AR app extends far beyond a single city's heritage and can act as a pilot to be developed other cities' heritage in UK and abroad; it is emblematic of the broader transformation occurring in the realm of cultural preservation. As technology evolves and AR becomes more ubiquitous, the potential to resurrect and preserve heritage expands exponentially. The ability to recreate and interact with history becomes increasingly sophisticated and accessible. Nottingham in fact, is not an isolated example of augmented heritage. Globally, a resurgence of interest in history and heritage is brewing, bolstered by AR technology. From the Roman Forum in Italy to the ancient city of Petra in Jordan, heritage sites are leveraging AR to offer immersive experiences to visitors. Augmented heritage transcends geographical boundaries, making it possible for people worldwide to explore the cultural tapestries of distant lands demonstrating how it has potential far beyond tourism and leisure. History, at times, conceals aspects that challenge the established narratives. AR technology can serve as a key to uncover these obscured facets, offering new perspectives and insights into the past. It can shed light on marginalized histories, forgotten heroes, and hidden injustices. AR technology acts as a tool for historical revelation, discussing how it can contribute to a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of the past.

## Conclusions

The journey through Nottingham's hidden history and the creation of an AR app to resurrect it presents a fascinating case study of how technology and cultural preservation intertwine. Nottingham's hidden heritage, with its dual boroughs and the diving Market Wall, revealed the complex interplay of culture, history, and heritage. The AR app developed to bring this history back to life embodies the potential of Augmented Reality in shaping the future of cultural preservation. In a world where time seeks to obscure the past, technology offers an instrument not just for exploration; it's a means to foster a deeper sense of connection and understanding with our heritage. As the technology continues to advance, heritage preservation and education will be profoundly transformed, extending its reach and impact. Nottingham's AR app is but one chapter in this ongoing story, hinting at the incredible possibilities that await in the world of augmented heritage. Nottingham's Market Wall AR project demonstrated how a low-budget, augmented reality app can unlock hidden aspects of a city's cultural heritage, combining technology and history to create a unique and immersive experience. Through the use of AR, cultural heritage is made more accessible, engaging, and educational. Furthermore the project highlighted the transformative potential of AR in areas such as education, tourism, and entertainment. As AR technology continues to advance, it holds even greater promise for the future of cultural heritage.

Nottingham's multicultural heritage, encapsulated in the Market Wall AR project, is a testament to the city's rich history and its ability to embrace and celebrate the influences that have shaped it over the centuries. In the ever-evolving landscape of technology, Nottingham can preserve its past while stepping confidently into the future.

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# Collective Bathing in Urban Waters: Three North American Episodes (1970-1984)

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## Abstract

Performed in the heartland of the North American context at a pivotal time in thinking about public spaces after the post-war boom, the opening of Portland's Keller Fountain in 1970, the founding of the Save Barton Creek Association (SBCA) by Austinites in 1979 and the Beach Party at Dallas City Hall serve to explore how the performativity of space was involved in the transformation of urban waters into bathing waters, or in the creation of an intimate relationship between the bathers and their surroundings. Therefore, following a social and spatial analysis of these three episodes of urban bathing, a number of conclusions are discussed. An initial observation is that, despite the differences between the three situations studied, the spatial qualities and architectural mechanisms that favour collective bathing, and thus spatial performativity, can be grouped together and compared, since there is a certain resemblance between the cases. A further reflection is that, beyond the spatial and architectural aspects considered above, the three cases also provide an opportunity to reflect on several properties bounded with collective bathing. In light of the foregoing observations and reflections, it seems clear that collective bathing in urban waters may have the potential to provide cities and citizens with performative ‘places’ where agency, community, responsibility, regeneration and testing can flourish.

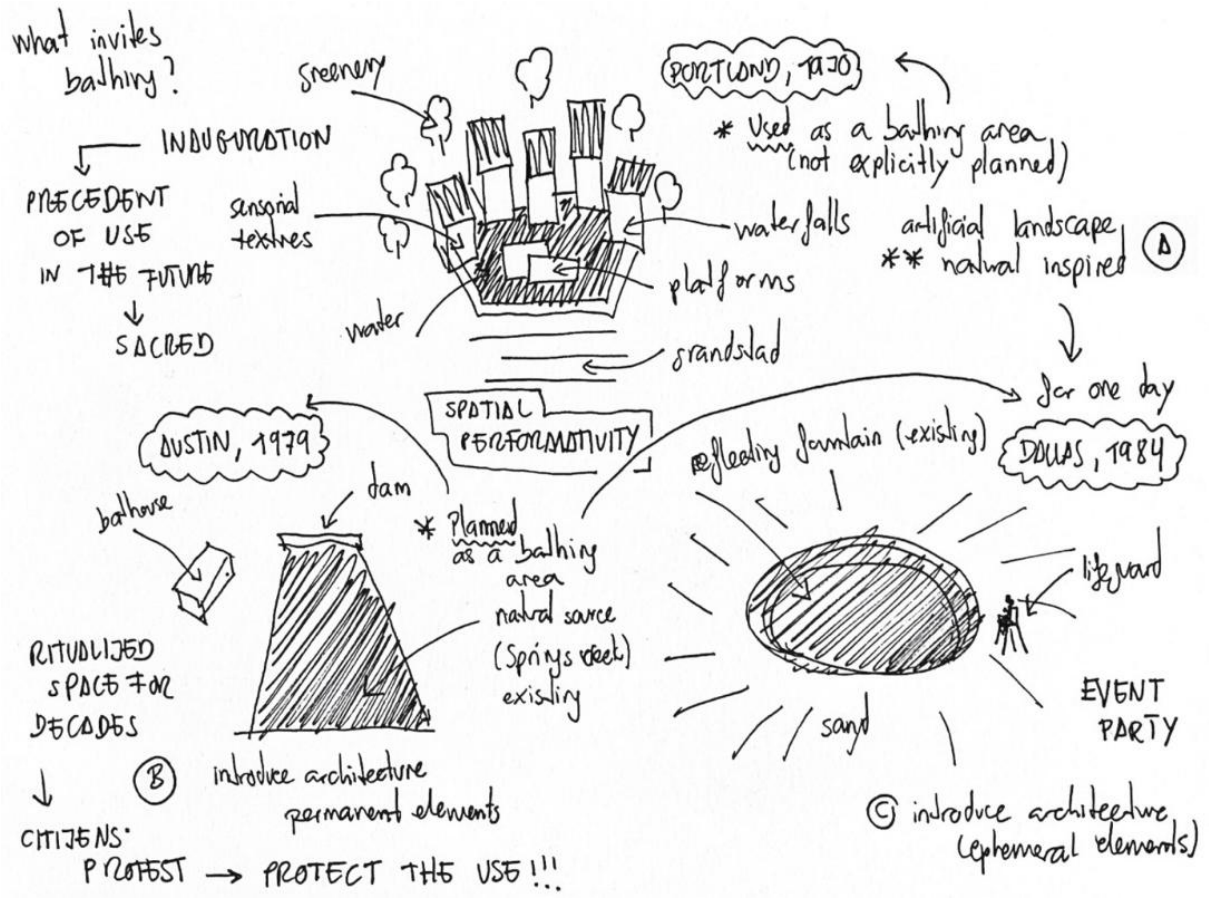
*Keywords:* Urban rituals, public space, citizen innovation, water culture, bathing practices.

## Collective Bathing in Urban Waters

This study focuses on three episodes of collective bathing in urban waters that took place in North America between 1970 and 1984:[102] The opening of Portland's Keller Fountain in 1970, whose design by Lawrence Halprin & Associates began in 1963; the founding of the Save Barton Creek Association (SBCA) by Austinites in 1979 to protect Barton Springs, a public bathing area since 1918; and the Beach Party at Dallas City Hall, a complex designed by Ieoh Ming Pei and opened in 1978 (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Summary diagram of the three episodes, Alba Balmaseda*




The selected events are presented chronologically, and they meet the following criteria. First, they all took place in the heartland of the North American context (Oregon and Texas), at a pivotal time in thinking about public spaces in the aftermath of the post-war boom. Indeed,

[102] The case studies presented here are part of an ongoing PhD study on collective bathing in urban waters at the University of Roma Tre, Department of Architecture, Italy. The research is supervised by Professors Michel Beccu and Giovanni Longobardi. This essay was edited by Quintin Lau. Thanks to Piet Tutenel from KU Leuven, Research[x]Design for his valuable feedback on the essay. Further gratitude to Karen J. Kocher of the Living Springs Platform for her generous help.

after this period of massive urban development, driven and managed mainly by economic interests, various researchers and practitioners from North America claimed the right to an urban space that considered the needs of its inhabitants.[103] The second criterion is that they illustrate in different ways "how certain spatial qualities or certain architectural mechanisms act as generators of spatial performativity" (Berzal, 2023, p.91). In this essay, spatial qualities refer, for example, to light, texture, form, smell, sounds, and what relates to the 'experience' of a place, whereas architectural mechanisms refer to the elements projected, their function, their arrangement in space and ultimately what is 'speculative'.

Thus, the case studies in this paper serve to explore how the performativity of space was involved in the transformation of urban waters into bathing waters, or in the creation of an intimate relationship between the bathers and their surroundings. Following a social and spatial analysis of the three selected episodes of public bathing, a number of conclusions are discussed. On the one hand, the spatial qualities and architectural mechanisms that favour collective bathing in the three study situations are grouped and compared. On the other hand, after the analysis of the physical context, several aspects bounded with collective bathing are reflected in each individual case.

## Methodology

The social and spatial context of the three episodes presented was explored using a 'desk research' method. The method was chosen because, even if the spaces exist still today, the focus of the study is on punctual events that took place decades ago. The work was carried out in two phases, as outlined below. In the first phase, the urban and architectural context was studied by consulting various sources: master plans, plans, elevations, sections and, in general, urban and architectural documents on the work of Lawrence Halprin, Dan J. Driscoll and Ieoh Ming Pei, as well as sitographies useful for understanding the context. Of particular importance have been the Halprin Landscape Conservancy sitography (https://www.halprinconservancy.org/), which provides an online archive of the Portland case, and the interactive digital scrapbook Barton Creek Time Stream (https://bartoncreektimestream.org/about/), which contains a collection of information on the Austin case. Writings by the designers themselves and by other contemporary and historical scholars about the spaces studied were also reviewed. In the second phase, the surviving narratives of the three episodes were investigated. For this purpose, videos taken at the time, photographs, interviews and press available online were examined. This was

[103] These productive years saw the publication of influential books in the field of urban studies, such as the works of activist Jane Jacobs (1961), anthropologist Edward T. Hall (1966), landscape architect Ian L. McHarg (1969), architects and urban planners Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour (1972), and sociologist William H. Whyte (1980).

essential in order to observe the interaction between the users and the space at that moment and to describe the atmosphere, the materiality, the dynamics of the participants or the use of architectural elements. It is noted that initially, the study wanted to include the testimonies of some of the participants in Portland, Austin, and Dallas in order to have first-hand narratives different from those of designers, photographers or journalists. To this end, the Halprin Foundation, the Living Springs platform, and the Dallas Museum of Art were contacted but it was not possible to obtain the material needed in the time available.

## Three North American Cases (1970-1984)

### *Opening of the Ira Keller Forecourt Fountain, Portland*

In the 1960s, the Municipality of Portland commissioned Lawrence Halprin & Associates to design four interconnected public spaces in the southern part of the city centre. The sequence included, from south to north, The Source (1968), the Lovejoy Fountain Plaza (1966), the Pettygrove Park (1966) and the Ira Keller Forecourt Fountain (1970), popularly known as the Keller Fountain (Figure 2). The latter, which culminates the choreographed series[104] toward the downtown and precedes the Civic Auditorium, is an exuberant, rough concrete landscape with a twenty-four-metre-wide body of water, waterfalls up to five metres high, grained cliffs, soft platforms, green areas, and a large grandstand. This was undoubtedly a very welcoming and playful environment, in contrast to the speculative and passive urban spaces of the time. Thus, the Keller Fountain quickly became a popular place, inspiring a wide range of behaviours and uses. At its inauguration, the New York Times proclaimed it “one of the most important urban spaces since the Renaissance” (Huxtable,1970, p.53).

On the opening day of the Keller Fountain, a hot June 20, 1970, the participants jumped into the water themselves in a great ritual of collective bathing, even though the possibility of bathing was not explicitly shown in the design.[105] In an interview conducted by Charles A. Birnbaum, in March 2003, Halprin recalled the enthusiasm of the opening day, when everyone present felt invited to bathe in the fountain, no matter if it was allowed or not, and despite the mayor's attempts to discourage people from doing so.[106] In the conversation, Halprin admits

[104] This is how Lawrence Halprin himself defined it on his sketches.

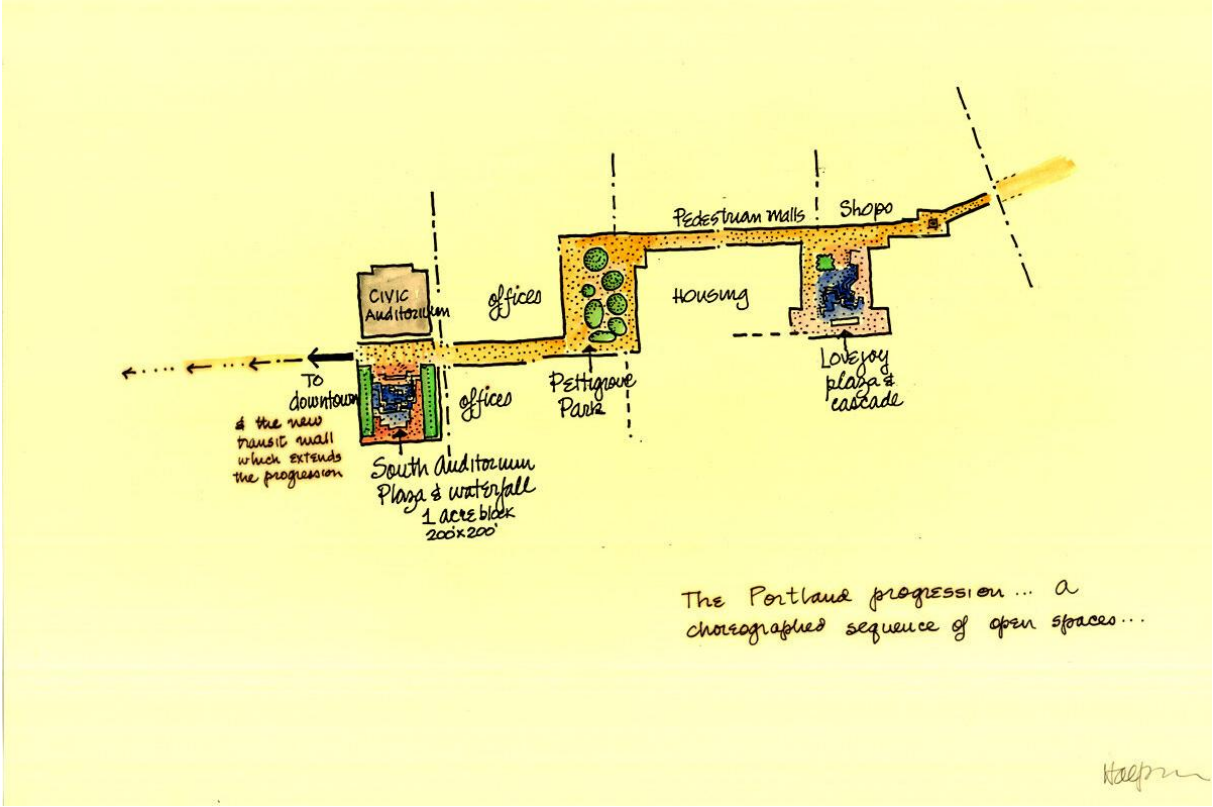
[105] The design lacks any explicit reference to the practice of bathing (i.e. no specific infrastructure associated with bathing, such as signage, lifeguard towers, changing rooms, toilet/shower areas or stairs for access). However, it is unclear whether the designers anticipated such an eventuality, as the space was designed for participation.

[106] “The day it was opened was hysterically exciting because what happened was that […] all the young people from miles around appeared on the scene and started jumping into the fountains. As I said they were designed to be used in that way, [to be] participated in. If I remember correctly, it was the mayor who got very upset and tried to shoo them away and I therefore decided that the best thing to do was not argue with the mayor, so I jumped in also. It was very successful and very very jolly actually, and there was a lot of fun about it” (The Cultural Landscape Foundation, 2003/2012, 1:10-1:60).

that he himself joined the crowd by plunging into the water and asserts that this episode “really did establish the notion that this was a different kind of a park than the usual” (The Cultural Landscape Foundation, 2003/2012, 1:56-2:04). Indeed, a video of the inauguration testifies to the festive atmosphere that was created in the space on the first day of its use. Crowds of people got wet in the various pools and waterfalls in what resembles a ‘baptism.’ There were children, teenagers and adults of all kinds. Some bathed fully clothed, while others bathed in swimsuits or underwear as if it were an ‘urban’ beach. Some of them climbed up the cliffs and others stood in the waterfalls or let themselves be carried by the water. On the platforms, some groups were sunbathing or hesitating whether to jump in or not, and a few were dressed in suits and ties (Portland Parks Foundation, 1970/2020).

**Figure 2**

*Sketch of the Portland Sequence*, *Lawrence Halprin. Image courtesy of The Cultural Landscape Foundation*




Let's now turn the attention to the built environment in which the event took place and try to give an overview of spatial qualities and architectural mechanisms that might have stimulated the participants to use an urban water as if it were a bathing water. The first is that the Keller Fountain is an artificial landscape whose design takes nature as an “archetypal precedent” (Hirsch, 2014, Chapter 3). As a result, the space evokes a wild environment and probably suggests for people to behave as if they were in a lake, a river, or a beach, where it is common for humans to feel like bathing. The second is the multi-sensoriality of the park

(Pallasmaa, 2012): rough materials stimulate the sense of touch, inviting users to walk barefoot; the sound of the waterfalls awakens the ear, transporting users out of the city; the trees surrounding the space trick the psyche into a feeling of being in nature. The third is a great variety of situations on offer; for example, different sized spaces, nooks and crannies to hide in, horizontal surfaces to lie on or parapets to sit on. The fourth is the fact that the water is the main stage, visible from all points of view, preceded by a grandstand and surrounded by terraces. This means that when someone leaps into the water, everyone sharing the space is bound to see the act. Thus, some spectators may feel influenced and decide to come on stage. The Keller Fountain represents an environmental design that, in Halprin's words, "goes far beyond the visual" and "is about social relevance" (1989, p.62). Even half a century later after its construction, the fountain remains true to this description, with spatial performativity persisting today. Actually, the space is also the site of performances such as *The City Dance* (2008) by Lawrence and Anna Halprin, and more recently, *Body is Home* (2020) by Heidi Duckler Dance/Northwest and the Halprin Landscape Conservancy, a work created to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Keller Fountain and the 100th birthday of choreographer Anna Halprin.

### *Creation of the Save Barton Creek Association (SBCA), Austin*

Barton Springs is a collective bathing area located within the large central green space of Zilker Park, southwest of downtown Austin, Texas. Given its proximity to the founding nucleus of Austin, it is likely that this natural area has been used by Austinites to bathe since the city was founded in 1840. In fact, as early as 1870, a private individual built a small dam and established a recreational pool and bathhouse that could be used for a small fee. The springs and surrounding land became public property in 1917 when the last private landowner deeded the site to the Municipality of Austin. By that time, cleaning up of the area and removing old structures that hindered bathing were among the first actions completed (McGilvray, 2012). Furthermore, in order to increase the size of the bathing area, the town undertook a project to dam the water in 1920.[107] For a few years, the site would neither be a swimming pool nor a bathhouse, but a large open space that was affordable,[108] almost natural and with little infrastructure. Finally, in 1931, a wooden bathhouse was built on the North bank of the creek. By this time, the area, called Barton Springs Park, had become very popular and beloved by locals (Koch & Fowler, 1928).

[107] It is worth remembering that this was in the midst of an explosion in the culture of pleasure around water pools (Wiltse, 2007, p.12).

[108] People had to pay a modest fee to enter the recreation area.

The wooden bathhouse was replaced in 1946 by the masonry structure still in use today. Designed by local architect Dan J. Driscoll, it is a single-storey building with a central foyer flanked by two open-air dressing rooms, outdoor showers and enclosed toilets, one for women and one for men (*Architectural Record*, 1948). The construction of the new bathhouse was followed by further investment in the leisure area, which was gradually expanded, and its services and facilities improved. Little by little, what was originally a natural area on the edge of the city became, as Austin expanded, an urban recreational oasis.

**Figure 3**

*Rally at Austin City Hall in 1990. Alan Pogue. Image courtesy of Barton Creek Time Stream.*




However, because of urbanisation and development in Austin after the 1950s, the natural waters that fed the Barton Springs Park began to be threatened. As the city grew in the area, sewage was starting to be dumped into the waters. In response to community concerns about water pollution, the Save Barton Creek Association (SBCA), a non-profit citizens' group, was formed in 1979 to protect and preserve the six watersheds of the Barton Springs Edwards Aquifer. At the same time, the Austin Parks & Recreation Board fought to protect the water, initiating the first draft of the Save Our Springs (SOS) watershed ordinance in 1986 and safeguarding the Barton Creek Greenbelt, a public park on both banks of Barton Creek. Amongst all of this, there were also demonstrations in the city centre (Figure 3) and performances at Barton Springs Park, such as the *Inside the Springs* dance to support the approval of SOS in 1991 and the election night vigil a year later, where citizens joined hands

and circled around the dammed bathing area (Figure 4). Finally, on 8 August 1992, the definitive SOS ordinance was officially approved because of a citizen initiative.[109] The document states that “The City of Austin recognizes that the Barton Springs Edwards Aquifer is more vulnerable to pollution from urban development than any other major groundwater supply in Texas, and that the measures set out in this ordinance are necessary to protect this irreplaceable natural resource” (City of Austin, 1992, p.1). This resource was described at the time as the soul of Austin (Pipkin & Frech, 1993) and remains one of the most important social cores of the city today.

**Figure 4**

*Citizens Holding Hands at Barton Springs Pool Before Election Night*. *Marshall Frech. Image courtesy of Barton Creek Time Stream*



Looking back on this episode forty years later, it is important to note that while most of the attention has been focused on water pollution to the detriment of biodiversity, urban development as a threat to the natural environment and citizen participation to change legislation, there are some aspects related to collective bathing that require further discussion. On one hand, Barton Springs, like Keller Fountain, has spatial qualities and architectural mechanisms that are conducive to generating spatial performativity, in addition to its environmental, economic, and social values. On the other hand, at the time of the protest, the site had already been used for more than a hundred years for bathing, water sharing and collective rituals.

Indeed, the 1992 musical tribute to the SOS ordinance by Austin musicians, artists and activists, *Barton Springs Eternal*, opens with a story about bathing: “Austin is a summer city in Barton Springs Eternal, the winters are short and the springs are pretty in Barton Springs Eternal, and when it's warm where do we go to take off most of our clothes, the clearest

[109] This is relevant because in this period it was unusual for regulations to emerge from booms.

cleanest swimming home is Barton Springs Eternal" (Save Our Springs Alliance, 1992/1998, 0:19-36). This shows that a collective memory associated with the site was created through the possibilities offered by the space, which facilitated communal use. So, in the case of Austin, what a place of shared enjoyment meant to the community was revealed when the possibility of bathing together was threatened. The symbolic value and closeness of the locals to 'their' bathing waters was significant in mobilising the citizens to save the waters. Moreover, it is not by chance that the local people chose the pool as a place for performances during the protest and as an emblem to involve the society in the cause.

Again, the spatial conditions and architectural mechanisms that allowed Barton Springs to be used and appropriated are important to consider. Firstly, in addition to its natural value, the fact that the natural space was made available for bathing by means of a dam and a small wooden structure shortly after the city was founded gave the natural site a social significance. Afterwards, it became a public space, protected against urban development, and the city council continued to provide leisure activities that were very popular and essential for the local people. This is reflected in the improvements made to the infrastructure. Secondly, we find architectural elements that allowed this space to be used for bathing: a dam to contain the water so that it can be used by more people; a bathhouse that makes a more comfortable use of the space; stairs and diving boards around the water that provide access; lifeguard towers for security; and platforms for sitting or lying in the sun. Thirdly, as in the case of Portland, the natural landscape has been preserved as much as possible to ensure a "fundamental connection or inescapable primal response" (Hirsch, 2014, p.21) to the environment. Thus, the source of the water and the original rocky bottom of the pool have been kept to this day, and are home to algae, fish and other creatures (Stewart, 2012).

### *Beach Party at the Dallas City Hall Fountain*

"Downtown Dallas may be hundreds of miles from the nearest body of water, but for one sunny day it became the nearest beach" (Dallas AP, 1984, p.11B), reports a small newspaper item on 18 July 1984, near the billboard advertising *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*. And indeed, on 14 July 1984, a collective bathing took place in a spot not intended for such a ritual: the public square in front of the Dallas City Hall, Texas. For a few hours, the 24,000 square metres of the wide plaza, designed by architect Ieoh Ming Pei and inaugurated in 1978, were transformed into a pop-up beach. The event, a fundraiser for the Muscular Dystrophy Association, was sponsored by a rock radio station (KZEW) and a beer company (Coors) and collected around $15,000. The bathing rites were performed by bathing in an existing circular fountain, approximately fifty-four metres in diameter. Forty-two tonnes of sand were poured

around the fountain, and there were lifeguards in place to ensure safety. The event, known as the Beach Party, was something out of the ordinary for a city 270 miles by car from the sea.

The Beach Party took place in a highly contested space for the city of Dallas at the time, a newly opened City Hall that was a subject of controversy and not quite accepted by the citizens. Evidence of this is the fact that the City of Dallas commissioned a report by the sociologist William H. Whyte “to study the use of the plaza and nearby spaces and recommend action that would make it a livelier and better used place” (Whyte, 1983, p.1). The report, published the summer before the Beach Party, notes several observations about the space and makes concrete suggestions for improving its shortcomings: installing kiosks, adding more seating, replacing existing trees with others that provide better shade, programming events, enclosing the space and improving access from the city and into the centre. Two aspects are particularly interesting for this study. The first aspect is programming, whereby the report recognised that the Town Hall esplanade was ideal for large, regular events[110] that have “pulling power” (p.9) to invite a wide range of people to experience the space, so that it can become a ‘place’ (Casey, 1996: Malpas 1999). In the same vein, Whyte pointed out that more should be done with the fountain, even to the point of taking a dip in it: “It is a fine feature and artfully designed to be safe wading. So why not have wading? And splashing about” (Whyte, 1983, p. 10). The second aspect is that there was a citizens' call for ideas about what could be done in the square, and making more use of the reflecting fountain was one of the most common requests. "Ducks, goldfish, porpoises, skating, mud wrestling, water slides” (p.11) were some of the suggestions.

In fact, the Beach Party confirms the ideas of Whyte's report. The possibility of being able to bathe in a body of water that was not initially envisioned for bathing purposes opened up a completely different urban scenario, from that of a representative space to that of a lived-in space (Sennet, 1996). Thus, the large reflecting pool in front of the modern City Hall was briefly transformed during the event into a bathing water, not intended to be compositional or decorative, but appropriated and ritualised by local people. The Dallas Museum of Art owns photographs by Lynn Lennon, who captured the celebration with great sharpness, allowing the atmosphere created to be appreciated today (Figure 5). In her photograph, a lifeguard watches over a large group of people gathered around a rounded pool of water. At the front row, there is a family, a pram, and several Coca Cola cups. People are bathing in the water, alone or in groups. On the left, a man is watching the scene. In the background, the mass of people and bodies stand under the imposing façade of the building, which is not the protagonist of the scene, as it usually is, but the background. The sense of multitude is multiplied by the windows

[110] Besides the size of the square, the area can rely on the Town Hall building to support these events with its own facilities, especially at weekends when empty.

reflecting the crowd. Curiously, the event was never repeated, despite its success and the large turnout, as can be seen in the photo. According to the media, this was due to the damage that had been done to the fountain (WFAA, 2019).

An analysis of the spatial qualities and architectural mechanisms used to give the existing space what is necessary for the bathing rituals reveals a number of findings. Primarily, the inclusion of a new surface, the sand, which spatially associates the experience with that of the beach, suggested to the user that entry into the water was permitted. As a result, the fountain was re-programmed as a bathing water when access was not lacking (Whyte, 1980). Sand also provided a flexible surface for sitting, lying down, playing volleyball, or building sandcastles. Then, the presence of removable furniture related to the bathing activity (e.g. the lifeguards' chairs, the stalls selling food and drink, the toilets, or the parasols) supplied more options for the space to be used and appropriated in different ways. Definitely, the Beach Party represented a major change in the way space was used, through a ‘soft' transformation that could easily restore the existing space to its original state.

**Figure 5**

*Beach Party, Dallas City Hall, 1984. Lynn Lennon. Image courtesy Dallas Museum of Art*



## Conclusions

An initial observation is that, despite the differences between the three situations studied, the spatial qualities and architectural mechanisms that favour collective bathing, and thus spatial performativity, can be grouped together and compared, since there is a certain resemblance between the cases. The most basic set of spatial qualities and architectural mechanisms that is required, although seemingly obvious, is to ensure the supply and containment of water. In the case of the two fountains, there was an artificial source of water contained in basins, and in the case of the stream, there was a natural source of water contained by a dam. Likewise, the shape of the water surface and the way elements are arranged around it were important to facilitate access and participation: in Portland, the water is the stage, surrounded by terraces and stands; in Austin, platforms are built around the water; in Dallas, the water surface is a circle, reachable and visible from all sides. Moreover, the ability of the 'naturalness' of the built environment to motivate people to undress and encourage collective bathing seems significant after analysing the case studies. This is evident in the trees around the Keller Fountain and its resemblance to a waterfall, in the natural bottom of the bathing area and the green space surrounding Barton Springs or in the inclusion of sand around the water in Dallas. Equally important are the elements that activate the bathing practice, which at the very least requires the possibility to get in and out of the water and to dry afterwards. Activation is facilitated by items like steps, trampolines, bollards, sunbathing platforms, etc. Eventually, comfort can be increased by nearby changing rooms, showers, public toilets, deckchairs and kiosks. In summary, the supply and containment of water, the shape of the water surface, the way the elements are arranged around it, the naturalness of the built environment and the activation elements are the enablers identified in the physical environment.

A further reflection is that, beyond the spatial and architectural aspects considered above, the three cases also provide an opportunity to reflect on several properties bounded with collective bathing. In particular, in the opening of Portland, the collective bathing ritual endowed the space with agency. In effect, users were invited by the space to create, try out and produce individual and communal practices of enjoyment (Koolhaas et al, 1973; Lefebvre, 1973/2014). The example in Austin, on the other hand, shows how collective bathing gave rise to a strong community and sense of belonging, gathering people around a water space. In this case, as citizens began 'sacralising' certain practices that were part of their ordinary life (e.g. bathing, swimming or walking by the water), they formed groups that assumed social responsibility for the preservation of the place (Gidieon, 1948). Finally, in the Dallas episode, collective bathing provided regeneration by transforming the function of an existing space with a 'soft' event (Sim & Gehl, 2019). The Beach Party represents an effective performance-based design tool (Marcus & Francis, 1976) for quick testing of unused urban waters. In light of the

foregoing observations and reflections, it seems clear that collective bathing in urban waters may have the potential to provide cities and citizens with performative places where agency, community, responsibility, regeneration and testing can flourish.

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# Spatial Performativity in the Natural Environment. On the Origins of the Asclepieion at Epidaurus

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## Abstract

Spatial performativity is the capacity of the environment to influence the performances and mental and emotional states of its occupants. Within the natural environment, sacred places would be those with the greatest spatial performativity, becoming the centres that have structured territories throughout history. The choice of certain places as sacred would have been determined by their being important territorial landmarks, structurally, visually and semantically relevant, and also emotionally charged.

The sanctuary of Asclepius at Epidaurus is located on the slopes of Mount Kynortion, in the pass that connects the Argolid plain with the Saronic Gulf. Mount Kynortion was an important territorial landmark and the plateau on its slopes, where the sanctuary of Asclepius was located, was soon associated with curative properties, which reinforced its importance as a territorial landmark and gave it the status of a sacred site. The spatial performativity of the landmark, combined with the social practices that took place at the important crossroads where the plateau is located, together with the qualities of the environment, gave rise to its sacred healing character, standing as one of the most famous Panhellenic sanctuaries of antiquity.

*Keywords:* Spatial performativity, ritual space, sacred space.

## Spatial Performativity in the Natural Environment

As part of the research on the performativity of ritual space that we are currently conducting, taking as a case study the choice of place in the origins of the Sanctuaries of Apollo Maleatas and Asclepius at Epidaurus, this paper aims to clarify how the spatial performativity of the natural environment could influence the choice of a place as a sacred space and how it could determine the type of cult that was established there.

### *Spatial Performativity*[111]

Drawing on Ervin Goffman's (1958, p. 8) definition of performance as “an action carried out by a participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way in any of the other participants”, we define “spatial performativity” as the potential of space to influence the activity of its occupants.

Spatial performativity acts when the occupants of a space are exposed to the qualities of the space: shape, size, lighting, temperature, acoustics, humidity, smell, colours and textures of its constituent elements, etc. The responses that these spatial qualities evoke in the occupants of the space may be genetically or culturally predetermined, or they may be learned through the individual's own experience. In most species, responses are genetically predetermined by evolution in their adaptation to the environment, whereas in humans, cultural responses and those generated by the individual's own experience predominate.

Over thousands of years of interaction with the environment, humans have created their own environment, unconsciously experimenting with the spatial performativity offered first by the natural environment and then by the modifications they made to the environment to inhabit it, to make it their home. Some authors understand the process of the construction of the environment as a process of ritualisation, in which the ritualised environment would act as a means of ritualising its inhabitants; that is, the ritual action would be imprinted on the space in the form of spatial performativity which in turn would ritualise its inhabitants, thus completing a circular process of ritualisation of the individuals in a society (Bell, 2009a, pp. 98–99).

Obviously, within the ritualised environment, spatial performativity is particularly intense in what we commonly recognise as ritual spaces. The ritual space could be defined as a space in which ritual activities take place and which is characterised by formalism, traditionalism, immutability, is governed by rules, contains sacred symbolism and is a highly performative space.[112] These characteristics are materialised in ritual space as architectural mechanisms of ritualisation through which spatial performativity operates. In addition, Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw (1994) argue that the only thing that distinguishes ritual action from any other kind of action is the state of mind with which it is performed, what Evangelos Kyriakidis (2002) has called a specific “frame of mind.” To a large extent, the sensory stimuli produced by spatial qualities could help to generate the specific "frame of mind" of ritual action. The

[111] In the essay *The Performativity of Ritual Space* (Berzal Cruz, 2023), the concept of “spatial performativity” is further developed.

[112] Since the publication of Catherine Bell's work, *Ritual. Perspective and Dimensions,* many authors have adopted as characteristics of ritual what she listed as “six neither exclusive nor definitive categories for assessing the degree of ritualisation of an activity: formalism, traditionalism, invariance, rule-governance, sacral symbolism and performance” (Bell, 2009b, pp. 138-164). Bell argues that these ritualisation categories or characteristics of the ritual are also categories of ritualised space or characteristic of ritual space.

spatial qualities of the natural environment produce the sensory stimuli from which humans learned and reproduced in their construction of the environment. In the early days of environmental construction, the spatial performativity produced by sensory stimuli must have been fundamental in the choice of a place to establish a particular activity, especially in the choice of sacred sites as fixed centres of human space.

### *Sacred Space*

All ritual spaces have a certain degree of sacredness, as sacred symbolism is one of their characteristics, and it is common to find in them a fixed point where the highest degree of sacred symbolism is reached. Rituals can be performed in a sacred space, but as it attains its status as the "centre of the world", the sacred space becomes a forbidden space, accessible only to the chosen, and often the rituals associated with it are performed in its immediate vicinity, as in the *sancta sanctorum* of temples and shrines.

Mircea Eliade (1959, pp. 21-22) defines sacred space in opposition to profane space; sacred space would be strong, meaningful, while profane space would be amorphous, without structure or consistency.[113]

> In the homogeneous and infinite expanse, in which no point of reference is possible and hence no orientation can be established, the *hierophany* reveals an absolute fixed point, a centre. From this "centre" the human being can construct the sacred space and ritualise space.

We could say that the *hierophany* that reveals the sacred place would be produced, among other factors, by the spatial performativity of the place; that is, the sensory stimuli produced by the spatial qualities would create an "emergent mood" in its occupants that would cause them to perceive the place as sacred.

> The most primitive of the "sacred places" we know of constituted a microcosm, (…) a landscape of stones, water, and trees (...) The place is never "chosen" by man; It is merely discovered by him; in other words, the sacred place in some way or another reveals itself to him. Eliade (1958, pp. 269,369)

In other words, sacred space is part of the natural environment before it was discovered. Of course, humans have constructed sacred spaces, just as we have constructed the rest of our environment, even creating a portable sacred space, as in the case of the tabernacle of

[113] More recently, Marc Verhoeven (2011, 125-126) has argued that the profane-sacred dichotomy established by, among others, Mircea Eliade, and still used explicitly or implicitly, is too simplistic. For him, it is obvious that there are sacred and profane contexts, but he believes that it is probably more productive to see the sacred and the profane as two ends of a continuum. Many contexts and activities lie somewhere between these extremes, with varying degrees or qualities of the sacred and the profane. This approach has a clear example in ritual space where, as we have said, there are different degrees of sacredness.

Moses, at the command of Jehovah. But here we are interested in exploring how spatial performativity in the natural environment works to make a place perceived as sacred.

### *Searching for a Study Method*

So how can we systematise the study of the spatial performativity that causes the perception of a place as sacred in the natural environment? Richard Bradley (2000, p. 48) points out that in archaeology sacred places are usually studied through the biography of the objects that were used in offerings; he suggests that we should turn our attention to the biography of the places where these processes occur. Places that were dedicated by different peoples to different supernatural powers and to which they probably offered sacrifices and offerings for different purposes. He argues that the choice of place was probably linked to the characteristics of the deity with which it was associated, as was the type of sacrifice offered to it. In other words, the spatial performativity of the place would evoke a specific "frame of mind" associated with the characteristics or attributes of a type of deity. For example, shrines on particularly prominent peaks in the landscape would be associated with the gods of the sky, storms or rain. Shrines at springs would be associated with the powers of youth, spring, healing, and so on. Very fertile lands would be associated with deities of abundance, motherhood, even agriculture. Places like caves or dark passes would be associated with death, hell, but also rebirth and mystical states.

But not all mountain peaks, springs, fertile lands or caves were considered sacred places. Eliade gives the key to the difference between why some would be considered sacred and others would not: Sacred places are "centres of the world" that organise the amorphous territory; that is, they are landmarks that help to orientate the territory, to structure the land, to give it shape.

At the dawn of humanity, navigating the environment in search of resources required the use of landmarks as spatial references for orientation and recognition of routes, resources and places of social opportunity. As the Palaeolithic archaeologist Paul Pettitt (2011, p. 336) argues, it is easy to imagine that very early in our evolution these landmarks could "begin to be imbued with meaning –places of life, places of opportunity, places of danger, places of death" until they became transcendent.

Massimiliano Palmiero and Laura Piccardi (2017) suggest that topographical memory is strongly supported by object location memory. In particular, they consider that landmarks would play a key role in the construction of cognitive maps of the environment; landmarks being understood as salient environmental cues that function as spatial references. Landmarks are effective for navigation when they are structurally, visually and semantically relevant; structurally with a prominent spatial location, visually with a particular size, colour or shape,

and semantically depending on cultural, historical or personal influences. In addition, landmarks can be emotionally charged, either positively or negatively, which enhances the ability to construct a cognitive map. In the natural environment, effective landmarks can be mountains, rock outcrops, trees, springs, lakes, rivers, etc. with special characteristics that make them recognisable, easily distinguishable from other similar elements in the same environment, whether by height, colour, smell or texture. In other words, they are elements of the landscape that provide a high level of sensory stimulation. In addition, the emotions associated with these elements would make them more effective as landmarks.

On the basis of these clarifications, we can reformulate Bradley's observation as follows: In the natural environment the choice of a place as a sacred space occurs because: first, it is a landmark with high spatial performativity that produces high sensory stimulation and provokes a series of emotions linked to certain supernatural powers; second, these emotions reinforce the effectiveness of the landmark and increase its spatial performativity. Therefore, in order to study how spatial performativity influences the choice of a sacred place, we propose: first, to assess the character of the landmark by observing the sensory stimuli it produces; second, to find possible cultural reactions to these stimuli; and third, to find associations with supernatural powers through which the place was “revealed.” We will use this method to try to understand why a place between the mountains of the Saronic and Argolic Gulfs was chosen to found one of the most famous sanctuaries of antiquity, the sanctuary of Asclepius and Apollo Maleatas at Epidaurus.

## Spatial Performativity in in the Surroundings of the Asclepieion of Epidaurus

Situated on the slopes of Mount Kynortion (Fig. 3), in the natural corridor between the Argolida and the Saronic Gulf, the sanctuary of Epidaurus was one of the most important and longest active Pan-Hellenic sanctuaries of antiquity, dedicated from its origins to deities associated with healing. The earliest records of human activity date from the end of the Neolithic period and were found on the site where the sanctuary appears to have originated, a terrace of the Kynortion at 482 m above sea level, 1 km away, and 60 m above the plateau on which the Asclepieion would have stood. This hill is the site of the earliest surviving structures, dating from the 3rd millennium BC and corresponding to a settlement of an active Early Helladic community. In the Late Helladic period, the site was the site of an important Mycenaean sanctuary, which included an open-air altar and a large terrace for ritual meals. Around the 7th century BC, the sanctuary was dedicated to Apollo Maleatas. The sanctuary dedicated to Asclepius seems to have been founded at the same time, and the two sanctuaries functioned together without interruption until the end of antiquity (Theodorou-Mavrommatidi, pp.1167-1168).

We have evidence that humans have inhabited the Argolid since at least the Upper Palaeolithic, as evidenced by finds from the Franchthi cave dated to around 38,000 BC (Douka et al., 2011). Since then, the passage between the Argolid and the Saronic Gulf must have been an important route, in which Mount Kynortion must have played an important role as a territorial landmark.

**Figure 1**

*Mount Kynortion from the Ancient Agora of the Asclepieion. (Photo by the author).*



## *The Landmark*

Using a cognitive approach, the archaeologist Natalie M. Susmann (2021) examines the importance of Mount Kynortion as a cult landmark. She proposes the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to measure the visual prominence of the elevations surrounding the site. Specifically, she uses the method proposed by Wesley Bernardini et al. (2013, pp, 39-46) to measure the "visual impression," or the shape of a landform against the horizon. She concludes that Kynortion is the most visually prominent mountain in the valley of the sanctuary of Epidaurus, compared to other surrounding mountains such as Arachnaion (1199 MASL) and Limnes Mountain[114] (685 MASL). Nevertheless, being the most visually prominent

[114] Pausanias describes that above the sanctuary rise two mountains; the "Titthion" (Nipple), formerly called "Myrtle" and "Kynortion" (2,27,5). On Mount Titthion, Aslcepio would have been abandoned as a newborn baby and there he was suckled by a goat and protected by a shepherd dog (2:26,5). We use the current common names of the mountains and hills surrounding the sanctuary, with the exception of Kynortion, which seems to be clearly identified. Sussman (2021) identifies Mount Limnes with Mount Myrtle or Titthion, which seems justified given its prominence from the sanctuary, but the small mountain Agios Ilias has also been identified with Mount Titthion, given its more nipple-like shape. Another

mountain in the valley does not necessarily make Kynortion an important landmark, and certainly not a sacred site. In order to better understand the choice of the sanctuary's location and its possible connection with Kynortion, we should perhaps analyse the spatial performativity that the mountain exerts on the territory.

The passage between the Argolic plain and the Saronic Gulf (Fig. 3) must have been an important route from the beginning of occupation in the region. Indeed, it certainly was during the Helladic period, especially in the later Helladic period, as evidenced by the surviving Mycenaean roads and bridges. However, looking eastwards from Argos, Tiryns, Midea or Nauplia, Mount Arachnaion is undoubtedly the most important landmark, with a sanctuary on its summit with a similar chronology to that of Mount Kynortion, although it was never inhabited and the only buildings were small altars (Psychoyos & Karatzikos, 2015). Travelling from the plain of the Argolid towards the Saronic Gulf via the two possible routes, it is not until we reach the vicinity of the acropolis of Kazarmas, near where the two routes meet, that Mount Kynortion comes into prominence. Its isolated pyramidal shape, set against the backdrop of the corridor formed to the north by Mount Arachnaion running from west to east and to the south by the similarly developed Mavrovouni, makes Mount Kynortion an important landmark marking the descent towards the port of Epidaurus (Fig. 2).

**Figure 2**

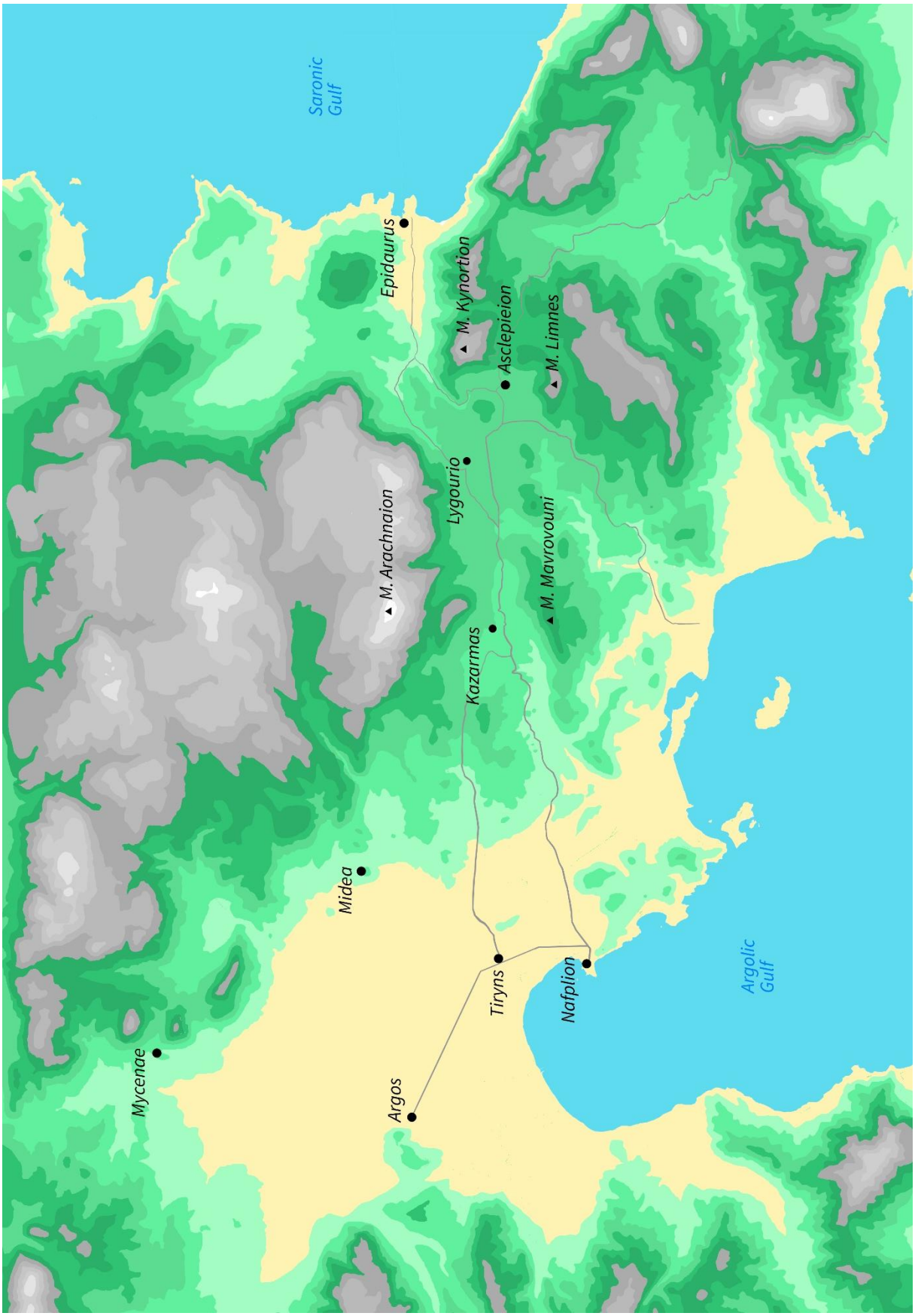
*View of the Corridor to Epidaurus from the Crossroads at Kazarmas with Mount Kynortion in the Foreground. (Photo by the author).*



mountain mentioned by Pausanias is “Coryphum”, on the top of which stood the sanctuary of Artemis Koryphaeas (2, 28, 2), which has also not been identified. We are inclined to think that Mount Coryphum is also Mount Kynortion.

**Figure 3**

*Map of the Argolida. (Map by the author).*



The ancient road to polis of Epidaurus from the Argolid ran along the northern side of the valley and led to Koroni to reach the plateau of the sanctuary, skirting the small Mountain Agios Ilias (471 MASL) that hides it behind it. From the sanctuary, the route continued to the ancient polis of Epidaurus by following the sacred road around the Kynortion down into the valley where the Tsipianiti stream flows, crossing it to continue along the north flatter side of the valley until it reached the harbour. However, the quickest and easiest route was to continue along the north side of the valley, without turning towards Koroni, towards Ligourio and then along the north side of the Tsipinai valley to the sea.

Because of its spatial performativity, Mount Kynortion was an important navigational landmark on both routes and in both directions, Epidaurus-Argolida or Argolida-Epidaurus; once you reach this point from the Epidaurus pass, the valley leads directly to the Argolid plain, and in the opposite direction, from there you only have to descend to the Tsipianiti valley to reach the Saronic Gulf.

### *Possible Cultural Reactions*

As far as we know, the first occupation of the sanctuary took place in the Late Neolithic (5300-4500 BC) or Early Helladic (3200-2000 BC), it was located on Mount Kynortion and its use was for habitation. It was not until the Middle Helladic period (2000-1550 BC) that, after a period of abandonment, the site was used again for sacrificial rituals. Susmann proposes, in line with Joseph Maran's (2016) observations on Tiryns, that the site begins to acquire a sacred character from the Middle Helladic onwards as a product of the social memory of the place. If we accept her hypothesis, then we should first consider how the spatial performativity of the site influenced the construction of a settlement there.

In the vicinity of the first settlement of Apollo Maleatas, sherds from the Early Helladic period have been found in the lower layers of the “Baths of Asclepius,” at Asclepieion. Two other Early Helladic sites have been found in the area, on the peaks of Stochos and Pouliou Rachi. Remains from the EH II period (2650-2200 BC) have also been discovered at Palaia Epidaurus (Theodorou-Mavrommatidi, 1168). This means that the area was fairly well settled since at least the Early Helladic period.

The natural terrace of the future sanctuary of Apollo is in a somewhat remote location, off the Argos-Epidaurus road, but it is sufficiently elevated, with a topography that makes it relatively easy to defend, with springs nearby but no running water. It is not the ideal place to settle, but it was obviously possible. Perhaps the most important feature of the site chosen for the settlement is that it is a terrace overlooking an important crossroads at the foot of an important territorial landmark, Mount Kynortion. The plateau where the sanctuary of Asclepius would have been located is not only an important point on the Argos-Epidaurus route, but also

the starting point for the routes to the south leading to Troezen, Poros, Kandia and Hermioni or Koilada. In other words, Kynortion was not only an important landmark, but at the foot of its western side, on the plateau where the sanctuary of Asclepius was founded, it was a place of social occasion, to use Clive Gamble's (1999, pp. 73-79) terminology. This place of social opportunity could have been located where the agora of the sanctuary would later be, or perhaps in the temenos of the sanctuary itself, and it would have been a place of exchange, of marketing, of social encounters. In this sense, it would make sense to choose the site of the terrace of Apollo Maleatas as a place to live, a place from which to contemplate the plateau where these exchanges took place. A place to see, a natural "*theatron*", a few hundred metres from where the most perfect theatre of antiquity was built. The spatial performativity remains in place throughout the millennia.

## Cultural Associations with Supernatural Forces

On the summit of Kynortion, only a few, little-studied remains have been found, consisting of a pit lined with stones and filled with dark earth, and an arrangement of stones suggesting the base of an altar, which some authors (Windell & Webb, 2021, 30) have interpreted as the summit sanctuary of "Artemis Koryphaion" (of the Peak) mentioned by Pausanias (II.28.2). Could this possible sanctuary have had the same character as the one on the summit of Mount Arachnaion? Pausanias (II.25.10) mentions that there were altars dedicated to Zeus and Hera on the top of Arachnaion, where the inhabitants of the area offered sacrifices in their honour when they needed rain, and recent studies have shown that the sanctuary was in use from the Mycenaean period (Psychoyos & Karatzikos, 2015). No studies have been carried out on the possible peak sanctuary of Kynortion, but in any case, it did not have the same success as that of Apollo Maleatas or Asclepius, and this is logical, since it was located in a difficult to reach place, more than 480 m above the Asclepieion plateau. Sussman (2021, pp. 80–94) suggests that Mount Kynortion may have followed the process of acquiring a sacred character very early on, with the establishment of a peak sanctuary on it. In time the sanctuary would have descended to lower ground, first to the site of the sanctuary of Apollo Maleatas and then to that of Asclepius, with the mountain remaining an important element of the religious landscape.

The sanctuaries of Apollo Maleatas and Asclepius functioned as one, dedicated to healing. Some authors argue that the Mycenaean sanctuary on the terrace of Apollo Maleatas was dedicated to a healing deity. What we do know is that the sanctuary became one of the most important centres for healing in antiquity. What did the site contribute to its recognition as a place of healing? How did the spatial performativity of the site function in this sense?

Tim Ingold (2000) describes what makes a point in the territory become a “place” as follows:

> A place owes its character to the experiences it affords to those who spend time there– to the sights, sounds and indeed smells that constitute its specific ambience. And these, in turn, depend on the kinds of activities in which its inhabitants engage. It is from this relational context of people’s engagement with the world, in the business of dwelling, that each place draws its unique significance. (p. 192)

In other words, spatial performativity conditions the activity of the place and the activity carried out in a place can transform its character and the cultural associations that its spatial performativity activates.

One of the things that gives the plateau on which the Asclepieion stands the character of “place” –in Ingold's sense– is that the air there feels lighter. The air there has a spatial texture that is felt on the skin and is experienced as refreshing, invigorating, renewing, leading to a more awake, more aware state of mind. It is an experience shared by many visitors to the site, perhaps conditioned by the knowledge of the activity that took place there for centuries. The truth is that it has little to do with the healing rites that were performed there, related to dreams and altered states, so the knowledge may have little to do with the real experience offered by the site.

Since at least the late Neolithic, the site has been visited and recognised as a “place” of social opportunity. Did visitors who experienced the qualities of the air at Epidaurus attribute healing properties to the site? Did they associate the site with a healing deity? Or was it a practice that took place there that gave the site its healing character? Or could it have been a combination of the two? It seems more likely to be the latter, as the site was perceived from its origins as a place of social opportunity and as a special place with revitalising qualities, so the practice of healing must have been initiated there very early on, reinforcing its character and thus its spatial performativity.

## Conclusion

The study of spatial performativity in the Asclepieion of Epidaurus shows us how the site could be considered a sacred place marked by a healing character since the Neolithic period. Its origin as a place of social opportunity, associated with the landmark represented by Mount Kynortion, the crossroads at its foot, and the characteristics of the site, initiated a process of interaction with space that over time transformed it into the most famous healing sanctuary of antiquity. From this point in the research, we can begin to study the space of the sanctuary and understand its design, its orientations, the location of each element and the relationships it establishes between them and with the landscape.

Here we present only a preview of an ongoing investigation into spatial performativity in the foundation of sacred space, taking as a case study the Asclepieion of Epidaurus, adopting a perspective somewhere between phenomenological and cognitive. As Christopher Tilley (2010, p. 26) argues, the phenomenological study requires time spent observing and experiencing the place, while the cognitive perspective requires the observation of our own mental processes. But spatial performativity can only be studied by experiencing the place, performing in it, and observing what mental and bodily processes occur in response to our performance in the place. In the coming days,[115] during the workshop, we will have the opportunity to experiment with the methodology proposed here, in significant sites such as Tiryns, Mycenae, Nafplio and Epidaurus. We hope that this experience will greatly enrich this research.

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# Other Papers Presented at the Conference

Other papers were presented at the Conference but were reserved by the authors for inclusion in other publications. We include the abstracts of these papers, which were submitted in response to the Call for Papers for the Conference.

# *Traumland* - The Land of (our) Dreams
# A Journey through Space, Body, Language and Performance for the Search of the Iconic and Sublime Place to Live in Surreal Times

**Anna Tsichli**
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This paper will be the first public account of a moment of artist's block followed by revelation that resulted in the creation of a video performance called *Traumland* and later to the performance *Ich will ein Land/I want a Country*.

The journey starts in the spring of 2020, right after the first lockdown for the coronavirus pandemic, when the performance group Terrasse Ensemble decides to stage the acclaimed modern Greek theatre play *Ich will ein Land/I want a Country* by Andreas Flourakis.[1] ''It is a Greek play which examines the aftermath of the financial crisis on a personal and collective level: the crisis today which has led to immigration, violence and the loss of social stability. The play considers whether the future will bring hope or despair. Its chorus-like structure makes it flexible for performance by any number of actors while its subject matter is undeniably universal, making it relevant for worldwide audiences'' points out Flourakis.

For five months (September 2020 – January 2021) the members of Terrasse Ensemble engage on an exploration between the ideal place to live and their everyday reality as financial immigrants in a foreign country at the times of the global pandemic crisis. Discussions about bodies in isolation, (secret or formal) gatherings on-line or in open spaces, thoughts, dreams and confessions about the life before and after such moments of crisis, comprise huge digital and analogue files, archives and lists.

In January 2021, while another lockdown was making physical contact and rehearsals impossible, we all realised that the performance was unlikely to happen. Full stop, end, artist's block.

Then came the Aha-moment, a sudden inspiration and realisation that absence can be in focus and isolation can create worlds. The chorus voices of the theatre play *I want a country* can also function in solitude, creating multiple worlds in space and bodies. So, the answer was a video performance: *Traumland* because it represents the dreams, the countries, the dream-

[1] https://www.andreasflourakis.com/biography

lands of each one that can stand out of the chorus and perform one's own stories in unique space and time as if told to an invisible friend, visitor, journalist on camera.

*Traumland* became a unique chorus-monologue video performance based on the theatre play *Ich will ein Land/I want a Country* by Andreas Flourakis. Not one sentence is exactly the same in *Traumland* and yet the eight characters find the same vocabulary to share their crazy dreams, thoughts and lives, that create a chorus full of contrasts, hobbies, movements memories and confessions. The video performance *Traumland* was presented in June 2021 at Theatre Stok in Zurich followed by a short live encounter of the eight performers on stage. In November 2021 the entire theatre play *Ich will ein Land/I want a Country* was staged by the same performers at Bühne S in Zurich.



## This Used to Be my Playground… Argos as "Background", as Scenery, as Past and as Present in the Aeschylean Tragedy

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Three of the extant tragedies of Aeschylus take place in the mythical (?) city of Argos (*Hiketides/The Supplices, Agamemnon, Choephoroe/Libation Bearers)*), whereas in other plays Argos is "present" in choral songs (e.g. *Septem contra Thebas / Seven against Thebes*). In these plays, Argos is either the dramatic space, the "scenery", or, in some cases, the city is merely the background, but it is also introduced as the narrative space; Argos is even mentioned as a memory of a –more or less– auspicious past in opposition to the gloomy present of the city and/or the hero(s)/heroine(s).

In this paper all the instances of the "appearance", function and exploitation of Argos in the dramas of Aeschylus will be categorized and discussed in order to shed light in one main question: How is Argos portrayed by Aeschylos, taking into account also the current historical situations of the staging/*didaskalia* of his "on" or "about" Argos plays?

## Reconstructing Hellenistic Performance: Rituals of Nikephoria at the Precinct of Pergamon Altar

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The precinct of the Great Altar is situated among the topmost level of the Pergamene acropolis. The location of the complex already indicated that it was one of the most important monuments constituting the Pergamene urban fabric. This suggestion is confirmed by the narrative content of its sculptural decoration. The sculptural display of the Great Altar most eloquently articulated the religious, military and dynastic themes that constitute Attalid political ideology. The Altar is also among the most studied monuments from Pergamon. These studies, concentrating on the iconography of the narrative content, rigorously emphasized the significance of the monument to Attalid political ideology at the expense of its religious significance. The shape of politics implicated in these studies, moreover, seems to have been influenced by one of the

broad generalizations about the Hellenistic world. Scholars often project the modern distinction between religious and secular affairs to their interpretations of the Hellenistic social world: it is a widely held belief that religion becomes subservient to the political agendas of kings in the Hellenistic period. Departing with such an assumption, the scholarship on the Great altar either consciously or unconsciously de-emphasized the religious significance of the monument, the architecture and its sculptural content is seen solely instrumental to facilitate the political agendas of the Attalid kings. This misconception is also corroborated by the tendency to understand the symbolic significance of the ancient monuments with respect to their typologically defined "function." For instance, scholars occupying themselves with the questions of whether the Great Altar was a heroon, altar or a banquet hall, rarely dwell upon the kind of performance —sacrifice— that gave meaning to the ceremonies that regularly take place in a heroon, altar or a banquet hall. The sacrifice, which means "to act" (operari) was the spatial practice that literally and symbolically shaped the monuments in the ancient Greco-Roman world.

In this paper, I will consider the festival rituals such as procession and *phyrric* dance prior to performance of sacrifice at Great Altar in the context of the festival of Nikephoria, where the state ceremonial encountered and merged with the cult practices of Athena. The Great Altar took its final shape during the reign of Eumenes II contemporaneously with the initiation of the Nikephoria as a pan-hellenic festival. Besides "staging" the festival, The Gigantomachy and the Telephos friezes of the Great Altar, on the other hand, established the mythical connection between the Attalids and their Greek heritage and thereby claimed Pergamon as a monarchic successor to democratic Athens. During the celebrations of the Nikephoria, the architecture and its narrative content were put into the service of Attalid ideology through performative spatial practices such as procession and *phyrric* dance culminating in a sacrifice. These re-configured the urban space as a performative setting transforming the ritual event into celebration of Attalid victories.

# Site-Specific Theatre: A Case Study in Istanbul

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“Site-Specific Theatre” refers to the type of theatre that uses areas that are not originally designed as theatre spaces as a performance space, but where the area is connected to the topic of the play, and does not have a classical audience-play relationship. Such areas can be set up and designed specifically for the play; existing areas such as schools, hotels, transportations, public or private buildings, streets and forests can also be included in the subject of the play and used as a performance area. The relationship of the field-specific plays with the audience is also different from mainstream theatre plays. In the past, a structure has prevailed where the audience and the performance areas are separated by sharp boundaries, where the audience watches plays in artificially created areas designed for the specific purpose of watching theatre. This differs in site-specific plays. In general, the audience is included in the play and is positioned in a different way. In most of the examples, the audience is involved in the theatre by watching the play in a physical and active way.

The relationship that the theatre wants to establish with the audience in the plays staged in non-public areas is related to the theatre's practice of making the theatre specific to the area and the reason for choosing it. It is aimed to present an alternative to mainstream theatre with the audience who have theatre-watching practices. In this context, a “different” staging with a new perspective on theatre are presented to the audience.

In Istanbul, it has been observed that the number of alternative theatres (buildings gaining function by transforming into various and different usage areas that have no relation with the theatre function) has been increasing since the early 2000s. The demand for alternative performance spaces has surged as a result of economic inadequacies, insufficient availability of conventional stage spaces, a desire to depart from the customary proscenium stage, the pursuit of diverse theatrical aesthetics, and the experimental imperatives that characterize contemporary theatrical sensibilities. The developments in alternative staging in Istanbul in recent years have also led to an increase in site-specific examples. Apart from their interest in the theatre play, the audience also participates in these events with their curiosity about staging and the space.

This study aims to examine the site-specific theatres in Istanbul in recent years. In this study, the performance in the existing space, the performance in the temporary space through the relationship between the performance space and the theatre, the performance in the moving space, and the performance as the urban interior will be examined. These

spaces and their effects on the audience will be investigated comparatively through audience experiences, and an answer will be sought as to whether the spaces chosen for site-specific performances have the flexibility to be transported to different venues.

## Performing Stage: An Interdisciplinary Re-reading of the Black Box

**Elena Peytchinska**
University of Applied Arts Vienna, Austria

The naked stage as an active participant in the theatre performance is a decade-long and well-established fact. However, within the framework of spatial dramaturgy – the spatial organization in time, its narrative potential and continuity – It is a subject-centred decision that traditionally foregrounds the assumption that the site of a theatrical event is neutral and passive: a "black box" waiting to be animated by the liveliness of the performative intervention of its human participants.

In this talk, I would like to propose two lines of argument concerning the agency of a theatre stage from respectively relational new materialistic and post-humanist perspectives. First, I intend to observe the dynamics of the empty stage, revealing the complex texture of its vibrant (visible and invisible) materiality and agential capacity. Second, I explore the potential for more-than-human collaborations and creative practices in relation to theatre space.

Regarding the first line of argument, I evoke Erika Fischer-Lichte's distinction between two spatial events within the performance: the pre-existing and pre-designed space of a theatre venue, characterized by Fischer-Lichte as "architectural-geometric" and rather static and neutral place and the "spatiality" which emerges during the performance event. Whereas I enthusiastically adopt Fischer-Lichte's conception of spatiality, I would like to re-read the notion of "geometric" space, drawing on theoretical material by (e.g.) Donna Haraway, Karen Barad and Jane Bennet.

In my second line of argument, I question the traditional image of the black box and its inside/outside dichotomy and propose the figure of "Skinspace" as a spatial practice, including more-than-human collaborative dynamics. The spatial experience of inside/outside corresponds to a similar bodily perception. Presumed as a boundary, the skin envelops and protects the inside of the body from the outside world – a quality shared by most human and non-human animals (and in contrast to other species, such as fungi, which, due to their "anatomy" do not experience a difference between inside and outside). However, the image of

the skin as a limit appears not until the 18th century. Until then, the skin was perceived as a porous membrane – an interface of permeability, transformation, and friction. Reactivating this forgotten knowledge, I propose “Skinspace” as a material spatial practice that intertwines spatial agency and spatial dramaturgy and develops a potential for embracing the Nonhuman.

## How the Tangible and the Intangible Cultural Assets of the Space Create a New Identity

**Eleni Linaki**
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece

The beginning of a place begins with its idea, which is gradually shaped into forms. Each place or the world is divided into three main expressions of resources, natural resources (flora, seas, hills, etc.), man-made resources (buildings, roads, schools) and intangible resource (customs, folklore, myths). For its smooth operation, the world, through the natural, human and intangible resources sustain the continuation of the transmission of a movement, in the sense that they are preserved today, only if they are in an endless relation with their perpetual creative force. They are not self-propelled, but they are moved and move each other, creating a chain of sequential movements until the end. Culture, as a whole or as an organism is built on relationships, as a sum of its assets. This means that culture is related to the people who live in the world, in which they have been born and lived with changes, reinforcements and subtractions. Culture is not a static concept, but is constantly evolving, following the above, the nature, man and spirit in a specific but also wider time, place and duration. Each place has a myth, archetypes, customs and traditions, buildings, ensembles, trees, etc. that compose the whole world and each place on earth. After all, culture is a place with speech and myth, where each city creates its own speech and myth, on a logical, spiritual and emotional level, creating an identity. Cultural identity is the inherited culture that communities tend to preserve in order to transfer knowledge to future generations. In other words, culture is an ongoing process that leaves significant traces without affecting the progress of communities and their futures. Under this notion, traditional buildings and settlements as well as, in general, all the elements of the human environment having notable historical, urban, architectural, folkloric, social and aesthetic characteristics and significance are of great importance. Cultural identity is something broader than culture, it is the result of a collective historical experience of many sectors and people, creating a common set of values. The coexistence of people, constituting

this value and social groups is the creation of a city, a place. Each place forms sensory landscapes (acoustic, visual, etc.), but beyond that it functions as a scene of action, as an area of expression, as painting motif and a canvas. This paper tries to seek the relationship between the tangible and the intangible cultural assets of the place and the new cultural identity that could be shaped and formed through them.

## Performing Landscape as a “Dream of Presence”

**Anna Tzakou**
University of the Peloponnese

In 2012, I found the performance group Geopoetics, an artistic collective formed by different disciplines (such as theatre, visual arts, music, poetry and architecture). The group creates walking, site-specific performances in rural and urban landscapes with the aim to explore place as a collective experience and a mythical narrative of the present moment. Each time, the group applies a repeatable set of contemplative performance practices in situ in order to devise a participatory physical - based outdoor theatre performance.

The practice of Geopoetics examines the lived experience of a place. It prioritises its somatic event before becoming integrated with the cultural practices embedded on site. The practice elaborates the performance/site interplay as a discipline of ‘presence’. It develops an experiential listening of site upon which an awareness of the processes of knowing and understanding in space is cultivated as a narrative.

Geopoetics examines place by re-negotiating the bodily presence with the large-scales narratives of history and culture. It approaches space as a continuum within which the performance event attempts to manifest the cardiograph of a perpetual effort to ‘dream the world as a whole’ (Rose, 2006: 545). It stresses three points in the site-specific performance process.

Landscape as a Body: Landscape is revealed to us not only as form, shape and architecture but also as an echoing of our emotional, associative, impulsive and mental experience in it. It is understood through an exchange, a back and forward of the inner connecting with the outer.

Performance as a Participatory Event: Landscape is being revealed as a fluid experience of encounters, connections and ruminations through a nonhierarchical value that cultivates equanimity. Space and time are expanded through their liminality and the performance in situ

gains efficacy as a potential individual and collective event of self-introspection, emotional resolution, and healing.

Place as ‘Dream of Presence’: Place is freed from linear stories that separate and fragment space into social and cultural dichotomies. It is emerged as a continuum, a stratography of dreams, emotional conflicts, historical aberrations and embodied narratives, manifested as the practice of everyday life or as one’s own perception and experience.

This presentation will give a thorough account of geopoetics practice and performance work. It will describe the ways it explores the physical, emotional and mental experience of the body (- ies) in situ. It will explain the mechanisms through which geopeotics investigates narrative of a place as an intensity lying between the body and the cultural practices on site. It will argue for a landscape dramaturgy (its principles, values and performative form) that does not approach site as a standardised classification but as an open-ended system of signifiers based on the experience of events of relationality and connectivity. In this way, performers and spectators are not guided by the narratives that govern a space, but they become agents and co-creators of it. They exist because of a place and not in spite of it.

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