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PROCEEDINGS OF THE PERFORMING SPACE 2023 CONFERENCE

(2026)

PERFORMANCE & SPACE III. PROCEEDINGS OF THE PERFORMING SPACE 2025 CONFERENCE

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PERFORMANCE & SPACE III

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PERFORMING SPACE 2025 CONFERENCE



Performing Space Association **University of the Peloponnese**

2026

https://epublishing.ekt.gr | **e-Publisher:** EKT | **Downloaded at:** 29/04/2026 06:18:31

PERFORMANCE & SPACE III

PROCEEDINGS OF THE
PERFORMING SPACE 2025 CONFERENCE



Performing Space Association **University of the Peloponnese**

2026

PERFORMANCE & SPACE III

PROCEEDINGS OF THE PERFORMING SPACE 2025 CONFERENCE

4 – 7 July, 2025, Nafplio, Greece

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Organised by

Performing Space Association

Department of Performing and Digital Arts
Department of Theatre Studies
University of the Peloponnese

Directed by

Pablo Berzal Cruz

ISSN 3057-434X
ISBN 978-960-89135-6-1

2026

PERFORMING SPACE 2025
Programme
4 to 7 July, Nafplio Greece

Friday, 4 July

9:00 Registration

9:20 Welcome address

1st Session: Body, Time and Space
Chair: Dr. Philip Hager

9:50 Dr. Eirini Sourgiadaki.
Spaces of the in-between.

10:00 Prof. Mónica Raya
Under the Light of a Posthuman Feminist Approach to Apace. Seminar of Expanded Practices of Scenography.

10:10 Dr. Fatma Erkök & Dr. Pelin Dursun Çebi.
An Embodied Educational Experience: An Accumulated Memory and Vision.

10:20 Michael Budmani.
The Posthuman Space of Theatre Production Education.

10:30 Discussion

10:40 Break

2nd Session: Theatre and Social Change
Chair: Dr Christina Zoniou

10:50 PhD(C) Bilal Akar.
Home as a Diasporic Space: Underground Theatre Practices of the Kurdish Group Koma Demhat.

11:00 Dr Tyrone Grima.
Performative Spaces and Queerness at the End of the Twentieth Century in Malta.

11:10 Dr Tony McCaffrey.
Differentiated Bodies, Dysfluent Voices: Disabling Performing Space.

11:20 Katerina Kataki & Despina Mitsiali.
Performing Ages

11:30 Discussion

11:40 Break

3rd Session: Spatial Embodiment
Chair: Dr. Alba Balmaseda Domínguez

12:00 Andreas Skourtis.
Performing House.

12:10 Dr. Angeliki Sakellariou.
Performing the Square: Notational Practices as Spatial Interventions.

12:20 Dr Miljana Zeković.
Bubble Ecologies: Interstitial Worlds of Performance and Growth.

12:30 PhD(C) Pantea Eslami.
Embodying Space, Performing Learning: Architecture as an Interface for Interdisciplinary Education.

12:40 Discussion

13:50 Dr. Eleni Kolliopoulou.
The Soup.

13:00 Break

4th Session: Performative Presentations I
Chair: Dr. Pablo Berzal Cruz

13:15 Anna Luyten.
Hear the Things Sing. Writing Footnotes While Reading Your Hand.

13:30 Adrian Montana.
Co-Habiting with Pteropodidae (Australian fruit bats) as Sound Ecology.

13:45 Discussion

14:00 Lunch Break

16:00 – 20:00 Workshops

Dr. Pablo Berzal Cruz & Dr. Alba Balmaseda Domínguez
The Preferences of the Gods. Spatial Performativity Revealed.

Prof. Dorita Hannah
Mediterranean Spacing 2.0
Site-Responsive Actions Exploring Nafplion's Spatiotemporal Performativity.

Saturday, 5 July

5th Session: Environmental Awareness
Chair: Dr. Bill Psarras

9:00 Dr. Giada Cipollone.
Curating Islandness:The Case of Marosi Festival (Stromboli, IT)

9:10 George Lazoglou.
The Carbon Tierra Biennale 2025: Spatial Performativity and Artistic. Negotiations in Post-Industrial Landscapes.

9:20 Dr. Joonwoo Kim.
Performing Resistance to Regional Decline: Revitalizing Korea's Small Towns through the Gyechon Classical Festival.

9:30 PhD(C) Alexia Kalogeropoulou.
Following the Movements of Trees: Nature as a Portal to Creative Flow.

9:40 Discussion

9:50 Coffee break

6th Session: Changing the Perception of Environment through Performance
Chair: Dr. Adonis Volanakis

10:00 Georgia Kanellopoulou.
Reading the City: The Performative Function of Text and the Dramaturgy of Public Space

10:10 Marcela Oteíza Silva.
Scenographic Void: Aereal Street Performances and the Urban Space.

10:20 Anthi Kougia.
PUBLIC SPACE, ENCHANTMENT AND RESISTANCE.

10:30 Zoe Drakopoulou.
REBEARTH.

10:40 Dr. Daniel Dilliplane.
Walking as Anarchiving. An Aesthetic Analysis of the "Window on the World" Tour.

10:50 Discussion

7th Session: The Material as Narrative
Chair: Dr. Maria Mikedaki

11:00 Katerina Liapopoulou.
Poe on Paper, or The Gold-Bug *Was Made of Paper. An Ecological Performance. Using Paper as Its Sole Material.*

11:10 Prof. Rachel Fensham.
Re-imagining the Architecture of the Chiton: An intimate Haptics.

11:20 PhD(C) Sofia Alexiadou.
W Memorabilia, (Phaedra's Laboratory) Following the light: A Woman's Never-Ending Dialogue with Space and Time

11:30 Gülten Nur Bilgiç & Dr. Pelin Dursun Çebi.
The Body as Deus Ex Machina: Revealing the Stage through Apparatus.

11:40 Discussion

11:50 Coffee break

8th Session: Ritual Space
Chair: Dr Pablo Berzal Cruz

12:10 Prof. Dorita Hannah.
Bringing Down the House: Decolonial Spacing to Reimagine Globalised Theatre Architecture.

12:20 Dr. Dragana Konstantinović.
Public Urban Space and the Performance of Political Agency – the Case of Serbia.

12:30 Dr. Christina Banalopoulou.
Ruined Performativity, Ethno-Religious Diversity: Live Events at the Ruins of the Panagia Paramythias/Vlach Saray Church in Istanbul.

12:40 Dr. Wen Liang, PhD(C) Xiao Yang & PhD(C) Rebeca Zhu Cao.
Mapping Temporal and Spatial Dynamics of Imperial Rituals in the Forbidden City.

12:50 Discussion

13:00 Break

9th Session: Performative Presentations II
Chair: Dr Gina Giotaki

13:10 Dr. Bill Psarras.
We are all Cities: The Poetics of Performing Landscapes through Writing, Microscope and Digital Media.

13:15 Bernadett Jobbágy.
Embodying Space and Text: The Inside and the Outside of Soma in a Creative Process

13:30 Discussion

14:00 Lunch break

16:00 – 20:00 Workshops

Dr. Pablo Berzal Cruz & Dr. Alba Balmaseda Domínguez
The Preferences of the Gods. Spatial Performativity Revealed.

Prof. Dorita Hannah
Mediterranean Spacing 2.0
Site-Responsive Actions Exploring Nafplion's Spatiotemporal Performativity.

Sunday, 6 July

9:10 PhD(C) Valentina Sáez Marín.
Living in Motion: Muleteer Corporacies and Territorialization in the Maule Mountains, Chile.

10th Session: Performance as Research
Chair: Dr. KIMVI Nguyen

9:10 Helen Robertson.
IN A CLEARING.

9:20 Dimitra Kordomenou.
Playing in the City: Practice and Poetics of Reclaiming Urban Space.

9:30 Eliza Soroga.
Let's Inject Some Randomness into the City: Reflecting on Eliza Soroga's Site-Specific Performances in London and Prague.

9:40 Discussion

9:50 Coffee break

11th Session: Multimedia Performance
Chair: Dr. Anastasios Theodoropoulos

10:00 Dr. David Bassuk.
DESIGNING SPATIAL NARRATIVES: From Memory Palaces to AI-Enhanced XR.

10:10 PhD(C) Eleana Pandia.
A Moment in Digital Time: Pause During Performative Gameplay.

10:20 Dr. Katerina El Raheb.
Streetstories: Instagram as Drift.

10:30 Dr. Philip Hager.
Portable Dramaturgies: Performing Globalization's Un/Specific Ground.

10:40 Discussion

12th Session: Social Change through Performance
Chair: Dr Tyrone Grima

10:50 Prof. Klitsa Antoniou.
Roadworks (1985) versus Coalworks (2024).

11:00 PhD(C) Sara Gholami & Sara Boroumandi.
Performing Protest: The Girl of Enghelab Street and the Spatial Politics of Resistance in Iran.

11:10 Dr. Antonia Vasilakou.
Redefining the Change of Care in Democracy: A Site-Specific Walking Performance in the Park of Sotiria Hospital.

11:20 Marianna Koukoulekidou & Aggeliki M. Doufa.
Lipstick Liberation: A Feminist Performance Mapping the Femicides in the Performing Public Space.

11:30 Discussion

11:40 Coffee break

13th Session: Spatial Performativity
Chair: Dr. Alba Balmaseda Domínguez

12:00 Dr. Loukia Minetou.
Shaping Actants to Assist Communication: Co-Producing Narrative Spaces with People Living with Dementia.

12:10 Dr. Anna Street.
Subversive Submersions: Water's Shapeshifting Force.

12:20 Dr. Vasiliki Sirakouli.
Changing Spaces, Changing Music Ecosystems: What We've Learned so Far in Greece.

12:30 Dr. Višnja Žugić.
Architectural Performative on the Thresholds of the Domestic and the Extreme.

12:40 Discussion.

12.50. Break

14th Session: Performative Presentations III
Chair: Dr Christina Zoniou

13:00 Arianna Chatzigalanou.
Urban Vampire: A Rite of Passage.

13:15 Carolyn Defrin & Elena Marchevska.
The Shape of Home: A Performative Presentation of Letters that Resist the Border as a Line.

13:30 Elli Vassalou.
Some Dances Last Longer than Castles: Çiftetelli.

13:45 Discussion

14:00 Lunch break

16:00 – 20:00 Workshops

Maria Chaniotaki with the collaboration of Eleni Palogou
Performing Spaces: Narrative Spaces and Scenography

Prof. Dorita Hannah
Mediterranean Spacing 2.0
Site-Responsive Actions Exploring Nafplion's Spatiotemporal Performativity.

Monday, 7 July

15th Session: New Performative Spaces
Chair: Dr Athena Stourna

9:00 PhD(C) Daniela Dispoto.
An Archipelago of Floating Islands. Memory, Transmission, Transformation.

9:10 Anna-Pagona Papidi & Dafni Anastasia Tsintzeli.
Methodologies and Immersive Tools in Scenography. The case of the "Beyond the 4th Wall (B4W)" project.

9:20 PhD(C) Pavlos Panagiotidis.
From Actors to Performative Architecture Designers: Devising Experiments with Responsive Environments.

9:30 Dr. Adonis Volanakis.
A Performative Archive.

9:40 Discussion

9:50 Coffee break

16th Session: Other Forms of Presence
Chair: Dr Antonia Vasilakou

10:00 Greig Burgoyne.
Re-thinking site-specificity via long durational performance art.

10:10 Valassia Barbouti & Myrto Andronidi.
Deciphering Mechanisms and Narration Systems in the Natural Landscape: The Case of Keros.

10:20 Sophia Kyriakou & Areti Petropoulou.
The Performative Character of Betrayal in Public Space.

10:30 Anastasia Giamouzi & Dr. Stella Paschalidou.
Bacchae: You Who Are Willing to See the Unseen.

10:40 PhD(C) Beatrice Lapadat.
Space and Voice as Substitutes to Character Embodiment in the Expositional Performance "Entre vos mains" by Marc Lainé.

10:50 Discussion

17th Session: Performance Space
Chair: Prof. Dorita Hannah

11:00 Dr. Rafaël Magrou.
Scenographic Architectures. (Re)Questioning the Relationship between Spectators and Actors.

11:10 Prof Liviu Dospinescu.
A Phenomenological Approach to the A-Social Configuration of Scenography in Single-Spectator Performances.

11:20 Edward Nilsson.
Exploring the Spectator / Performer Interface: A Case Study of Grecian Garden, Yonkers, New York

11:30 PhD(C) Elias D'hollander.
Storytelling the Theatre Building. On the Tension between the Multiplication of the Theatre Building's Specificities and the Al-Halqa in Radouan Mriziga's 7 (2017).

11:40 Discussion

11:50 Coffee break

18th Session: Multimedia Performance II
Chair: Dr. Katerina El Raheb

12:10 Paraskevi Bokovou.
New Technologies Reshaping the Performative Space: The Site-Specific Set and the Action Props.

12:20 PhD(C) Alessandro Di Egidio.
Where Do I Play My Body? A Round Trip between Virtual Stages and Real-World Arenas.

12:30 Altar Çolak & Merve İrem Keklik.
In the Dialectic of Space as Body, Body as Space: The Performative Grey Zone

12:40 Discussion

12:50 Break

19th Session: Performative Presentations IV
Chair: Dr Dorita Hannah

13:00 PhD(C) Natalia Jowita Kozakiewicz.
Strategies of Creating Presence in the Space of the City: Analysing the Role of Somatic Practices in Performance within Urban Environments.

13:15 Ridha DHIB.
Conjuring the Threshold.

13:30 Discussion

13:45 Conclusion

14:00 Lunch break

16:00 – 20:00 Workshops

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Performing Space 2025

Pablo Berzal Cruz
Independent researcher
Athena Stourna
University of the Peloponnese

Performing Space is a research project that explores the relationship between performance and the built environment, taking into account the different perspectives of disciplines that study human activity and space, such as anthropology, archaeology, architecture, cognitive sciences, economics, geography, law, performance studies, philosophy, sociology, and theatre studies. The project understands 'performance' as "all activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants" (Goffman, 1956, pp. 8–9). Following this definition, any activity that people carry out with the conscious or (usually) unconscious intention of influencing their social and spatial environment can be considered a form of performance. Catherine Bell (1992) and other authors argue that our performances influence our environment by transforming it; at the same time, the environment influences our behaviours and mental states. The title of this project, *Performing Space*, refers to this circular process of environmental transformation through our performances and the reciprocal influence of the environment on those performances, as well as to the space in which performances take place: the built environment.

The primary objective of *Performing Space* has been to establish a platform for presenting, experimenting with and debating research from different disciplines on performance and its environment. In other words, the project aims to foster an international network dedicated to discussing and disseminating the performative understanding of space, which is essential for both interpreting and shaping our environment. To this end, the project has been developed through international conferences that include academic and artistic research presentations, alongside workshops designed to experiment with methodologies that explore the relationship between space and performance. Since its first edition in Nafplio, Greece, in 2022, Performing Space has steadily grown as a collaborative and interdisciplinary community.

The 2025 Edition

The fourth edition of the *Performing Space* project, in the form of the Performing Space 2025 Conference and Workshops, was held once again in Nafplio, Greece, from 4 to 7 July 2025. Building upon the momentum and achievements of previous editions, this iteration further consolidated the project as an international reference point for transdisciplinary research on performance and space, achieving a slight increase in participation compared to 2024.

The 2025 edition featured 81 presentations and three workshops, bringing together participants from 24 countries. On this occasion, the event was organised by the Performing Space Association — formally established in Madrid in 2024 — in collaboration with the Departments of Performing and Digital Arts and Theatre Studies of the University of the Peloponnese. This institutional development marks an important step in the consolidation and long-term sustainability of the project.

Figure 1

Image from The Preferences of the Gods *workshop, led by Pablo Berzal Cruz and Alba Balmaseda Domínguez. Performing Space 2025. (Photo by Spyros Kousouris).*



The conference was structured into 19 sessions, reflecting both the continuity of existing lines of research and the emergence of new thematic approaches: Body, Time and Space; Theatre and Social Change; Spatial Embodiment; Performative; Environmental Awareness; Changing the Perception of Environment through Performance; The Material as Narrative; Ritual Space; Performance as Research; Multimedia Performance; Social Change through Performance; Spatial Performativity; New Performative Spaces; Other Forms of Presence; and Performance Space.

As a significant innovation, this edition introduced four sessions of Performative Presentations, in which participants were invited to present their research through performative formats, expanding beyond conventional academic communication. These sessions reinforced one of the core principles of the project: that performance is not only an object of study but also a method of research and a mode of knowledge production. By integrating embodied, spatial and experiential forms of presentation, these sessions contributed to bridging theory and practice, fostering a deeper understanding of the relationship between performance and space.

Figure 2

Image from Mediterranean Spacing 2.0 *workshop, led by Prof. Dorita Hannah. Performing Space 2025. (Photo by Pablo Berzal Cruz).*



The 2025 edition continued to explore key lines of research developed in earlier years, such as spatial performativity, performative space, site-specific practices, and the role of performance as a research and pedagogical tool. At the same time, it expanded its scope towards issues such as environmental awareness, material narratives, and new forms of presence in both physical and mediated environments. The increasing attention to multimedia and hybrid formats reflects the evolving conditions of contemporary spatial experience.

The workshops accompanying the conference once again played a central role, offering participants the opportunity to engage in embodied and site-specific practices, and to experiment collectively with methodologies that explore the relationship between space, perception and performance.

In this edition, three workshops were organised. *The Preferences of the Gods: Spatial Performativity Revealed*, led by Dr. Pablo Berzal Cruz and Dr. Alba Balmaseda Domínguez, explored spatial performativity through embodied and analytical practices aimed at revealing the latent dynamics between human action and environment (Figure 1). *Mediterranean Spacing 2.0: Site-Responsive Actions Exploring Nafplion's Spatiotemporal Performativity*,

led by Prof. Dorita Hannah, continued the exploration of coastal and liminal environments, focusing on site-responsive actions that engage with the temporal and spatial layers of Nafplion (Figure 2). Finally, *Performing Spaces: Narrative Spaces and Scenography*, led by Maria Chaniotaki in collaboration with Eleni Palogou, examined the relationship between narrative, space and scenographic practice, emphasising the performative construction of spatial storytelling.

Figure 3

Images from Performing Spaces *workshop, led by Maria Chaniotaki in collaboration with Eleni Palogou. Performing Space 2025. (Photo by Maria Chaniotaki).*



Beyond its academic and artistic contributions, Performing Space 2025 further reinforced the sense of an international and interdisciplinary community that has been steadily growing since the first edition in 2022. The continuity between editions — evidenced by the return of participants as well as the incorporation of new contributors — demonstrates the strength and relevance of this collective endeavour. The establishment of the Performing Space Association and the sustained collaboration with academic institutions signal a new phase in the development of the project, ensuring its future growth and impact.

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1

Spaces of the In-Between
Teleportation & Transformation

Eirini Sourgiadaki
Zurich University of the Arts

Abstract

In our western understanding, stories of teleportation and transformation in principle consist of three stages: the state before, the in-between moment (the shift) and the state after. The middle part is where the blurry boundaries of what we commonly call “reality” and “fiction” lay: the boundaries of awareness, trust and believing. The in-between moment is a moment of trespass, change, shift, a moment often invisible. What exactly happens after Gregor Samsa falls asleep as a human and before he wakes up as an insect or what happens right after Alice steps into the mirror and before she enters Wonderland? What happens while Clark Kent is inside the phone booth? None of these events occur in plain sight, but in a liminal space, where a device (*τέχνασμα*: *technasma*) activates the process. They occur in an instant, bound by the Aristotelean time paradox.

How to deal with the presence of the body in terms of time and space during this in–between moment and how to stimulate imagination, memory and the senses towards the “impossible”, using the elements that define a teleportation/transformation device? To deal with the questions, I had extensive discussions with experts in the field (children, people with schizophrenia and people in love), supported by the investigation of the “daily-life” realm as well as the analysis of my personal experience (autoethnographic self-investigation).

Through a compositional, experimental methodology, this speculative transdisciplinary artistic research project looks into means of (s)low-tech immersive arts, exploring im/possibilities through storytelling and technologies of the bodymind, seeing no clear boundaries between the performative space and the daily life realm with its physical and metaphysical properties. It navigates the nostalgia for a past and a future as a continuum, contributing to ongoing conversations about the artist/researcher’s existence, their agency and their ability for interconnectedness and change.

Keywords: transdisciplinary artistic research, teleportation, composed methodologies, technologies of the bodymind, trance-formativity

Spaces of the In-Between

One could argue that this is rather a personal narrative than an academic text in its strict sense. They should be right and wrong at once. How much space does the personal hold within the academic and the other way around? Can we merge the two? How to re-connect, how to become un-divided, “whole” (Aronson, 2005) whilst in-between creative and institutional time and space? It is a story inseparable from my dissemination project in artistic research, a story of transitions, of shift, trespasses that during the process defined both the content and the methodology of my work. The need for creation is a need to live, to connect with the inner and the outer, the deeper and the higher with the conscious and the divine, with the soul that extends far beyond the body, not only vertically but also horizontally. It is my attempt to reconnect my motivation, that lays deep *within*, to the world that moves *without*. It is meant as a spoken text, here to be read, imagined or remembered. Departing both from lived experiences and abstract concepts simultaneously, this is a subjective perspective that aspires to become an entry point for anyone who shares the concern and the desire to activate elements of such “impossibilities”.

I presented this text at the Labour Center of Nafplio during Performing Space 2025, and I will challenge its performative and narrative aspects here as printed matter.

(Medium sized stage, podium, one moderator and four presenters seated, one more person on the right appears in slo-mo through a beam of light. Mic on.)

Looking for an exit is looking for an entrance

If I may now tell you that I believe in karma, I should also say that most likely this is my first time on Earth as a human. In this life, I was born as Eirini Sourgiadaki in Crete in 1981 in a working-class family and I grew up in Athens. There, I studied Sociology, and then Cultural Management.

I also studied Poetry and Dance. I left Athens in 2014, amidst what was then presented as “the peak of the crisis” which was only the beginning of an ongoing demise. At that time, among other underpaid or unpaid jobs, I was writing scripts for theatre and performance. I moved to Zurich to read for a second MA in Transdisciplinary Studies in the Arts and then a PhD. A very short version of my doctoral research will be presented in this paper. I am interested in the liminal spaces where more-than-human elements show up with humans, and the roles of these elements in practices of care and justice.

Figure 1
Self-portrait. (©ES*)*



Shift

It was the first Christmas break after I had moved from Greece to Switzerland, requiring quite a big effort to make this move, and after leaving what I knew, until then as my life, behind — not too far, but behind — when I felt that something was wrong with myself, I was becoming disconnected, living either in memories or in imaginations, with my thoughts circling in non-stop loops. When I decided to seek help, the psychotherapist diagnosed me with anxiety disorder and existential stress. But he considered it a good sign that I was functional and could go to work. He used to say that sadness comes with my artistic mentality and that it is common for artists to have a tendency for melancholy and drama. I had already told him that my father was killed in a work “accident” when I was a child, but maybe he took it as a minor detail. Every now and then he asked me what thoughts gave me comfort when I felt trapped in those loops. After several weeks, I eventually answered that the only thought

that gave me relief was to get instantly transformed into something or someone else, or to get teleported to another place in space or time. He replied that both are impossible. After that, I looked for a new therapist and started working on ways to prove that they were not.

Metaphors and Transports

Figure 2
Metaphorai, Zurich, 2017, MA Transdisciplinary Studies in the Arts, ZHdK (©ES*).*



A year later, in 2017, I created a project called *Metaphorai: Teleportation & Transformation Services*, a low-tech immersive installation, a service provider where one could refer to, if they wanted to get teleported or transformed (Sourgiadaki, 2017). It was accessible through a website and a pre-meeting was required, where candidates would explain in detail their wish, and sign a declaration form that they would proceed at their own risk. “Metaphorai”, is a reference to Swiss German scholar Wolfram Groddeck, who wrote in his book *Reden über Rhetorik* about his experience of seeing such trucks driving around when he visited Greece (1995, 249). “Metaphorai” means transports, but also metaphors. For that experiment, I met with eleven people who all confirmed afterwards that they were indeed somewhere else or in another body.

I continued experimenting with the format and technologies of the bodymind also through collaborations with other artists and non-artists, the transporter became a boat and a spaceship, an armchair, a phone booth, an elevator and a helmet. It featured on stages, in galleries, and in public space. But what happens outside the laboratory setting, outside the stage or a designated space and beyond the conventions of a performance or an

installation? How do such events take place in the daily life realm? This became the topic of my doctoral work.

Since the mental health expert had failed me, I needed to find new experts. Who could that be? A child, a “crazy” person, a person in love — someone in a non-normative state of mind, who is often made fun of, whose mind “doesn’t count”, who is often, therefore, unheard? My hypothesis was that people who are experienced in these ways of being, which are also not stable, in societies that assume stability and sanity (for the many), should know something. They all have a special relationship to imagination and fiction. I assumed a few things:

Every adult has experienced childhood. We all sleep and dream — here I refer to Carl Jung’s connection of the dream to the psychotic state (Hobson, J. Allan, 2005, p. 20). Another assumption I made is that most people experience falling in love — not necessarily with another human, but also with a non-human or an idea.

I met with 25 people of diverse age, gender, ethnicity/nationality, class, education, profession, religious views after asking them if they were willing to share with me their expertise on the matter.

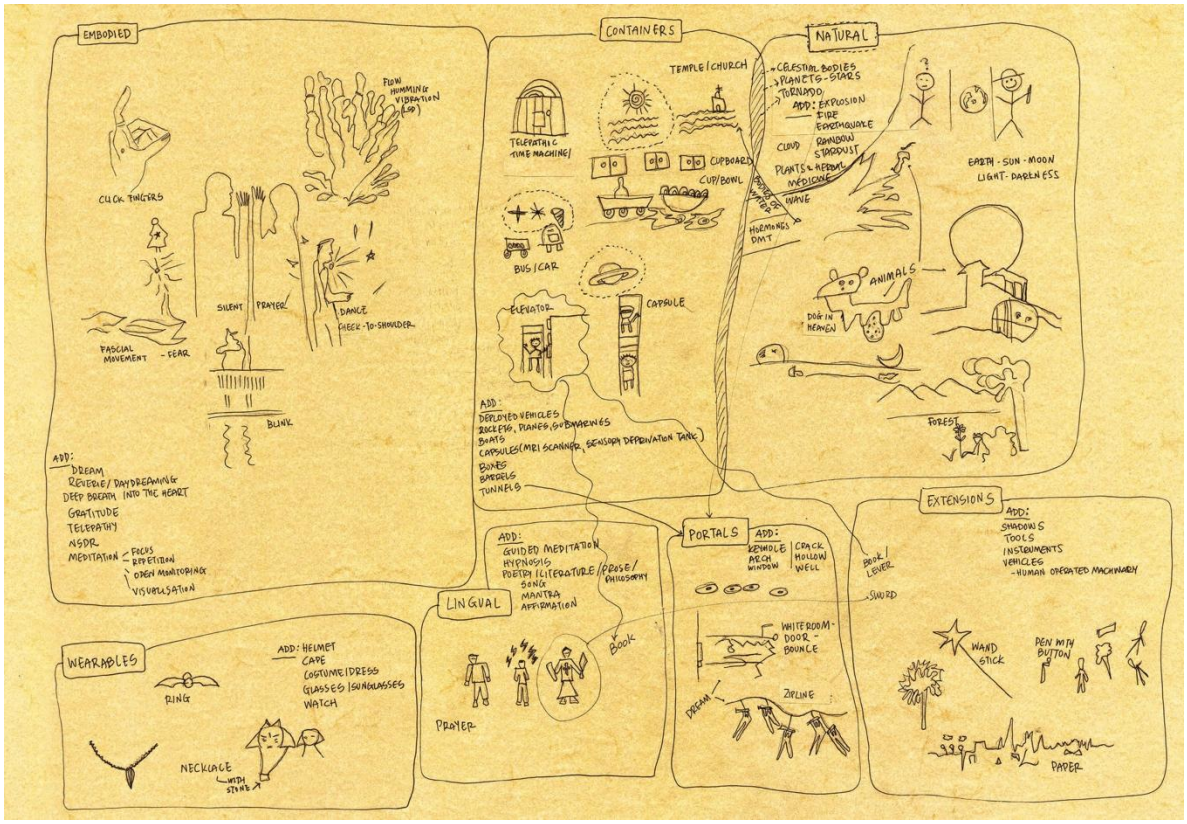
Experts & devices

Figure 3
Experts’ drawings. (©ES)



After discussing experiences of teleportation and transformation, I asked them to draw either the device that once allowed or still allows this to happen, or a depiction of the very moment of the shift.

Figure 4
Map (©ES)

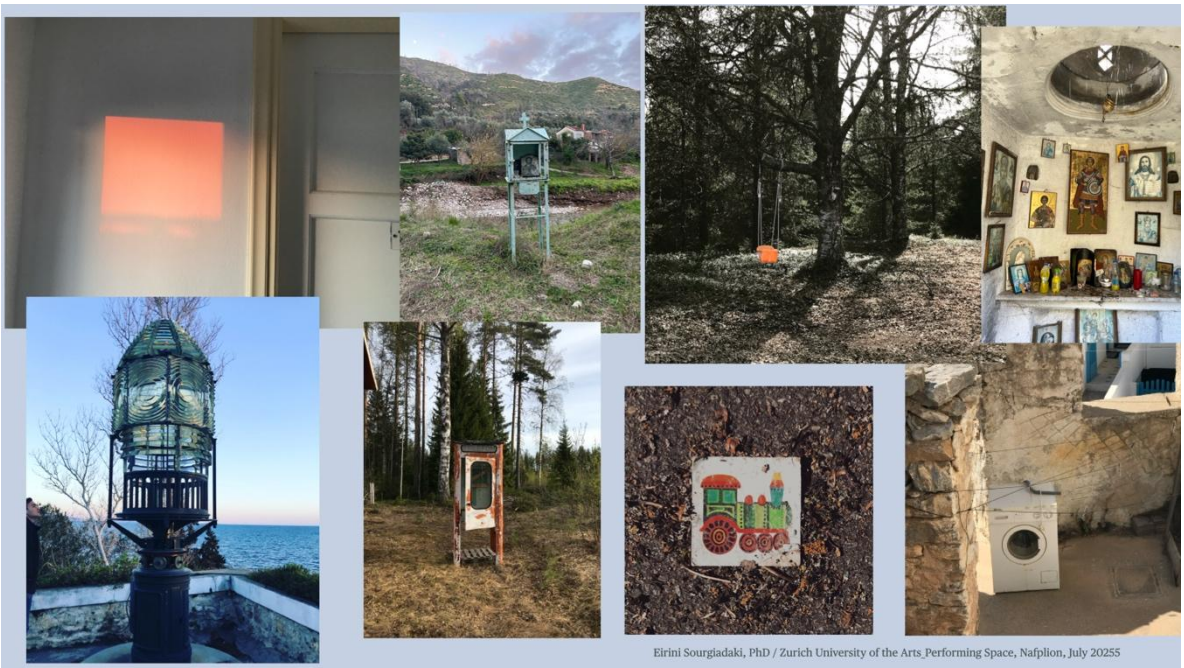


I transferred the drawings of the experts over transparent paper, a practice that emerged as a childhood memory of cartography class, and classified the devices in a rather arbitrary way but with their relationality to the physical body in mind, in a way that could fit in the signs, symbols but also the synchronicities described in the conversations. They are lingual, embodied, wearable, extensions, natural, portals and containers; one's own breath, a ring, a blink, or a book that, if pulled like a lever from the bookshelf, a big vacuum pipe comes and sucks you in and takes you to Saturn.

In 2019, right before the pandemic, due to a brain injury but also another great loss, I went through a long period of grief and recovery. I started practising walking meditations and endless strolling. Thanks to those walks, the next part of the project grew: a collection of images of teleportation and transformation devices that I came across in the places I inhabited or visited during that time. They were abandoned or operative; objects associated with other functions, often misplaced or forgotten. Sometimes they were openings, sometimes they enabled daydreaming, sometimes they were parts of hyperobjects —

objects whose dimensions in time and space are too massive for our human perception (Morton, 2017, p. 64). They often appeared in everyday life and they were usually ‘hidden’ in plain sight. They were new or old, sometimes even ancient: ruins, keyholes, sockets or cracks. They were indeed cracks in the solidities of daily life. Sometimes they contained levels of memories, like a photograph of a photograph of my mom’s radio when I was a child. Sometimes they were words that appeared as messages. And sometimes they were messages on my phone from friends who observed something that made them think of this research and sent me their findings.

Figures 5+5.1
Devices (©ES*).*



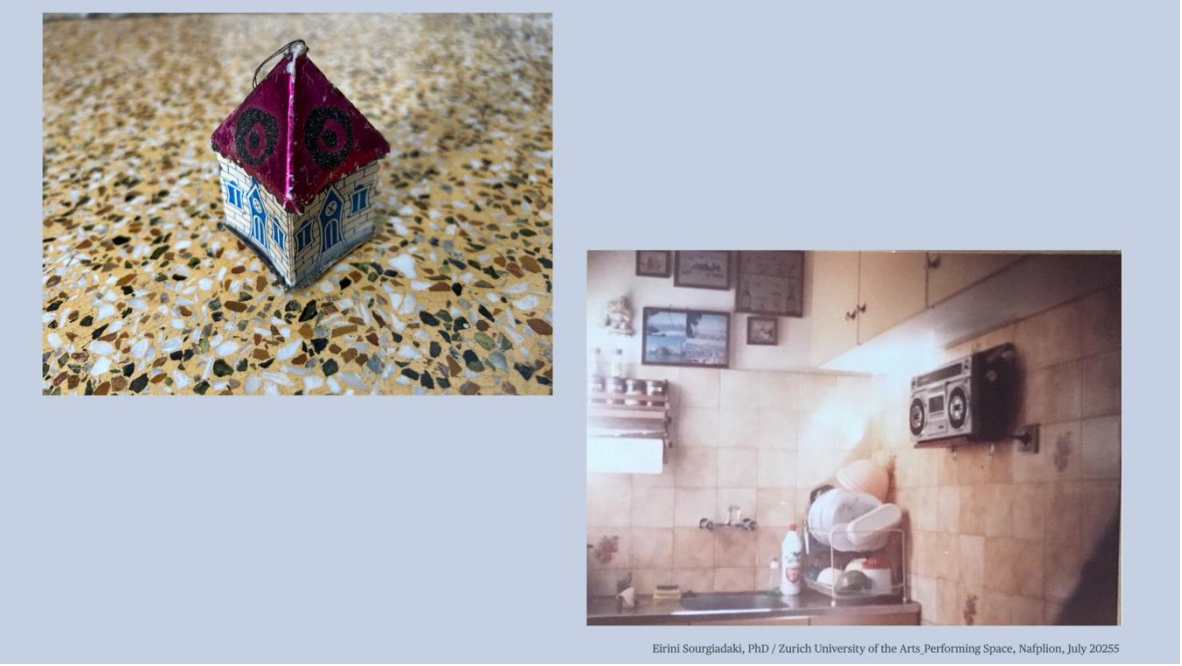


Figure 6
Card deck (©ES)



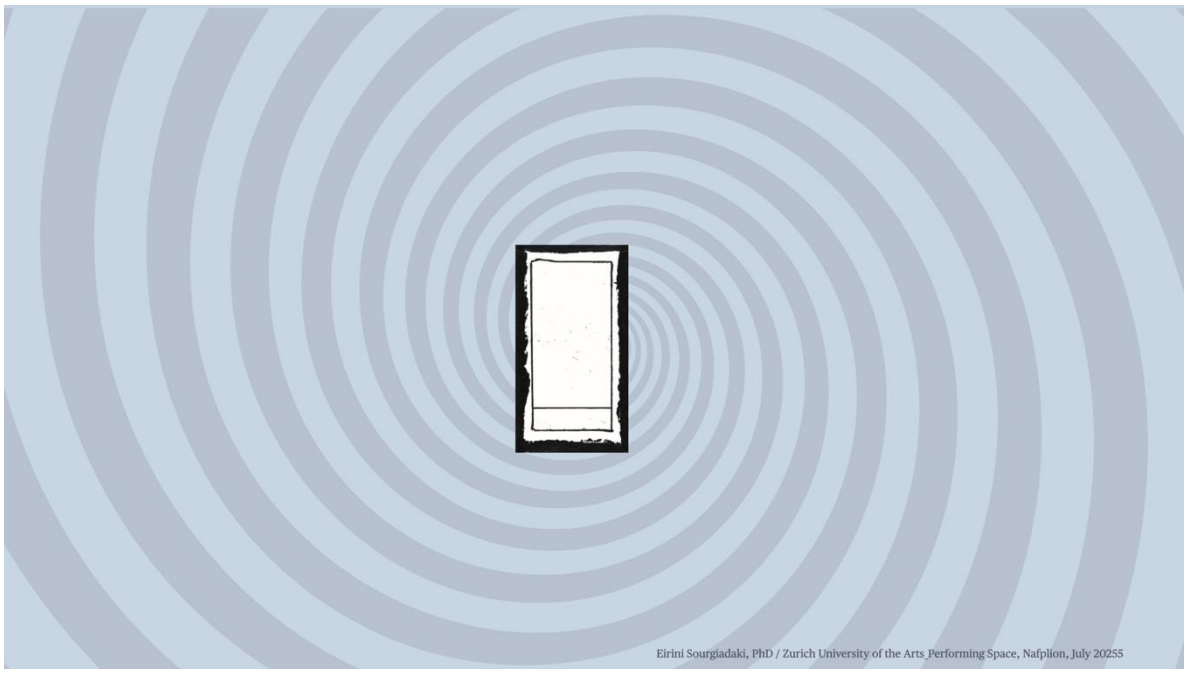
Reflecting on whether this collection could also follow the same classification as the drawings, I returned to the map and transferred them a second time. I ended up with a set of 28 cards that one could use for divination and self-reflection. And instead of a reading, I proposed a writing of the cards. I wrote 28 short texts. Sometimes they were reflections; sometimes notes of inspiration; sometimes stories about impossibilities in science, literature, mythology that I felt belonged together or were in conversation with each other: a collection of references that I would have loved to have available when I am trapped in hopelessness. They are not about hope though, but about the realisation that we are interconnected.

The end is the beginning is the end

This work was my response to something that did not feel right. The liminal space I was looking for was a trespass towards healing. I would dare to say that this work came with my "response-ability", this beautiful term Donna Haraway gave us (2016, p. 29), a response for and with the ability to use the imagination and the memory and still to be present in this here and this now. In the transition we find ourselves today as artists, researchers, educators and

beyond, I believe that we need to make this effort: to address dis-ease, discomfort, and unwellness as common places. This effort around art and health needs to go on and remain vivid. It may not eventually define our wellness, but it defines our integrity. In times of endless war, control and climate anxiety, it is crucial to be able to sense and respond, to observe, preserve and find the passages, the in-between spaces for us and for others to go through uncomfortable ways of being. In this timeline, on this planet, this is my contribution.

Figure 7
Blank Card (©ES*)*



(Presenter on the right disappears in slo-mo through a beam of light, the four and the moderator get up, mic off. Doors open. Coffee break.)

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2

Under the Light of a Posthuman Feminist Approach to Space

Dr. Mónica Raya
National Autonomous University of Mexico

Abstract

There is are a wide variety of critical approaches to social sciences engaged in decentring the human in favour of the nonhuman. I aim to share some of these perspectives to analyse spatial design away from the usual rational practices and accepted conventions. As a researcher, I made an ethical commitment to explore spatial performativity under what Donna Haraway addresses as “the located view from a body” (Haraway, 1988, p. 589) (in this case, mine; a woman´s body), a vision that is “always complex, contradictory, structuring and structured, that stands versus the view from above or from nowhere” (Ibid, p. 589).: a sort of multidimensional subjectivity.

I will expose some of the contributions of feminist philosophers: Donna Haraway, Karen Barad, Jane Bennet, Rosi Braidotti and Bronwyn Davies. These thinkers provoked me to observe actively and intuitively nonhuman agency and those deemed as posthuman practices in architecture and scenography. According to Haraway, how to see is the scientific question in feminism (Ibid, p.587).

I invite the reader to engage in understanding that space is a vibrant matter, and to picture it as a witty agent and not as a resource. Jane Bennet claims that the most critical driving force behind the nonhuman turn is how it might help us live more sustainably, with less violence toward various bodies (Bennet, 2015, p. 235). This ethical call ought to make sense to architects or scenographers who would like to expand their relation to space into a more-than-human approach.

Keywords: material feminism / posthuman performances / vibrant matter / expanding scenography

Under the Light of a Posthuman Feminist Approach to Space

There is a wide variety of current critical approaches to the social sciences engaged in decentring the human in favour of the nonhuman. I aim to share some of these perspectives to analyse design and space separately from the accepted conventions. As a female researcher I made an ethical commitment to explore spatial performativity under what American philosopher Donna Haraway (1988) addresses as “the located view from a body” (Haraway, 1988, p. 589) (in this case, mine; a woman´s body). A vision that is “always complex, contradictory, structuring and structured, that stands versus the view from above or from nowhere, from simplicity” (p. 589), a sort of multidimensional subjectivity. “How to see? Where to see from? What to see for? Whom to see with? Who gets blinded? Who wears blinders?” According to Haraway, *how* to see is the science question in posthuman feminism (p. 587).

Besides Haraway, I expose some of the contributions of feminist philosophers such as Karen Barad (2003), Jane Bennet (2010), Erin Manning (2015), Rosi Braidotti (2022) and Bronwyn Davis (1992) that engaged me into an intuitive and active observation of the nonhuman agency of space and those which could count as posthuman practices in architecture and scenography.

While investigating more-than-human spatial phenomena in scenography, I was attracted by the work of American feminist theorist Karen Barad, who calls into question the givenness of the differential categories of “human” and “nonhuman”, examining the practices through which these differential boundaries are stabilised and destabilised (2003, p. 808). Barad claims that *all* bodies, not merely human bodies, come to matter through the world’s iterative intra-activity and that BODIES are NOT OBJECTS BUT BEINGS IN THEIR DIFFERENTIAL BECOMING (p. 818). Barad explains performativity as a “materialist, naturalist, and post humanist elaboration that allows matter its due as an active participant in the world’s becoming” (p. 803) challenging the idea that it is the *thinking* of the human spectator which creates a location for a spatial assemblage. This is one of the premises from the posthuman approach that I use to observe, recognize and celebrate the agency of space as a nonhuman entity.

Following Barad’s perspective, a posthuman approach is about taking issue with human exceptionalism while being also accountable for the role we play in the differential constitution and positioning of the human among other creatures. At this point, I think that space is neither fixed and given, nor the mere end result of different processes. Space is produced and productive, generated, and generative. Space is agentive, and not a fixed essence.

In Barad’s analysis, she argues that the primary ontological unit is not “independent objects” but rather PHENOMENA. In her elaboration, phenomena do not merely mark the

epistemological INSEPARABILITY OF OBSERVER AND OBSERVED; rather, phenomena are the ONTOLOGICAL ENTANGLEMENT OF INTRA ACTING AGENCIES. The world is to be understood as a dynamic process of intra-activity and materialisation.

> This ongoing flow of agency through which part of the world makes itself differentially intelligible to another part of the world does not take place in space and time but happens in the making of spacetime itself. It is through specific intra-actions that phenomena come to matter-in both senses of the word (p. 139-140).

In summary, Barad proposes that the primary ontological units are not "things" but phenomena-dynamic-topological reconfigurings / entanglements / relationalities / (re)articulations of the world. This dynamism is called agency. And agency as such, is not an attribute but the on-going reconfiguring of the world. She claims that “the universe is agential intra-activity in its becoming” (p. 141).

Following these ideas and the path of my own intuition, I take the ideas of Canadian philosopher Erin Manning when she asserts that intuition activates the proposition at the heart of the as-yet-unthought and that art is a manner of becoming (2015, p. 45). “Intuition activates the smallest vibrational intervals — human and nonhuman — that lurk at the interstices of experience” (p. 48). This is how the artwork becomes capable of attuning to the force of its own potential in a way that exceeds its initial proposition.

> When the work stands up, it creates its own momentum, its own block of sensation, its own field of forces (...) the work evolves into a becoming that could have not been mapped in advance. The relational field activated by the work’s outdoing of itself touches an ecology that does not place the human at the centre of experience” (p. 59-60).

Under the light of Manning´s own intuition, she affirms that artfulness is always more than human.

American political theorist Jane Bennet is another philosopher that has been a major source that influenced my reflections on space design, as well as my own thinking. She claims that the driving force behind the nonhuman turn is how it might help us live more sustainably, with less violence toward a variety of bodies. I hope that this sort of philosophical call makes sense to any architect or scenographer that would like to expand the ethics of their use of space. In her article “Systems and things” (2015, p. 223-224) she points out that the recent turn toward nonhumans takes place within a complex swarm of other intellectual, affective, scientific, and political-economic trends and it can be understood as an attempt to depict a world populated by lively and essentially interactive materialities that make “calls” upon us and demand our attention. I will invite the reader to engage into understanding space as A WITTY AGENT AND NOT AS A RESOURCE.

Furthermore, I will bring attention to feminist theorist Rosi Braidotti's political analysis, where she argues that a posthuman turn [away from white men and patriarchy] is needed as a corrective and alternative to the intersecting critiques of power. Her call is for the equal participation of all in the discussion about what we are capable of becoming. From Braidotti's perspective, new materialism is a plane of encounter between scholarly and activist communities coming from different theoretical traditions. Her stance takes ideas from the primacy granted to the human body, to a more expanded definition of materialism that includes nonhuman elements as well as technology. She claims that

> materialism is about being embodied and embedded. It is a philosophy of immanence as well as of realism, that assumes that matter is vital, intelligent, and self-organising. Matter cannot be reduced to a social construction but should be understood to exist independently of human representation and should include a structural relationship to nonhuman entities" (2012, p. 110).

The same train of thought should apply to our ideas about space.

Braidotti's perspective helped me to attempt a daring connection between my scenographic work and the marginalised materialism of ancient Indigenous thought. Long before the arrival of the European colonizers, the Mesoamerican societies were organised around impressive ceremonial centres, which were in turn constructed to reflect the cosmos through architecture and artworks. Mesoamericans saw these urban centres as *axis mundi*, places where divine powers reach the earth, and are diffused from there. Looking for a point of connection between the spatial performativity of my scenographic work and "other" beliefs that are open to "more-than-human" performativity, it was impressive to find that at the heart of Nahua philosophy stands the thesis that there exists a single, dynamic, vivifying, eternally self-generating and self-regenerating sacred force known as *teotl*. Teotl continually generates and regenerates as well as permeates, encompasses, and shapes the cosmos as part of its endless process of self-generation and regeneration. Yet, the concept of Teotl is more than the unified totality of things. Teotl is identical with everything and everything is identical with Teotl. Teotl transcends dichotomies such as personal versus impersonal; and animate versus inanimate. The Mesoamerican concept of Teotl vivifies the cosmos and its contents. Diving into these non-occidental philosophical thoughts, I convinced myself that every architect should have a deep personal connection to space on Earth and beyond. It may sound childish, cheap, magical, but I feel it clearly in every cell of my female body.

Finally, it was Australian Feminist scholar Bronwyn Davies (1992) who empowered me to refer to the experience of being female (no apologies) and to hold a position that challenges the hegemonic discourses that dictate that contradictory (female) knowing is flawed knowing. I will hold on to what could be a "contradictory" multidimensional objectivity

and challenge those who might dismiss it as irrational, lacking in direction, intuitive, incomprehensible, or wrong. It is possible to act in contradictory ways without the coherence of oneself being called into question. I am convinced that posthuman feminism can re-inscribe, discover new story lines, invert, invent and break the bounds of the old structures and old discourses about space and that the embodiment of emotions, desire, and feelings "is a legitimate part of female reason" (pp. 58-59).

Conclusion

One of my main concerns as an architect and scenographer is reflecting about the nature of space, an entity that is usually taken for granted and commonly thought of as a "void". When Lotker and Gough (2013) observed the agency of scenography, they explained that there is no such thing as an empty space. "Every space is an environment, is already resonant; it has its character, a psychology and a memory (…) every space is marked, every space is charged –the space performs even before the [human] actor walks across it" (p. 4). Space is not a void. Space is never empty; it has never been empty and will never be. (Lotker and Gough, 2013, p. 4; Raya, 2015; Hann, 2019, p. 86).

After my own experience in professional practice, I have concluded that space is a nonhuman body in continuous transformation; a "living" entity with an incalculable potential for play; a vibrant matter with agency and performativity of its own. I have used my investigation to offer some arguments to support my point of view and even if I do not prove it beyond a reasonable doubt, my reflection cannot be cancelled.

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3

What is tertiary theatre production education (TPE) in the post-humanist digital world? How might it meet the needs of stakeholders in the evolving theatre-making industry?

Michael Budmani
Lasalle College of the Arts, Singapore

Abstract

This paper critically examines the contemporary landscape of tertiary theatre production education (TPE), and its continuing fitness for purpose and relevance in our digital post-humanist society. It will examine existing signature pedagogies within undergraduate TPE, an area 'for which there is currently very little academic scholarship in existence' (Malik, 2016, p.13). Qualitative data is drawn from detailed primary interviews with established English-speaking sector TPE academics, alongside existing academic articles, and the author's extensive applied and TPE profile. To protect anonymity, interview responses are presented as a summary.

Findings will help to consider how existing TPE signature pedagogies may need to be refreshed and renewed to respond to the contemporary requirements of digital tertiary learners, and consider how some areas of TPE skills, knowledge and learning environments could be redesigned and reframed to give stronger relevance and alignment to student, academic and industry stakeholders in the post-humanist digital era.

Keywords: Theatre Production Education (TPE), Signature Pedagogies, Digital posthumanism, Contemporary tertiary learners, Curriculum Innovation

Theatre Production Education in the Post-Humanist Digital World

The psychoanalyst Erik Erikson once observed that if you wish to understand a culture study its nurseries. There is a similar principle for the understanding of professions: if you wish to understand why professions develop as they do, study their nurseries, in this case, their forms of professional preparation. (Shulman, 2005, p. 52)

Signature pedagogies are designed to produce graduates for careers in very specific and often highly vocational professions. Signature pedagogies will inform curriculum design, delivery, learning environment and faculty profile. Their appropriateness can be justified through comparison with medical training, where surgeons are educated within a signature pedagogical framework that deliberately combines theory with intensive, closely supervised practical experience across a prolonged period of apprenticeship.

Shulman (2005) further highlights that signature pedagogies lead to strong similarities between different programmes within a discipline. This can be clearly evidenced when considering the existing signature pedagogies of TPE, where the expectations of programmes of study are of a high contact hour, and face-to-face experiential learning environment, where students learn to produce shows, by producing shows. This enables a "culture of ambiguity that students must learn to negotiate through live project work, problem-based learning and replicating the experience of being a practitioner" (Malik, 2016, p.164). The author of this paper was a TPE student in the late 1980s. These existing TPE signature pedagogies are largely unchanged from that time. Are we really future-proofing theatre production education by offering these same signature pedagogies to our contemporary TPE learners — Gen Z and beyond?

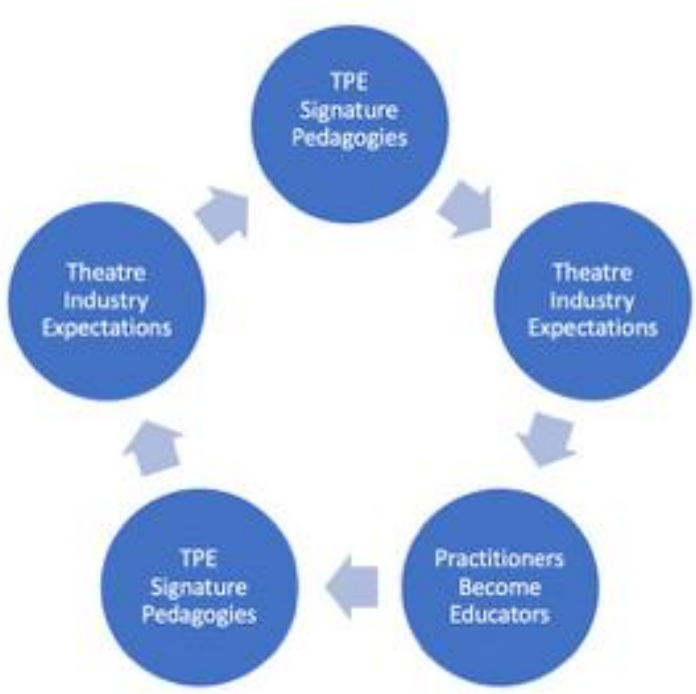
To take a litmus test of current thinking on these topics from within the TPE sector, and also as a response to the scarcity of available academic literature on TPE signature pedagogies, the author has conducted a series of nine primary interviews with established academics, chosen as a representative demographic from across the English-speaking TPE sector. With one exception, all identify as *'practitioner turned academics'*. Whilst gathering their perspectives, my own position as a TPE educator requires consideration of the possibility that such views may be shaped by what I have previously defined as the *closed cycle of theatre production pedagogy*, which is illustrated in figure.1. TPE signature pedagogies produce graduates with recognisable skills, practices and beliefs. When some graduates subsequently become educators themselves, these values and attributes are then perpetuated to their students. Within this cycle, there appears to be no obvious space for the generation of new ideas and processes within TPE.

"Only the most radical of new conditions, such as sharp changes in the organization or economics of professional practice or in the technologies of teaching, are sufficient forces

to redirect that inertia" (Shulman, 2005, p.56). The Covid-19 pandemic provided the radical conditions that Shulman describes. Disruption can lead to innovation. The pandemic demonstrated that TPE signature pedagogies can indeed be challenged and refreshed. The face-to-face learning environment became either virtual or blended, almost overnight. The closed cycle of theatre production pedagogy was broken. Pedagogical change was inevitable, as circumstance provided no alternatives. Both theatre-makers and TPE sought digital solutions to fill the void where face-to-face productions no longer sat, with the disruption providing new forms of producing, sharing, and consuming theatre, in forums where theatre, media and gaming increasingly converged.

Figure 1

Michael Budmani / Closed Cycle of Theatre Production Pedagogy / 2010



Interviewees described numerous effective strategies for developing digitally accessible asynchronous tools that empowered students to learn independently at their own pace. These tools also facilitated stronger group work, enabling collective engagement after individual asynchronous activities and thereby optimising the effectiveness of synchronous online contact time.

Students utilised new skills in the creation of 3D virtual scans of venues, thus helping to enable digitally collaborative online productions. However, interviewees have largely reported back that, notwithstanding the advances of technological production advances, TPE signature pedagogies post-pandemic remain largely unchanged. Some interviewees were of the view that despite the potential to renew TPE signature pedagogies in the

pandemic, momentum has been lost, with pedagogical business as normal resuming relatively quickly. Many interviewees highlighted the challenges posed by the evolving skills, attributes, and expectations of the contemporary Gen Z student body.

> Growing up in a very different world than the one in which we were raised, the young generations are exposed to the technology at a very young age that pushes them through a gateway into another world of infinite imagination. The new technology invites students for experimentation. (Ularu, 2020, p.2)

Gen Z now populate the large majority of tertiary student cohorts. They are true digital post-humanists, with digital skills and preferences that were the most prized by those seeking immediate pandemic production solutions. Interviewees reported back on the values and drivers that now exist within their TPE student demographics, including inclusivity, sustainability, and a culture of wellness assuming a much higher priority. This trend can also be clearly evidenced across the wider higher education student body. The impact that contemporary student characteristics are having on the TPE environment was heavily evident in the emerging themes drawn from the TPE interviewees.

> They want it to be relevant, inclusive, and even transformative. Unlike previous generations, who may have seen education as a straightforward path to employment, many Gen Z students are driven by a desire to create meaningful change, both in their careers and in society. (West, 2025)

Interviewee Findings

Interviewee findings lead to the conclusion that TPE and its traditional signature pedagogies must adapt to current learner and societal realities within the ongoing digital workplace revolution. “A post-humanist approach would produce an environment that can now be shaped by the inclusion of digital learning” (Kaur, 2022). Outcomes that have emerged from the interviewee responses have been organised under three thematic headings, with figure.2 showing a mapping for each heading:

- Sustainability and accessibility
- Skills and Employability
- Post-humanism

Interviewees reported that to improve accessibility, TPE must attract both a greater number and wider demographic of student applicants, and to achieve this within the current climate of undergraduate TPE study no longer being the sole choice for the aspiring theatre production professional. The post-pandemic theatre industry environment has seen a significant reduction in the availability of skilled theatre production labour, leading to many

theatre-makers creating their own bespoke apprenticeship schemes. “There are various apprenticeship pathways available — some sector-specific to the theatre industry and others with transferable skills. They include: technical theatre, costume making, scenic metalwork and carpentry” (Ahmet, 2025).

Figure 2

Michael Budmani / Mapping to Thematic Headings / 2025

	Sustainability and Inclusivity	Skills and Employability	Digital Post-humanism
Curriculum to include sustainable theatre-making (including carbon literacy)			
Curriculum to include ethical theatre-making			
Pedagogies that include a blended learning environment - to include face to face, remote and asynchronous learning			
A technology-led experiential learning environment using a wide variety of digital tools			
A learning environment that prioritises work/life balance, mental health and well-being			
Adaptability to new practices and technologies			
A curriculum that incorporates both global and local perspectives			
Regular and manageable contact hours			
A learning environment with infrastructure that allows students who identify as having physical disabilities to be fully engaged			
A culture that promotes a diverse and inclusive learning and working environment.			
Creation of an environment that promotes the strongest representation of societal demographics (race, gender, socio-economic backgrounds, disabilities) amongst both students and faculty			
Pedagogies that incorporate a high degree of practical subject-specific technical skills			
Pedagogies that promote and encourage a motivational, highly collaborative and team orientated approach and ethic			
Pedagogies that incorporate a strong emphasis on transferable skills			
Pedagogies that foster adaptability and flexibility, enabling the ability to function across various scenarios and contexts			
Pedagogies that cultivate a high degree of emotional intelligence and self-awareness			
Pedagogies that promote an ability to both work within an environment of change, and to lead and manage appropriate workplace change			
Pedagogies with a strong emphasis on creativity			
Pedagogies that enhance personal resilience and motivational skills			
Pedagogies that promote transition into positions of greater responsibility			
Pedagogies that are aligned to the preferences of Gen Z theatre-makers and audiences			
A framework that incorporates a lifelong learning model			
Pedagogies that promote digital future-proofed skills and tendencies			
A learning environment that is designed for the skills and preferences of the contemporary tertiary learner			
Pedagogies that promote digital collaborative skills			
Pedagogies that include the creation of digital performance-making			
Pedagogies that have a wide variety of digitally transferable skills			

Every interview respondent reported that sustainability was a key theme for their contemporary student demographic, with a large majority of institutions now employing production sustainability benchmarks such as *Theatre Green Book.* ’Theatre Green Book’ began as a collective initiative by theatre-makers in the UK, and has grown to involve the performing arts industry across the world” (TGB, 2025). The term sustainability also carries a further resonance in this context–the continued viability of TPE provision itself. Significant challenges lie in the high delivery costs for institutions and the relatively small student cohorts, both of which are compounded by the changing and increasingly complex needs of contemporary students. Many now balance multiple jobs alongside their studies and, unlike earlier generations, no longer have the capacity to commit to extended periods of face-to-face learning.

A wider embedding of interactive asynchronous learning would align with improving TPE diversity and inclusivity. To future-proof curriculum, the new TPE could include core components in both sustainable/ethical and digital theatre-making. To promote greater inclusivity amongst the volume and breadth of applicants, TPE signature pedagogies should review and limit the current explicit contact hours expectations, thereby contributing positively to the culture of wellness within TPE, the increasing needs of which were identified by all interviewees.

> While these methods have been celebrated for their rigor, they exclude those with caring responsibilities, disabilities requiring time flexibility, or the need to support themselves financially. This isn't just a financial issue — it's a fundamental inequity in how time is valued in training (Farrier, Whittaker, 2025).

The experiential learning environment should be re-aligned to a digital post-humanist context, where technological and future-proofed skills are embedded and championed, alongside the more traditional TPE practical skills. This could widen both educational and industrial partnerships, and the possible spectrum of career destinations for graduates.

The pandemic demonstrated that skills learning can be delivered online. Interview respondents reported that in some cases (e.g. CAD learning), an online or asynchronous approach was actually more beneficial. Some stage management educators (including the author) utilised bespoke stage management software to be able to deliver strong show calling learning online. Although some practical disciplines clearly remain best suited to face-to-face learning, the live and asynchronous online environment could increasingly be optimised to deliver specific skills classes.

If partial skills training were to be delivered online, it would open the possibility to widen student participants to become part of an international cohort. This would give a truly global context to TPE learning, and the strongest and widest possible faculty demographic available for learners. Students would still practice on traditional collaborative productions within their geographically local context. However, they would also be able to collaborate online internationally to create fully realised digital productions. All projects on which students participate, could be sustainably created.

Post-Humanist Production for Performance

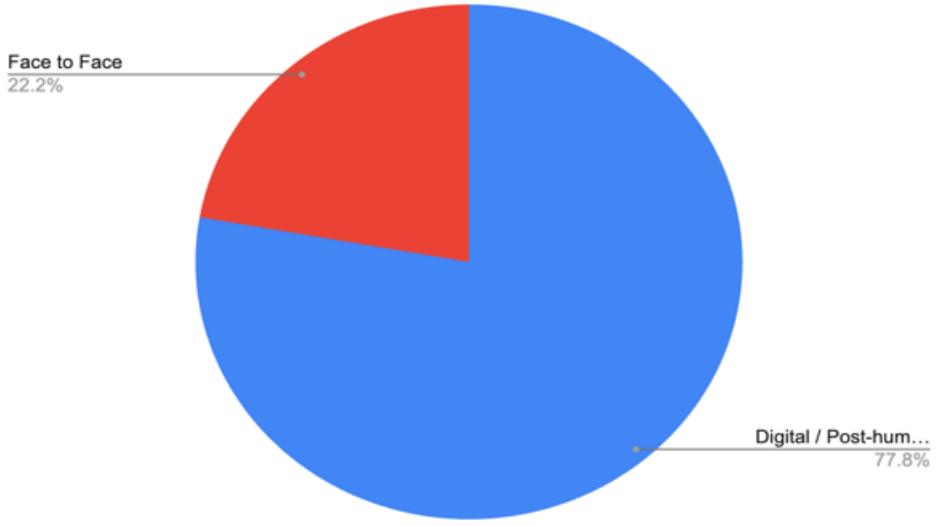
The findings outlined in the previous section, and summarised in Figure 2, inform the development of a provisional draft framework for a future-proofed TPE, provisionally titled here as *Post-Humanist Production for Performance*. This structure is presented as an exploratory touch-point, intended to provoke discussion and to hopefully be an aid to guide future research and debate.

- *TPE Skills* - Disciplinary skills learning could be delivered within a fully blended learning environment to a multi-location cohort — both online as a single cohort, and in face-to-face practical classes and workshops for smaller groups at each partner institution. The learning environment would be fully inclusive of a wide range of interactive digital asynchronous tools, further expanding the scope for inclusivity. As a programme which promotes and embeds concepts within post-humanism, ethical and sustainable theatre-making would be core components.

- *Live Studio* would involve student practice on traditionally mounted collaborative theatre/event productions, delivered within the geographically local context for each group of students. All projects/productions in which students participate would be sustainably and ethically created.
- *Digital Studio* — All students within the multi-location cohort would collaborate online to create fully realised digitally collaborative theatre/event productions. All projects/productions in which students participate would be sustainably created.

Figure 3

Michael Budmani / PPP Indicative Delivery Model / 2025



Note. Figure. 3 shows the indicative weightings that represent the relative balance of delivery modes within the PPP model.

Conclusion

This paper sought to critically examine the contemporary landscape of TPE and its signature pedagogies by drawing on qualitative data from detailed primary interviews with established English-speaking sector TPE academics, alongside existing academic articles, and the author's extensive applied and academic TPE profile. Findings have identified the contemporary issues that TPE signature pedagogies need to respond to, and have led to a draft PPP framework.

This draft PPP model reconfigures traditional TPE signature pedagogies into a genuinely blended, multi-platform framework. This model enables the development of an international theatrical learning experience, whilst fostering highly transferable and industry-relevant competencies. PPP aims to produce graduates who are not only practical and digitally proficient contributors to theatre-making, but also ethically grounded project and team-oriented professionals, prepared for a world of work defined by constant change and for careers that may not yet exist.

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4
Differentiated Bodies, Dysfluency, Anarchitecture: Disabling Performing Space

Tony McCaffrey
National Academy of Singing and Dramatic Art, Different Light Theatre, Christchurch, New Zealand

Abstract

The article considers how recent work in disability-led theory and theatre practice provokes a radical re-examination of conventional assumptions about disability and the event-space of performance. The article argues that the presence of disabled artists and the development of disability arts culture challenges boundaries and binaries of spatiality and performance**.** Disability brings an excess to the performer-audience relationship that problematises conventions of aesthetic distance and that emphasises affective, somatic and gestural exchanges as shown in the responses to Felipe Monteiro's performance *O problemo e porque sou lucido?!*

The article then draws on how these excess manifests in theatre-making, drawing on the practical experience of working with Different Light Theatre performer Glen Burrows and his deteriorating health conditions and how these blur the lines between the discipline of performance and the need for care and support.

The article then cites Joshua Saint Pierre's articulation of dysfluency, a term he uses to valorise the perceived errors and missteps in spoken communication of those who stammer and stutter as a critique of the fluency of communicative, and by extension neoliberal, capital (Saint Pierre, 2022). This critique is then compared to Jack Halberstam's recent thinking on transness, which like Saint Pierre's thinking on disability, does not merely wish to replicate the boundaries that would render transness a vehicle of capitalism but rather to generate unimagined lives and structures beyond these boundaries and mechanistic economic models.

The article then attempts to relate the somatic and conceptual framings of Monteiro, Saint Pierre and Halberstam to specific examples drawn from the performance practice of Back to Back Theatre and Different Light Theatre in which these theoretical underpinnings appear to be embodied in the practical yet poetic spaces of disability performance. The article concludes that disability-led thinking, culture and practice generates new as yet unimagined possibilities for relationality and relationships.

Keywords: disability culture and performance; aesthetics and access; critical disability studies; politics and aesthetics of disability; radical inclusion and access.

Differentiated Bodies, Dysfluency, Anarchitecture

How does disability performance enable a radical reconfiguration of what Dorita Hannah terms ‘event-space’? Disability is itself a social, situational, spatial construction that includes the marginalised, pathologised spaces to which disability is normally confined. Disability performance opens up new possibilities for the event-spaces of theatre, public space, and the conceptual and relational space between disabled and non-disabled bodies. Drawing on the work of Felipe Monteiro, Joshua Saint Pierre and Jack Halberstam, I wish to consider how disability thinking, culture and performance provoke a radical reconfiguration of theatrical, conceptual and social spaces and boundaries.

Disability Exceeds the Boundaries of the Performer-Audience Relationship

This is Brazilian disabled performance artist and scholar Felipe Monteiro.

In ‘On Performance and Disability: Differentiated Bodies and the Aesthetics of Invasion’ Monteiro (Monteiro & Pagnes, 2024) writes that his ‘differentiated body’ is:

> affected by severe progressive spinal muscular amyotrophy (SMA), a genetic neurodegenerative disease that affects the anterior horn of the spinal cord. A progressive degeneration of motor neurons occurs. Due to the SMA and severe scoliosis, I have no autonomous locomotion (p.91).

Figure 1
Felipe Monteiro presenting a paper by Zoom in the Performance and Disability Working Group at the International Federation for Theatre Research conference, University of the Philippines, Manila, 2024. Screenshot by Tony MCCaffrey (2024).

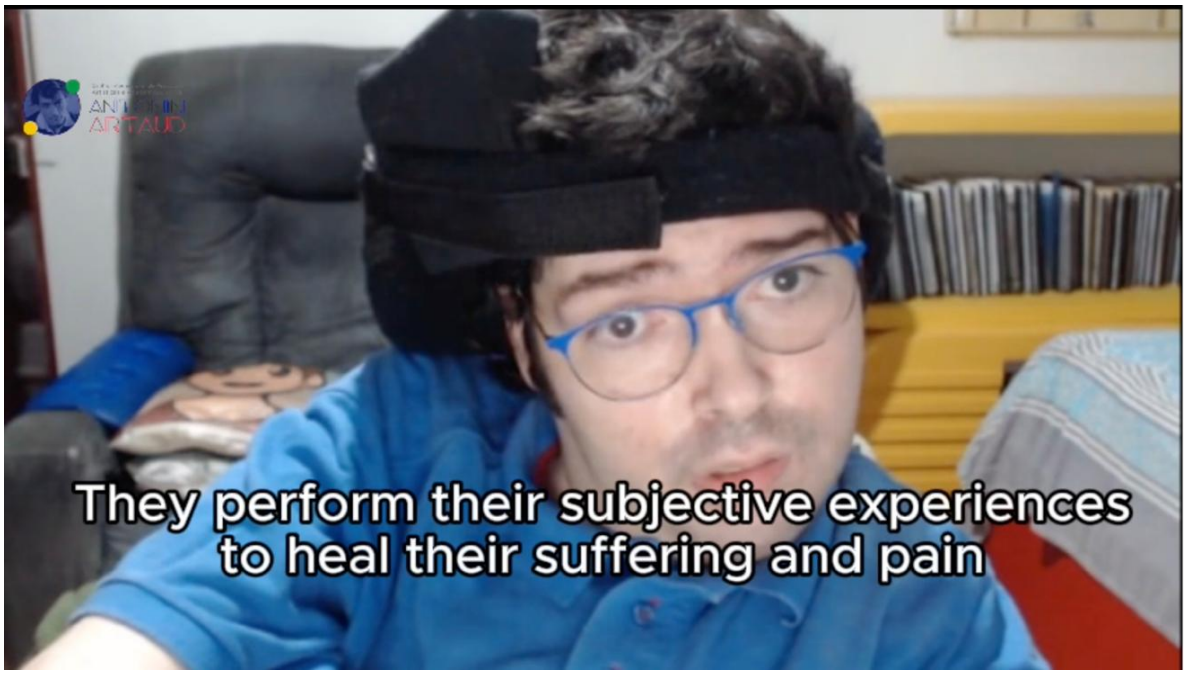


Figure 2
Felipe Monteiro in the performance O problema é porque sou lucido?! Taken from TDR: The Drama Review 69 (1) 2025.



His last performance in 2018 was *O problema é porque sou lúcido?!* The title is both a question and an exclamation. The translation of the Portuguese could mean either “Is the problem because I am lucid?” or “The problem is that I am lucid!” or both. In his understated and poignant words in ‘We Do Not Need Pity. We Need Opportunities: Considerations of a Performer with [a] Differentiated Body’ he explains:

> I chose this title because sometimes I disagree with the care the professionals attending me at home give. They often want me to be docile and submissive. A while ago one of them said I am a problem because I am lucid and outspoken (Monteiro & Pagnes, p.102).

In the performance Monteiro lay motionless on a hospital stretcher. He breathed through a ventilation machine. He used the sound of his heartbeat recorded from an echocardiogram. Audience members sat on benches or approached the stretcher to interact somehow. Some put their head on his chest to listen to his heartbeat and touched his hands gently.

> Some… watched me closely and asked if they could touch me. As time passed, it became evident that spectators had more sensory reactions than rational responses. (p.103).

The space between performer and audience shrinks to the haptic or perhaps to the affect passing between and within bodies, similar to what Erin Brannigan (2011) described as a "sensory and bodily exchange as a type of gestural exchange — a response that occurs between the performer's bodymind and the viewer's bodymind, and vice versa" (p.77). Monteiro's last performance was in 2018, the deterioration in his condition preventing him from performing. He continues to write. We correspond online. In an acknowledgement of his lifelong love for, and engagement with, the work of Antonin Artaud, I would say that he is 'signalling through the flames' of his deteriorating condition.

Disability Exceeds the Boundaries of Theatre Making

In my own work with disabled ensemble Different Light in Christchurch we are experiencing the deteriorating condition of Glen Burrows. He is a motorised wheelchair user with cerebral palsy who has been working with the company for seventeen years, touring performances in New Zealand, Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom. Recently, in addition to his other conditions, he has had a cancerous tumour removed, he has seen an increase in what he calls 'sparking'—epileptic fitsbu—t, perhaps more devastating for him, he now needs to be fed through a stoma. In the 2017 Different Light performance *I belong in the Past and the Future and the Very Now* other members of the company concluded the performance with a response in performance to an incident in rehearsal in which Burrows' 'sparking' was so severe that we called an ambulance. I quote from the script devised by the performers:

> BEN: Hold on here comes an ambulance
> JOSIE: Real life drama at Different Light drama
> GLEN: Isaac
> ISAAC: I'll go with you to the hospital
> BEN: How much pain do you feel on a scale of one to ten. Ten being your legs being cut off.
> GLEN: Ten
> PETER: Glen says ten
> ANDREW: Glen is not a piece of theatre
> JOSIE: Glen is not a few minutes of theatre
> PETER: Glen is like a computer game.
> A computer game you need to experience
> over months
> or years
> or possibly
> your whole life

Figure 3
Glen Burrows in the foreground with devil wings on his wheelchair, *with the cast of Faust. Us, Different Light Theatre and NASDA*. Photograph by Tony McCaffrey, 2023.



Figure 4
Glen Burrows in his motorised wheelchair typing on an iPad, the tube attached to his stoma is visible. Photograph by T. McCaffrey, 2025.



Felipe Monteiro chooses to expose his vulnerability in a conscious take on performance art practices of illness and pain through a disability lens. For Glen Burrows we needed to let a different approach emerge: one that would not undermine his sense of himself as a New Zealand male for whom the quality of staunchness and tight-lipped grip on emotion is

primary. We continue to seek to include him in-person in the rehearsal room, or online or even in the hospital room when we are allowed. We hold a space for him, a space in transition and transformation for Different Light as it was and is for Felipe Monteiro.

Disability Exceeds Economic Boundaries of Communication and Representation

Disabled scholar Joshua Saint Pierre (2002) in *Cheap Talk: Disability and the Politics of Communication* coins the term 'dysfluency' for the speech of those including himself diagnosed as having speech impediments, stammering and stuttering:

> dysfluency represents the erasure of a communicative subject and erosion of communicative capital (…) Dysfluency is interesting not as a case study of breakdown but as a disclosure of the asymmetries of power and the declensions of freedom that structure our collective environments of speech (p.17).

I would like to adapt Saint-Pierre's term 'dysfluency' from its purely verbal and speech-related provenance to encompass the particular temporality of learning disabled performance. Dysfluency in this context would describe stimming, uncertainty in occupying the stage space as well as stammering and difficulties of articulation. All of these particularities of learning disabled performance reconfigure the concept of theatrical *kairos* or good timing. Learning disabled performers step in and out of the conventions of theatrical performance in interesting, challenging and radical ways.

Disability Exceeds Binaries

Saint Pierre's notion of the erosion of communicative capital chimes interestingly with recent writings of Jack Halberstam on transness. In lectures delivered in person and online in April 2025 as a prelude to the forthcoming book *Anarchitecture After Everything* Halberstam (2025) writes:

> (…) anarchitecture delivers a version of transness that does not seek to become a new vehicle for capital, it offers an alternative to the process by which once-excluded groups become new markets. Rather than becoming a new platform for neoliberal marketing, the unbuilding of the body opens onto a critique of capital, real estate and the realities that subtend them. And finally, trans bodies, like the buildings that Gordon Matta-Clark opened up, represent an unworld within which representational systems can and do come apart. The trans body that can be glimpsed through Matta-Clark's anarchitectural experiments is not figure but ground, not body but landscape, not building but demolition site.

Saint Pierre and Halberstam and, I would claim, disability performance, are all trying to find alternative paths of inclusion and access that do not seek merely to replace a marginalised, excluded self with the entitled, atomised, narcissistic, but ultimately disempowered self of late, last gasp capitalism.

Figure 5
Scene from *Multiple Bad Things* performed by Back to Back Theatre (2024). Used with permission.



Disability and Placelessness

Disability brings to performance the possibility of a new and different sensorium. Disabled bodyminds bring to performing space the shadows of other spaces: confined, 'theatrical' spaces such as the operating theatre, the medical lecture theatre, the segregated institution, the sanatorium, the asylum, the freak show and the clinical spaces of eugenics. They also bring the troubling and unbuilding of spaces we assume to be 'normal'. They also bring the possibility of speculative future spaces.

Multiple Bad Things (2024) is a performance by world-renowned Back to Back Theatre in which learning disabled, neurodivergent members of the core ensemble inhabit a theatrical space that appears uniquely hostile to them. The set incorporates a jumble of scaffolding poles blocking their access to movement. The actors perform an awkward, elaborate choreography to avoid the poles. They also struggle to assemble the scaffolding poles into some kind of structure.

The intent of this strategy is revealed in a coup de théâtre right at the end of the performance when the structure is flipped through 90 degrees to reveal what they have been

building: the form of a house with roof, door, windows and picket fence. The production's narrative consists of arguments between the performers over the differences between their perceived disabilities. These differences appear to be resolved in this construction of a space of inclusion. The frame of the house that rises up and appears before us is, however, revealed to be no more than the abstraction of a house, the mirage of a normal home. The production implies that however much the disabled performers struggle to access the domestic space of the normal it will never be hospitable to them. This is for me a moment of theatrical anarchitecture. The building is revealed to be unbuilding and a cry for a completely different accommodation for disability in performing space.

Figure 6
Ben Morris, Isaac Tait and Glen Burrows in *Still Lives* at Riley Smith Hall, Leeds (2012). Photograph by Stuart Lloyd-Harris, Different Light Theatre.



Finally, I wish to turn to *Still Lives* (2012) by Different Light Theatre, an account of three disabled young men, Glen Burrows, Ben Morris and Isaac Tait, and their experience of the Christchurch earthquakes of 2010 and 2011. These quakes were an involuntary anarchitecture of public space. In their wake, despite the opportunity to rebuild the city to include access for all, the 'recovery' of 'disaster capitalism' (Klein, 2007) left them, and so many other disabled people, behind. In the final scene they imagined flying on Glen Burrows' wheelchair above the shattered buildings and the shattered promises of inclusion. Flying where? To a placelessness that they choose.

Disability culture and theatre challenge conventional boundaries and spatiality — of disability and of representative systems. The potential of differentiated bodies, dysfluency and anarchitecture is to generate a 'disabling' of performing space: to deconstruct binaries

of non-disabled and disabled, of performance and audience, and to create a radical placelessness out of which new relationalities and relationships might emerge.

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5

Performing Ages

Katerina Kataki
Performance Artist, Independent Researcher, Theatre Pedagogue
Mitsiali Despoina
Independent Artist. Adult educator.
Director of *Patchwork-Cultural Cooperative for the Community*

Abstract

In the multicultural reality of worlds where people's diverse social and personal identities are often discouraged from meeting and are excluded from spaces of shared identity, various discriminations are born. Working with separate groups of adults 65+ and many more with teenagers, the time was right to create an intergenerational workshop, an initiative that was accepted and supported by the National Theatre of Greece. This project attempted to invite people of two different age groups and generations to equally participate in a creative process of renegotiating age representation on and off stage, also as a socio-artistic dialogue process on ageism matters. We applied democratic and participatory practices incorporating Intercultural values and pedagogical goals of Inclusion. Participants researched and staged questions such as: *Can art be a safe ground for co-creation and equal coexistence between adolescents and older people (60+)? How is ageism absorbed and reflected in staged and unstaged realities? How do age phases of life serve collective narratives and how do they create artistic spaces of expression? How is aesthetic and experiential pedagogical methodology combined with inclusive education, regarding managing the "gap generation" phenomenon?*

The workshop concluded in June 2025 with a performance and a video production aimed at promoting intergenerational culture and education. This presentation aspires to refer to "staged & unstaged" age stereotypes, ageism and wonder on possibilities of reforming and re-making social, educational and art spaces in terms of age visibility, participatory opportunities, democratic values and intergenerational views, suggesting the artistic and educational practice of *Performing Ages*.

Keywords: *ageism, intergenerational theatre workshop, generations' gap*

Performing Ages

Despite the fact of multicultural realities and all of our trials to make a more inclusive world, people's diverse identities, social and personal, are yet indirectly or directly discouraged from specific interactions and even excluded from specific social spaces (Silver, 2019: Wilińska et al., 2018). Since a basic mechanism of making identity is the understanding when-how we are similar or different to each other, and when-how we meet or depart from each other (Sakaláki, 1996), these exclusions are highly possible to take place and stimulate various discriminations even before they are realised. One very interesting case is when these conscious or un-conscious “distastes” are based on a common characteristic of identity, that of biological age and thus, the phenomenon of ageism is born.

Ageism describes attitudes and behaviours of discrimination and exclusion that are built on the basis of the biological age of a person or some population, fuelled by stereotypes and prejudices about age which are equally met in microlevel to interpersonal relationships and in macro level such as in labour market, organisations or even governments (Ayalon & Tesch-Römer (Eds.), 2018).

In European and non-European cities, it is observed and witnessed that people of 65 and older age are not having the equal visibility and participation opportunities since the city life is mostly organised around to those who can use the space and services as full able bodies, also those who are familiar with new technologies and usually to younger ages (Rémillard-Boilard et al., 2020).

Even though lifestyles and abilities differ importantly from person to person, more obstacles based on the perception of biological age and age stereotypes take place. Indeed, we do not often talk about the 65+age group, its products or to-do-lists. “78 years old” might sound as “far away” from “our” reality or irrelevant. “84 years old” could even sound unfamiliar, unless they carry some groceries and struggle to walk. Exactly on those innocent pronouns of “we” and “our”, the phenomenon of exclusion and ageism is already present. The word “our” here indicates a society centralised towards the so-called “productive ages”, people who are considered as the workforce responsible for building economies. But since health and technology systems are developing fast and the opportunity of living longer lives is already happening, the percentage of older people is increasing. Therefore, “our” societies contain more and more citizens of 65+ and by 2070 they will represent around 45% of the population of Europe (European Commission, 2018), a fact that demands social changes on age perception.

At the same time, younger people and especially teenagers, even though offered more visibility and participation opportunities, still feel the impact of ageism in their social status and activities such as decision making or expressing their opinion in some environments.

But it is through socialisation processes that they absorb the values, attitudes, and perceptions of a particular society. Since adolescence is at the crossroads between the dependency of childhood and the independence of adulthood, the difficulty is that adolescents must deal with social roles of two different age types, that of childhood and that of adulthood (Giannaki, 2016).

Questions and verbal phrases of everyday life such as "*Are adolescents capable enough of taking part in decisions that concern their individuality or the social groups in which they participate? You are too young to know. Too young to decide"*, express this reality of declaring the incapability of acting in an equal or valid way, generating ageism's narratives.

It is interesting that the concept of "youth" or "adolescence" began to become a separate subject of scientific research only at the end of the 19th century (Giannaki, 2016). It is also interesting that theories on the experience of growing older are leaking of attending a more personal, deep and spherical approach, such as the theory of *disengagement*, as explained in Pușcașu's article *New Roles in Old Age* (2020). Taking the above, it's necessary to find ways to perceive, understand, and respond to biological age and numerous age identities. Thus, the need to reflect on the social concept of age in Art and Education is crucial especially taking into account inter-generational terms to our strategies.

Figure 1

Intergenerational workshop of contemporary theatre, presentation performance titled phase 1661, Educational department, National Theatre Greece. (Xenia Tsilochristou).



To understand intergenerational views, we inevitably focus on the so-called generations. As Manheim informs us (Pilcher, 1994) the notion of “generation” is widely used in the everyday world to make sense of differences between age groupings in society, as well as to locate individual selves and other persons within historical time. For example, we say “my generation,” “older generations,” “few generations ago,” “generation gap,” “the new generation.” Generations are defined by kinship relationships and thus connected with biological age. But also, we can speak of social generations that are defined by the social groups in which we are participating and by the historical, the economical, the political, and the social structures we are living in. Manheim also reminds us that social generations are related with our social class position, which affect our social roles. Although recognising the influence of biological factors, Mannheim stresses the overriding and ultimate importance of social factors, so that biology is seen to be embedded within social and historical processes. There is a need to recognise social structures, to develop social interactions between generations. When there is no social interaction between human beings — when there is no definable social structure, there would be only birth, ageing and death (Pilcher, 1994). It is then obvious the democratic importance of the equal participation of all age groups in social, educational, and art activities as well as other social spaces.

How is ageism and the social significance of age connected to the social space? We referred to the exclusion from social life that individuals experience due to their age, whether it reflects the narrative of being useless — in the case of older people — or that of inability to make decisions — in the case of adolescents and young people. Exclusion from public and social life is also related to exclusion from the public space despite various examples of European and non-European cities which are constantly evolving and trying to reform (Silver 2019; Green, 2013). Access to public space and the cultural, economic, political, and social activities that take place therein, give a society the status of democracy. Participation in these activities creates relationships and interactions between the individual subjects of a society, creating a common point of reference, that of its public life. The *possibility of public vision* also plays a decisive role in the social space, with the gathering of a multitude of diverse information that constitute stimuli for reflection and action. Anything in social space affects its political dimension, raising issues of accessibility, use, expression, and thus redefining the fluid boundaries of democracy (Agouranou, 2021). Even more, participation in physical and cultural activities, in the case of older citizens, contributes directly to their physical and mental health and it is vital for designing active ageing strategies (Green, 2013).

For the facilitators of *Intergenerational Theater Workshop* Katerina and Despoina, “social age” meant the process of creating social spaces through theatre, performance and non-typical education. In their projects they try to re-examine social and theatre roles

concerning ages and furthermore to re-create the frames inside of which they are process all the above.

In 2023, we implemented the project *65 + Co-Stations*[1]. As part of the project, we explored the phenomenon of the generation gap and ageism by contacting young people, older people, and experts. At the end, we presented part of the project's results through a documentary. As it was revealed through collected interviews of passers-by conducted for the project's documentary, the generation gap is actively working today and is growing, especially with the rapid development of technology.

Figure 2

Intergenerational workshop of contemporary theatre, presentation of performance titled phase 1661, Educational department, National Theatre Greece. (Despoina & Katerina).



As a development of our work to combat the phenomenon of ageism during the spring of 2025, we inspired, designed and facilitated the project '*Intergenerational Workshop of Contemporary Theater*[2]. It was an experimental artistic encounter with social explorations regarding coexistence and the experiences of persons aged 11-16 and 60+ years old.

[1] The project *65+ co-Stations* took place in Athens in 2023, in 10 friendship clubs as part of the actions of *People Behind organisation* in collaboration with the Municipality of Athens. The project was inspired by Katerina Kataki and facilitated by Katerina Kataki and Despoina Mitsiali.

[2] The project *Intergenerational workshop of contemporary theater* took place in 2025 within the framework of the Educational Department of National Theater of Greece, artistic direction by Maria Magkanari. The project was inspired, designed and facilitated by Katerina Kataki and Despoina Mitsiali.

Intergenerational relations are present in family or labour contexts, but are underrepresented in formal educative environments, which are typically homogeneous regarding age. It is not usual to find older people sharing the classroom with younger students. It is also not surprising to find young and older people sharing leisure places. Contact interactions between people who belong to different social groups can reduce prejudice towards the contact partner's entire outgroup, resulting in changes in attitudes towards groups of people. The findings of the meta-analysis, in which 10% of the studies explored contact interactions between different age groups, has significant implications for intergenerational contact, suggesting that it is a viable prejudice reduction technique capable of reducing ageist attitudes (Requena et al., 2018).

Figure 3

Intergenerational workshop of contemporary theatre, presentation performance titled phase 1661, Educational department, National Theatre Greece. (Xenia Tsilochristou).



In our workshop two generations met, found common thoughts and ways of actions, exchanged views on life and age, played together, reflected together, renegotiated ages and finally built together spaces for all, empowering communities. It was a social theatre practice of intergenerational meetings exploring creatively time and life issues, challenging limits of time and age perception, reframing narratives of age (young and mature). In the workshop, we used the theatre stage as a rehearsal space for the representation of *Social Space* and the presence or absence of different generations within it. Our methodology was based on the idea of *Intergenerational Learning (IL)*. IL is where people of all ages can learn together

and from each other, classically common within families where knowledge is shared down the generations (EPALE, 2020). The workshop concluded with the production of a video[3] with footage from his presentation. The video was presented for the first time at the Performing Space 2025 Conference.

Figure 4

Intergenerational workshop of contemporary theatre, presentation of performance titled phase 1661, Educational Department, National Theatre Greece. (Xenia Tsilochristou).



In societies it is the absence of scenarios of encounter and interaction between people of different ages that reduces contacts and limits intergenerational relations, which generates isolation and loneliness and, consequently, dehumanises our communities. In the Manifesto *Intergenerationality Adds Up Lives* (2020) Intergenerational practitioners suggest promotion of intergenerational contact between people of different ages, especially between children and young people and the elderly. Also, to adopt the intergenerational perspective as an alternative to specialisation by age is a new way of facing challenges and adopting solutions from an inter-age perspective in the design of services and public spaces. Avoiding spatial separation from an age perspective, which is commonly justified by the type of services provided to users, implies remodelling the organisation, management and services, as well as the uses of community centres and public spaces, in order to prevent and combat all segregation by age. The interaction between generations contributes to making society more powerful, creative, and efficient. Intergenerationally should be used as a key perspective for the orientation of decisions in the field of public services and community spaces.[4]

[3] You can watch the video at the link below. https://go.screenpal.com/watch/cTiUjjnItye

[4] The Brdo Conference, organised under the Slovenian presidency of the European Union and the European Commission on 28th and 29th April 2008, under the title Intergenerational Solidarity for

To conclude, the title *Performing Ages* reflects our artistic educational practice that emerged through workshops with teenagers and 65+ people in schools, friendship clubs in Athens and also at the educational department of National Theatre Greece. It incorporates pedagogical values of democratic education, interculturality and inclusion to cultivate intergenerational experiences of co-acting, co-creating, and co-learning. By using selected teaching content and devised activities it generates tools for negotiating unanswered questions regarding time, ages and social participation through play, physical and verbal dialogue, collaboration and coexistence. Its focus is to contribute to an expanded inclusive culture and education, and its approach could be applied in various contexts in micro and macro level such as workplaces among employees, social structures (friendship clubs, nursing homes) and educational institutions. Towards the end, we wish all of us to understand more the value of the interplay between the biological and the social, of the relationship between personal and social change and the intersection of social space and public life.

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6

Performing House: A Talk in Seven Fragments

Andreas Skourtis
Programme Leader: Performance Design
Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London

Abstract

Performing House is an ongoing practice research project exploring dwelling as a collective, evolving act rather than a fixed architectural state. Set in an olive grove in Chiliomodi, Greece, it unfolds as a slow-built experiment in co-designing a space for residencies, performance-making, and interdisciplinary exchange. The project imagines home not as an object to be completed, but as a relationship — sustained by presence, participation, and shared care.

Through performative workshops, sketches, and site gatherings, Performing House explores how architecture can perform as a verb: shaping, listening, and responding in real time. The grove, the house, and the nearby archaeological site act as living collaborators in a choreography of making and unmaking, remembering and reimagining.

This paper presents fragments of that process as a lecture-performance on the page — a document that performs its own construction. It proposes that building together is also a way of thinking together, and that design, when practiced as conversation, becomes a form of belonging.

Keywords: performance design, co-design, scenography, site-based research

Origin Point

I am an architect. A scenographer. An educator.

My practice moves between buildings, performances, sketches, and gatherings. My studio is called Performing Architectures — because space is not a backdrop. It is an act.

Performing House grows forty minutes from here,[5] in the village where I was born. In an olive grove I grew up with. In a place where the past is always present, and the future wants to be invited.

Figure 1
Concept sketch and photo of the olive grove. (Skourtis, 2021).



This project is about imagining such an invitation.

It is early in its making, but its roots reach back twelve years — of sketching, performing, and returning. It balances real assets — a grove, a house, a ruin — with speculative architecture: a desire to co-create a space for residencies, performance-making, and exchange.

A space that is ours to design. To co-own. To share.

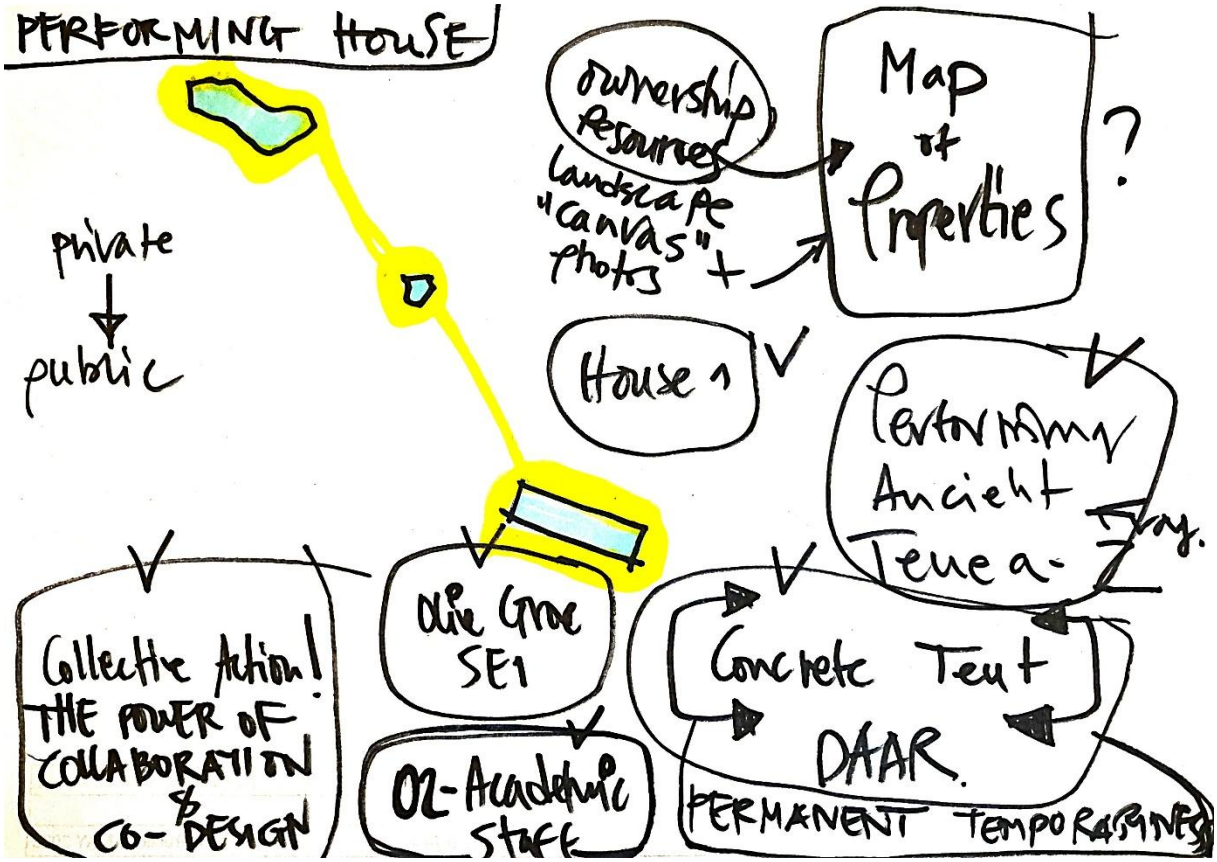
A place that performs with us — our thoughts, our bodies, our uncertainties.

A place to feel good. Because we want to. Because we need to.

[5] Reference to the location of the original talk during the 2025 conference: Nafplio, Greece

As Gaston Bachelard (1994) writes, “the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer” (p. 6). Performing House begins from that shelter and steps outward — from dreaming to doing, from imagining to inviting (Figure 1).

Figure 2
Sketch, mapping the project. (Skourtis, 2024).



Three Anchors

What is Performing House, materially?

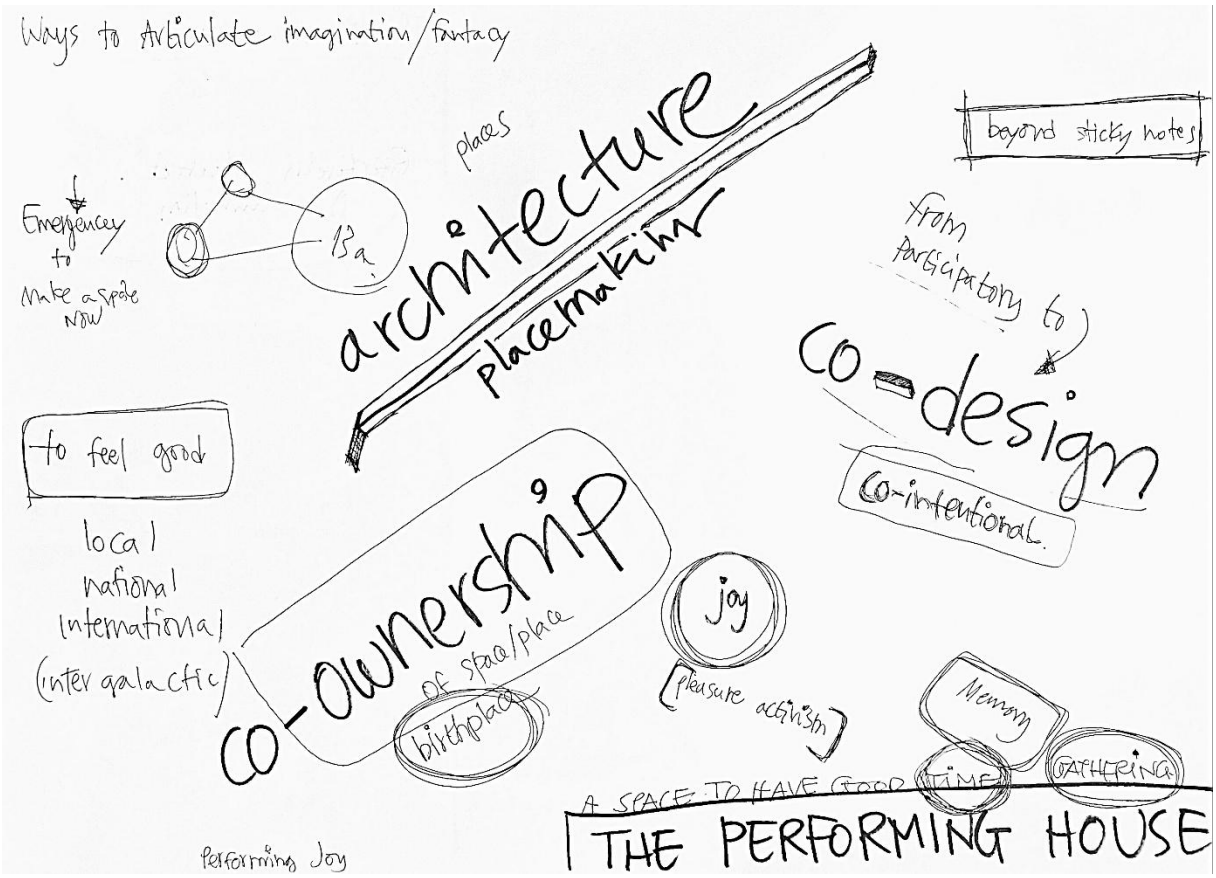
Three pieces of land: an olive grove with 130 trees; an existing house in the village; a nearby plot where the ancient city of Tenea is being unearthed. All within walking distance. All holding stories — past, present, imagined (Figure 2).

The olive grove has already performed — in Olive Grove SE1, in 02 Academic Staff — as studio, gallery, and durational act. A bridge between Athens and London, memory and invention.

Architecture, in this frame, is not construction but relation. It is the choreography of gathering. The feeling of being well together.

The tent is concrete. The future is soft. We design by asking questions (Figure 3).

Figure 3
Sketch, mapping the project. (Skourtis, 2024).



Situating the Practice

The grove is not remote. Ninety minutes from the Athens airport. Forty minutes from here.[6] Twelve minutes between each anchor point. Close enough to be reachable, far enough to feel apart.

In 2013, I performed here to introduce myself to new colleagues — bringing the grove with me to London (Figure 4). During lockdown, a tree became my collaborator, my studio, my stage (Figure 5).

Now the question is: how do we co-design a future?

Architectural collectives such as Archio remind us to ask open questions, design for shared ambition, bring value as you go. Performing House borrows that ethos, testing it through scenographic play.

[6] Reference to the location of the original talk during the 2025 conference: Nafplio, Greece

Can a grove become a performance space?

Can a ruin host reassemblies of the future?

Can we draw on post-it notes and build from trust?

Here, performance design becomes a research method: mapping spatial relations through encounter and dialogue. As Rendell (2010) proposes, site-writing turns reflection into a spatial act — writing as building, documentation as event.

Figure 4
Invitation, 02-Academic Staff performance and installation in the olive grove and RCSSD. (Skourtis, 2013).

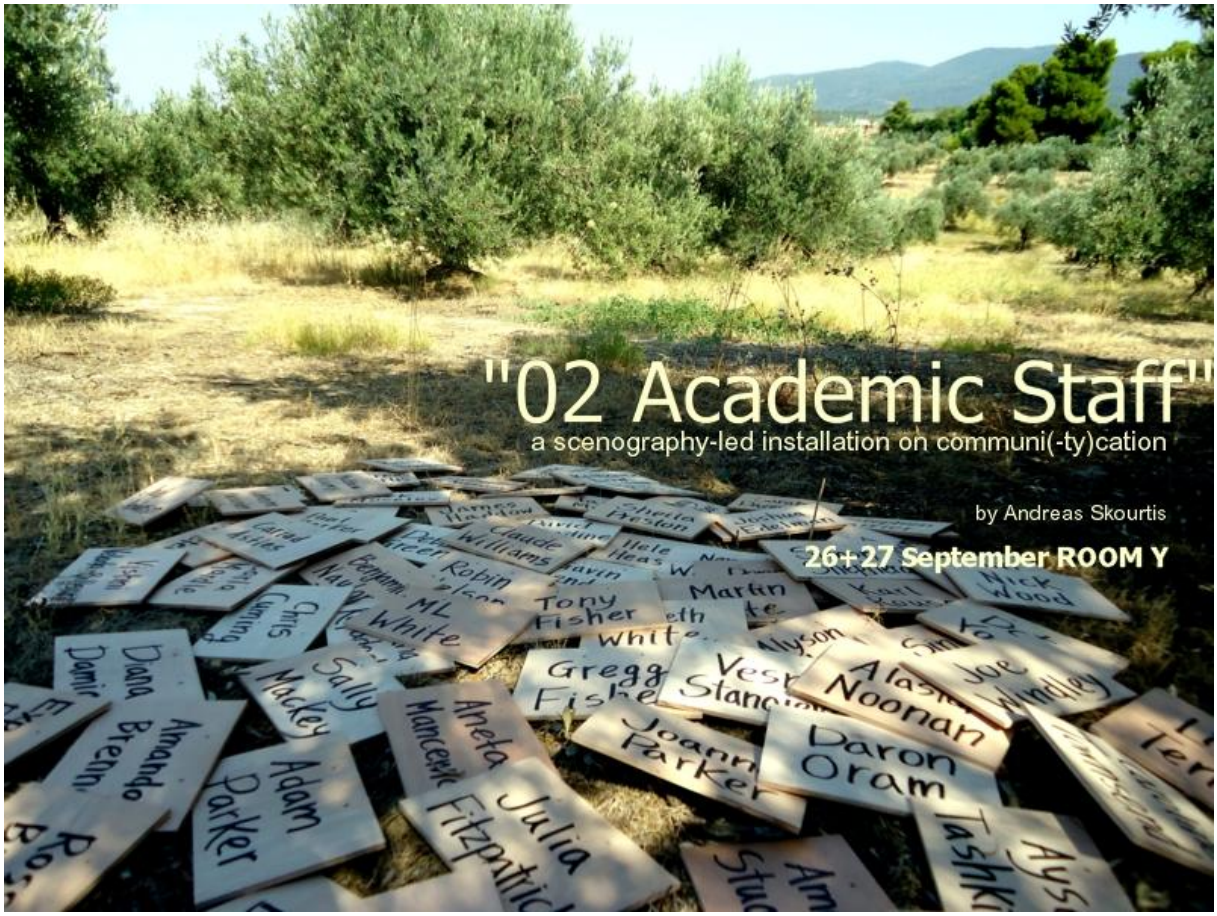


Figure 5
Photos from an installation in the olive grove during the 2021 lockdown. (Skourtis, 2021).



Figure 6
Concept architectural sketch, plan. (Skourtis, 2022).



Master Planning as Play

Aerial views become playgrounds. Buildings dissolve into lines. Plans turn into choreography. Sections into speculation (Figures 6, 7).

From afar, the site looks simple, but we draw over it repeatedly — each line an invitation.

Figure 7
Concept architectural sketch, plan. (Skourtis, 2022).

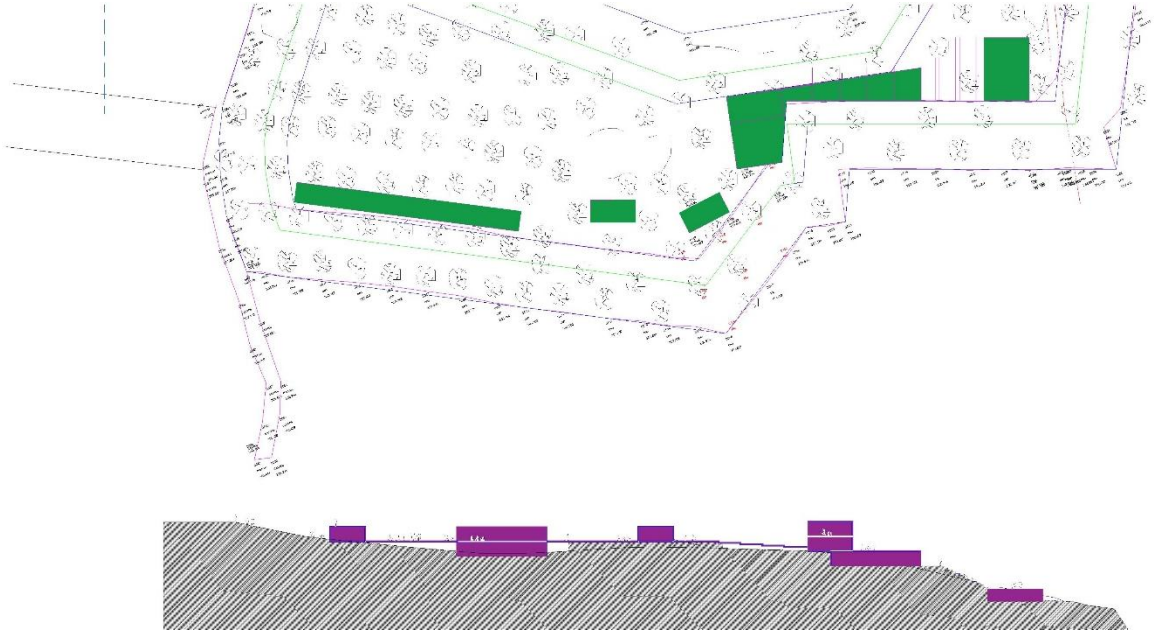
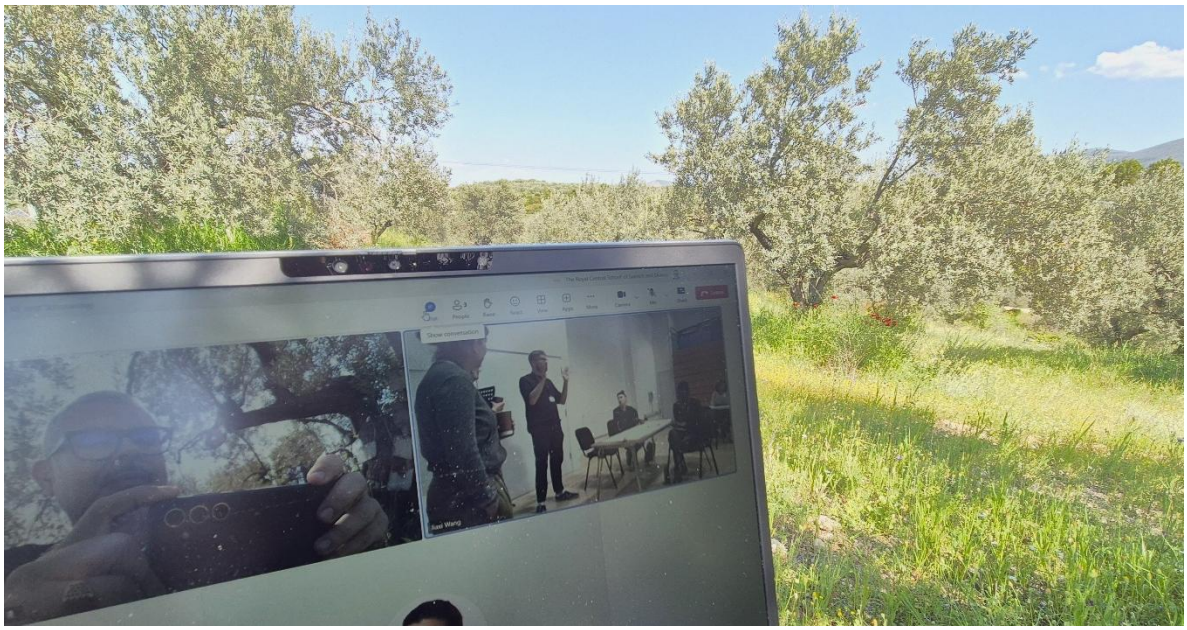


Figure 8
Photo, attending a RCSSD departmental meeting from the olive grove. (Skourtis, 2025).



Remote attendance becomes site-specific; a departmental meeting takes place beneath a tree. The institution follows us into the field (Figure 8).

Performing House is not one building. Not one style. Not one outcome. It is a rhythm. An atmosphere. A willingness to try.

Performing Ancient Tenea, and My House

The ancient city of Tenea lies beneath the soil of my third anchor. Partially excavated, still whispering.

In October 2024, it hosted the first Performing Ancient Tenea gathering (Figure 9). The artists arrived without scripts or sets — only gestures, fragments, footsteps, offerings. The archaeologists were the audience; the excavation was performed to them.

In that exchange, site became dramaturg, history became improvisation.

The existing house became a site of editing — its yard a frame for firelight, its walls a palimpsest of drawings, maps, and late-night notes.

Figure 9
Invitation visual, from Performing Ancient Tenea: Fragments 1. (Skourtis, 2024).



Figure 10

Photo, during editing footage from Performing Ancient Tenea, in the house. (Skourtis, 2024).

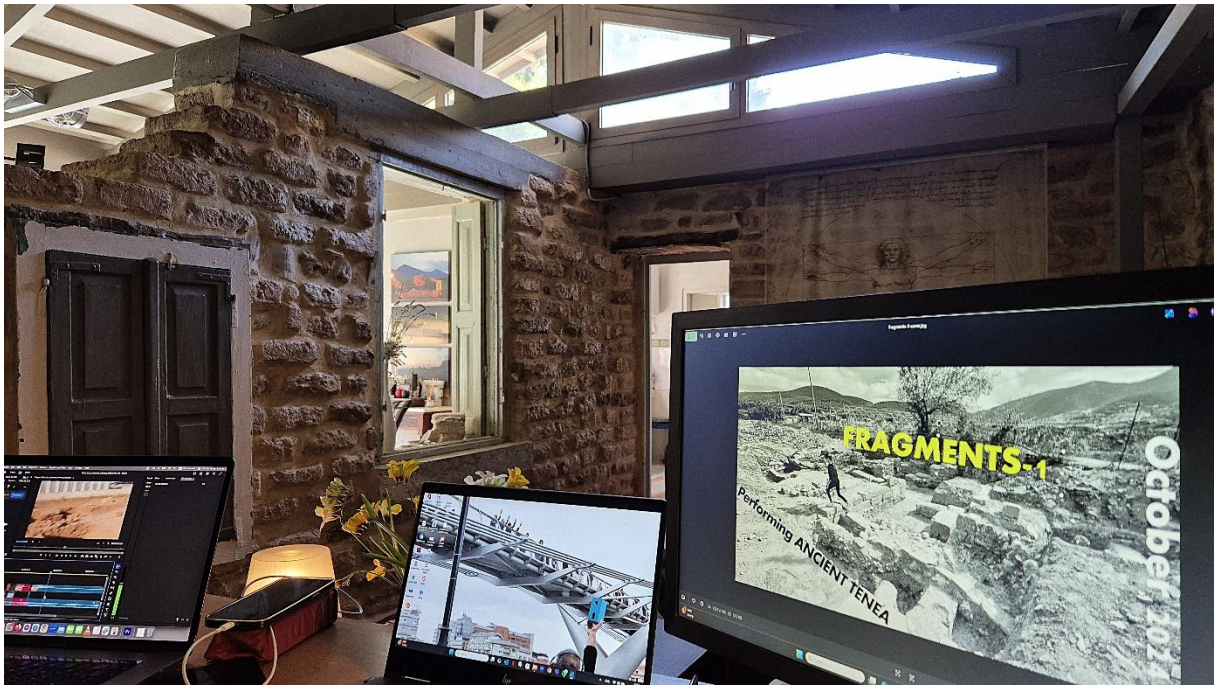


Figure 11

Photo, from a reflective night gathering in the house. (Skourtis, 2024).



An Open Ending

The house is already standing. The kitchen might already exist — in someone else's dream, in someone else's photo. The concrete tent reminds us: permanence can be portable (Figure 12).

Performing House is not proposing a building. Not yet. It proposes a way of being with place, with each other, with uncertainty.

What might we build if we begin by asking questions?

How do we gather to feel good, not just to be productive?

Can we perform care in the act of co-making?

Can a house hold performance, learning, and the pleasure of shade?

Figure 12

Photo, The Concrete Tent, from a keynote by DAAR Architects at RIBA, London. (Skourtis, 2024).



So, What Is This Project Trying to Do?

- It's trying to make a space that performs with us, that gathers us, that feels like a pause and a beginning.
- It's trying to use what we have — trees, ruins, drawings, attention — and grow what we need.
- It's trying to imagine how we might learn differently, live differently, build together.
- It's not trying to prove. It's trying to ask. And to invite you in.

Conclusion

Performing House is both proposal and process, both question and dwelling. It tests how architecture might act as an event and how performance might dwell. In a time when creative practice often accelerates towards outcomes, this work chooses slowness, iteration, and shared authorship. The olive grove becomes a classroom without walls, the ruin an archive in flux, the house a rehearsal for co-habitation. Each gesture — sketch, conversation, or walk — becomes part of a collective scenography of care. This paper, like the project, remains unfinished: an open plan drawn in soft pencil.

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7

Bubble Ecologies: Interstitial Worlds of Performance and Growth

Miljana Zeković
Department of Architecture and Urban Planning, Faculty of Technical Sciences,
University of Novi Sad

Abstract

This paper examines *Terram Intelligere: INTERSTITIUM*, Montenegro's contribution to the 19th International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, as a performative rethinking of architectural space. Developed through an interdisciplinary collaboration between curatorial practice and scientific research, the project engages soil and microbial life as active material agents. By embedding living ecosystems within translucent architectural forms — bubbles — the pavilion proposes space not as a static object but as an interstitial process: dynamic, adaptive, and co-created across human and non-human scales. Drawing on theories of performativity and ecological design, the paper situates the project within contemporary architectural discourse, challenging traditional notions of form, authorship, and materiality. *Terram Intelligere* offers an alternative model of practice, one grounded in relational ecologies, slow transformation, and hybrid intelligence. In doing so, it invites us to reconsider how we inhabit and build with, rather than on, the living systems of the land.

Keywords: interstitium; microbial design; ecological performativity; material agency; hybrid intelligence

Bubble Ecologies

Across the history of architecture, space has largely been imagined as something stable and complete — an enclosure for human presence rather than a living field of relations. However, recent theoretical movements have challenged this static model, proposing instead that space is performative — an active, contingent process co-produced through the relations between bodies, materials, and environments. Thinkers such as Henri Lefebvre, Tim Ingold, and Andrew Pickering have articulated space as something enacted and continually negotiated, dissolving the boundaries between design, occupation, and ecological processes.

This paper takes up these questions through *Terram Intelligere: INTERSTITIUM* — Montenegro's contribution to the 19th International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia — curated by Miljana Zeković in collaboration with Ivan Šuković, Dejan Todorović, and Emir Šehanović (Đurišić & Zeković, 2025). Located in the newly inaugurated Arte Nova Gallery at Campo San Lorenzo, Venice, the exhibition extends the Biennale's broader curatorial theme — "Intelligens. Natural. Artificial. Collective." by Carlo Ratti — through an exploration of intelligence as both ecological and collective. Developed at the intersection of scientific research and curatorial practice, *Terram Intelligere* situates microbial life as an architectural agent, embedding living systems within polycarbonate structures that grow, adapt, and transform over time. By framing the installation as both environment and experiment, the project resists the objecthood of traditional architectural exhibition and instead stages space as a living, performative ecology.

Located slightly away from the Biennale's primary venues, the pavilion offers an atmosphere of quiet dislocation and reflective slowness. Visitors move through a dimly lit, graphite space, punctuated by clusters of soil samples and translucent enclosures, their movement slowed to match the imperceptible rhythms of microbial life. In this setting, *Terram Intelligere* invites not only aesthetic observation but also temporal recalibration — a way of dwelling that foregrounds attention, care, and responsiveness.

Theoretical Framework

The notion that architecture should be understood less as a static object and more as an active process has been central to architectural discourse for several decades. Influenced by developments in process philosophy (Whitehead, 1929), actor-network theory (Latour, 2005), and performance studies (Schechner, 1985; Pearson, 2010), theorists and practitioners have increasingly framed architecture as an event, a situation, or a field of relations. Figures such as Bernard Tschumi (1996), Peter Eisenman (2004), and Jane

Rendell (2006) have interrogated the fixed nature of architectural form, proposing instead a view of space as dynamic, relational, and emergent.

This shift has opened architecture to the temporalities of occupation and use, emphasising the performative dimension of space. However, much of this discourse remains anthropocentric, centring on human bodies, actions, and temporal frameworks. By contrast, emerging ecological and posthumanist theories of space call for an expanded notion of performativity that considers the agency of non-human actors, materials, and ecosystems. As Pickering (2013, pp. 79-80) notes, environments are not inert contexts but active participants in ongoing, co-constitutive processes. Bennett (2010), Haraway (2016), and Barad (2007) likewise articulate frameworks in which vitality and agency are distributed across species and materials, inviting architecture to operate as part of this "dance of agency."

Figure 1
"Suvomeđa" — A dry-stone structure built in the land. (photo © Jovan Milošević).



Within this context, *Terram Intelligere: INTERSTITIUM* positions itself as a site of co-creation. The concept of the interstitium, borrowed from molecular biology to denote the space between cells (Benias et al., 2018, p. 1), becomes an operative metaphor and material method. The interstitial is not a void or a gap but a living tissue of exchange and transformation, a porous field through which energy and communication flow. In the Montenegrin pavilion, this notion resonates with the traditional *"međa"* or dry-stone

boundary, which has been recognised by UNESCO (n.d.) as part of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity. The *“međa”* delineates ownership yet remains porous: a wall built without any binding material that allows air, seeds, and organisms to pass through, hosting moss, fungi, and microbial life. As Zeković (2024) and Zanini (2002) observe, the boundary is both division and connection, a liminal threshold of negotiation and coexistence. Translating this cultural construct into architectural thought, the pavilion reimagines the interstitium as a spatial and ethical framework for shared inhabitation.

By embedding bacterial ecosystems within architectural forms, *Terram Intelligere* proposes a performativity that extends beyond the human. Architecture becomes an evolving ecology of matter, energy, and life — less a stage for human action than a continuous, multispecies negotiation. This move towards interstitial performativity opens new possibilities for practice in an era of environmental fragility and hybrid intelligence (Sarantou et al., 2025).

Case study: Terram Intelligere – INTERSTITIUM

Terram Intelligere unfolds as an installation in which architectural form operates as an active site of biological performance. Rather than being a finished exhibit, it is a living laboratory where microbial systems inhabit translucent polycarbonate structures, transforming in response to environmental stimuli. The project draws on soil samples collected from diverse ecological sites across Montenegro, focusing on *Streptomyces*—organisms renowned for their biosynthetic capacities. In collaboration with the Institute of Molecular Genetics and Genetic Engineering in Belgrade, the team cultivated microbial colonies that respond dynamically to light, humidity, and temperature by producing vivid bio-pigments and intricate spatial formations. These formations emerge autonomously, revealing a material intelligence that mirrors the ecological processes of the land itself. The installation thus becomes a conversation between biological agency and architectural intention, where design operates not through control but through attunement to living systems. Over time, the structures accumulate traces of environmental change, becoming temporal records of microbial adaptation and atmospheric fluctuation.

The installation’s spatial strategy extends the logic of interstitiality. Polycarbonate bubbles act as semi-permeable membranes — thresholds mediating exchanges between microbial interior and gallery atmosphere. Visitors are invited to experience a slow, durational encounter with growth, decay, and transformation, observing how colour intensities deepen and textures shift over the course of the exhibition. In this slow temporality, the project rejects spectacle and embraces what Zeković (2024) terms an “ecology of attention” — a mode of curatorial care that privileges observation, patience, and

reciprocal engagement with more-than-human processes. The space encourages a form of embodied contemplation, where perception is recalibrated to the subtle temporalities of non-human life. Through this encounter, the viewer becomes part of the evolving ecology of the system, contributing to the delicate equilibrium of the environment through breath, presence, and attention.

The conceptual roots of the installation also lie in Montenegro's vernacular landscape. The *"suvomeđa",* or dry-stone structure, is a cultural artifact and an ecological mediator, a system that blurs the boundary between the constructed and the organic. Within *Terram Intelligere*, this vernacular knowledge becomes a framework for architectural speculation: the *"međa"* transforms into a network of suspended, translucent "bubbles," evoking a porous architecture of connection rather than separation. Here, soil, bacteria and structure converge into a shared medium of becoming — a tangible articulation of the interstitial as method and metaphor. Ultimately, the project extends this condition beyond material expression, suggesting a broader ethos of coexistence, where architectural practice becomes a means of fostering attention, resilience, and care within fragile ecological systems.

Figures 2 and 3
INTERSTITIUM—A swarm intelligence of polycarbonate bubbles in the Montenegrin pavilion, close-up and details. (ph © Ugo Carmeni).





Discussion: Performing Ecologies and Rethinking Practice

By embedding microbial life within architectural form, *Terram Intelligere: INTERSTITIUM* advances a vision of architecture as a co-productive ecology rather than a static artifact. The project disrupts conventional hierarchies of authorship and material control, shifting attention to the slow rhythms of non-human actors and their capacity to shape space over time. This approach corresponds with current trajectories in curatorial and architectural discourse that advocate for slower, care-driven, and contextually responsive modes of practice. Rather than a spectacle of design, the pavilion cultivates a reflective experience — an ethics of slowness that mirrors microbial temporality and environmental transformation. It repositions the act of designing as one of continuous tending rather than completion, where uncertainty becomes an operative condition and maintenance a creative gesture. Through this lens, architecture begins to perform as a medium of relation, an interface through which species, materials, and climates negotiate shared existence.

The interstitium, understood as both concept and process, reframes architecture as an active field of mediation, where flows, materials, and encounters continuously generate spatial significance. Applied to architecture, the interstitial becomes a performative field where multiple agencies — biological, material, cultural — interact. The *“međa”*, once a

symbol of division, becomes a living frontier of collaboration, where human and non-human systems co-author spatial and ecological forms. As Zanini (2002) suggests, the significance of boundaries lies not in separation, but in their generative potential for encounter. In this light, *Terram Intelligere* reveals how architectural performance can manifest as ongoing care and negotiation. It makes visible the subtle economies of exchange that sustain ecological balance, foregrounding process over form and responsiveness over resolution. The interstitial is thus not a void between things, but a vibrant connective tissue that continually reorganizes relations across scales, from the microbial to the territorial.

Figure 4
INTERSTITIUM constellation in the Montenegrin Pavilion. (photo © Ugo Carmeni).



This reframing aligns with broader theoretical currents that advocate distributed agency and material vitality (Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2010; Haraway, 2016; Pickering, 2013). It also engages with the “new material language” articulated by Sarantou et al. (2025), where digital and biological systems intertwine through hybrid ecologies of communication. The pavilion thus embodies not only a curatorial methodology but a speculative design ethics — one that listens to material intelligence, cultivates slow emergence, and embraces uncertainty as a condition of growth. In this sense, *Terram Intelligere* anticipates a future of architectural practice rooted in reciprocity, adaptation, and care, where designing becomes indistinguishable from living.

Conclusion: Towards an Interstitial Practice

Terram Intelligere: INTERSTITIUM proposes a shift in architectural thinking — from the production of static forms to the cultivation of living, relational ecologies. By working with microbial systems and reimagining space as a performative interstice, the project demonstrates how architecture can participate in multispecies entanglements rather than stand apart from them. This model challenges conventional notions of design authorship, material agency, and temporality, calling for an architecture that listens, adapts, and evolves.

In refusing the spectacle of resolved form and embracing the contingency of living systems, *Terram Intelligere* gestures towards new modes of practice grounded in care, interdependence, and co-creation across species boundaries. It also contributes to broader disciplinary conversations on ecological design by articulating an architectural methodology that operates through observation, experimentation, and sustained engagement with non-human processes. The pavilion thus functions as both a curatorial experiment and a theoretical proposition — an argument for architecture as a living medium of communication and exchange.

It suggests that architecture may no longer be what we build upon the earth, but what we grow with it: a living membrane where multiple forms of intelligence and life converge. Through its synthesis of scientific research, curatorial sensitivity, and cultural continuity, the pavilion invites us to imagine futures where architecture, ecology, and performance converge within the interstitial spaces of coexistence. Ultimately, its contribution lies in reframing architecture as a practice of ecological reciprocity — one that transforms care, slowness, and relational attention into the very fabric of design.

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8

Embodying Space, Performing Learning Designing Interdisciplinary Learning Through Architectural Pedagogy

Pantea Eslami
Toronto Metropolitan University, Canada

Abstract

This research examines how architectural pedagogy can function as an interdisciplinary interface by integrating embodied, spatial, and collaborative learning into broader educational practices. Its aim is to propose a transferable pedagogical model that draws on foundational elements of architecture — such as spatial awareness and material engagement — to enrich teaching and learning across disciplines.

The study is guided by two core questions: (1) *How can architectural pedagogy, through embodied learning, enhance creative and performative practices?* (2) *In what ways can spatial thinking foster interdisciplinary connections between architecture, performance, and education?*

Using a practice-based methodology, the research developed and tested *archiBODY* in April 2024 a model designed to integrate architectural thinking into other educational domains. A central case study involved a collaborative workshop series with the Rosedale School's Department of Performing Arts, where dance and performance students explored bodily relationships to space through exercises and installations. The methodology emphasised learning through doing, sensing, and making, reflecting architecture's experiential dimension.

The findings indicate that engaging with space physically and reflectively encouraged students to reconceive both their creative processes and their understanding of the environment. The workshops demonstrated that the feedback loop between body and space not only deepens awareness but also fosters collaborative construction of meaning and form.

In conclusion, the study argues that when reframed as a platform for embodied and spatial learning, architectural pedagogy can serve as a valuable interdisciplinary tool. This approach supports more holistic, performative, and participatory modes of education, applicable in both formal institutions and informal community contexts.

Keywords: Architectural pedagogy, Embodied learning, Spatial thinking, Interdisciplinary education, Performative space.

Embodying Space, Performing Learning

Learning is not only an intellectual process but also an embodied and spatial one. The ability to act, perform, and create depends as much on how individuals inhabit and perceive space as on what they know conceptually. Yet educational practices have often privileged abstract knowledge and verbal expression over bodily awareness, limiting opportunities for learners to explore the connections between movement, space, and meaning. Performance studies remind us that performance is not confined to the stage; it is embedded in everyday acts of presence, communication, and participation (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008**)**. Recognising this wider scope of performance highlights the importance of approaches that re-engage learners with their own bodies and spatial environments.

This paper investigates how architectural pedagogy can contribute to such approaches. Architecture is understood here not merely as the production of buildings but as a mode of pedagogy grounded in spatial awareness, material engagement, and embodied experience. The study proposes that architectural methods can enrich performative and educational practices by cultivating sensitivity to the feedback loop between body and space. To investigate this proposition, the research developed ***archiBODY***, a practice-based pedagogical model that integrates architectural thinking with embodied and performative learning. Conceived as an interdisciplinary interface, *archiBODY* uses spatial exploration and making as tools for connecting architecture, performance, and education.

Two central questions guide this inquiry. First, how can architectural pedagogy, through embodied learning, enhance creative and performative practices? Second, in what ways can spatial thinking foster interdisciplinary connections between architecture, performance, and education? These questions are explored first through a theoretical and conceptual framework, and subsequently through a practice-based research model tested via a collaborative workshop series.

Theoretical Framework

The research builds on a theoretical foundation that positions learning as a fundamentally embodied and spatial experience. Four thinkers in particular — Lecoq, Dewey, Merleau-Ponty, and Pallasmaa — provide critical perspectives that inform both the conceptual and practical design of the *archiBODY* workshop model.

Jacques Lecoq: Body in Motion as Space-Maker

Jacques Lecoq's approach to physical theatre emphasised movement and gesture as primary ways of understanding the world. For Lecoq, the body in motion does not simply occupy space but actively reveals and shapes it. His exercises invited performers to “mime”

architectural forms (Lecoq, 2000/1997), allowing them to feel and enact space rather than merely represent it. This notion of space as a dynamic field generated through bodily action resonates directly with the research aim: to position architectural pedagogy as an embodied practice that enriches performative learning.

John Dewey: Learning Through Experience

Dewey's philosophy of education underscores the value of experiential learning, where knowledge arises from active engagement and reflection. In *Experience and Education*, he critiques approaches that separate abstract theory from lived experience (Dewey 1938), arguing instead for education that emerges from doing, sensing, and interacting. This emphasis on experiential process aligns with the methodological choices of the *archiBODY* workshops, where students moved fluidly between movement, drawing, making, and reflection.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Phenomenology of Perception

From a philosophical standpoint, Merleau-Ponty expands this understanding by describing perception as embodied and relational. In *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), he rejects the notion of space as a neutral container (2012/1945), proposing instead that space is lived through the body's sensorimotor interaction with the world. For Merleau-Ponty, the body is not a subject observing space from outside but the very medium through which space becomes meaningful. This phenomenological insight underpins the pedagogical emphasis on the feedback loop between body and environment in the workshops.

Juhani Pallasmaa: The Multisensory Dimension of Architecture

Architect and theorist Pallasmaa further grounds this framework in architectural discourse. In *The Eyes of the Skin* (2005), Pallasmaa critiques the dominance of visuality in architecture and advocates for a multisensory understanding of spatial experience — one that engages touch, sound, movement, and atmosphere. His insistence that "*profound architecture makes us return to the body*" (Pallasmaa, 2005, **p. 41**) frames architecture as a site of embodied knowledge, bridging the sensory, the material, and the spatial.

Synthesis

Together, these perspectives situate architecture as a "living" pedagogy — an embodied, sensory, and performative way of engaging with the world. They collectively provide the theoretical ground for *archiBODY*, a model that translates these insights into educational practice by treating body and space as co-constructors of meaning, learning, and creative expression.

Conceptual Framework

Building on this theoretical ground, the research articulates a conceptual framework organised around three interrelated principles: learning through play, learning through making, and interconnection. These principles translate abstract ideas of embodiment and spatial awareness into pedagogical strategies that can be enacted within workshop contexts.

Figure 1
Embodied play as a means of activating space through guided movement prompts. (archiBODY workshop, Rosedale School of the Arts, Spring 2024; designed and led by Pantea Eslami).



Learning Through Play

Play operates as an open-ended mode of exploration (Kolb, 1984; Dewey, 1938) where learners are free to improvise, experiment, and respond intuitively to spatial and bodily prompts. Rather than aiming for fixed outcomes, play invites curiosity and risk-taking, enabling students to experience space as a dynamic field of possibilities. Within *archiBODY*, play-based activities activated sensory awareness and encouraged students to test how gestures, rhythms, and interactions could generate spatial meaning.

Learning Through Making

Making grounds these explorations in material form. Through drawing, sketching, and three-dimensional construction, ephemeral gestures are translated into tangible artifacts. This process not only documents but also transforms experience, allowing learners to externalise and reflect on their bodily engagement with space. In the workshops, models and drawings became iterative tools — both records of embodied perception and platforms for further movement and reflection.

Interconnection

The final principle emphasises learning as a collective endeavour. By weaving together individual contributions, students co-constructed shared spatial compositions and performances, discovering how diverse perspectives and bodies can generate interconnected knowledge. This principal frame architecture as a “playground” where disciplines, practices, and learners intersect, forming collaborative modes of inquiry.

Together, these three principles define a flexible but coherent pedagogical approach. They provide the design logic for *archiBODY*, guiding its progression from movement to representation, from individual perception to collective performance. More broadly, they outline how architectural pedagogy can foster embodied, performative, and interdisciplinary modes of learning.

archiBODY

The principles of play, making, and interconnection were tested through *archiBODY*, a workshop model designed to integrate architectural pedagogy into a performative learning environment. The first edition was carried out at Rosedale School of the Arts in Toronto, with senior students from the Department of Dance. Developed in collaboration with the department’s director, the workshop aimed not simply to overlay architecture onto performance, but to create a shared platform where the two disciplines could intersect and generate new forms of knowledge.

Design of the workshop was structured as a circular and interconnected sequence of activities, designed to activate different modalities of learning — movement, observation, drawing, making, and performance. Each stage was intended to deepen students’ awareness of the body–space relationship, while also opening new avenues for reflection and collaboration. The design emphasised reciprocity: movements gave rise to sketches, sketches evolved into three-dimensional models, models inspired new choreographies, and performances in turn reshaped students’ spatial perceptions. In this way, the workshop enacted a feedback loop between embodiment and representation.

Figure 2

Translating embodied gestures from abstract sketches into three-dimensional models, materialising movement into spatial form. (archiBODY workshop, Rosedale School of the Arts, Spring 2024; designed and led by Pantea Eslami).



From Individual Awareness to Collective Space

The early phases of the workshop focused on cultivating bodily sensitivity to space. Through guided explorations, students experimented with curves, spirals, and trajectories, becoming aware of the invisible volumes traced by their gestures. These embodied explorations were then abstracted into sketches and later into three-dimensional models, allowing students to externalise the fleeting qualities of movement. Importantly, this process was not aimed at producing aesthetic artifacts, but at materialising perception — capturing the ways bodies carve and reshape space.

The transition from individual models to collective composition marked a critical pedagogical shift. Students were asked to combine their individual constructions into a shared body-landscape, negotiating how separate spatial sensibilities could coexist within a single environment. This collaborative stage foregrounded interconnection: architecture became the medium through which individuality and collectivity were reconciled. Students learned that space was not only shaped by their own gestures, but also by the presence and actions of others.

Figure 3

Collaborative body-landscape created by merging individual models, illustrating interconnection and collective spatial composition. (archiBODY workshop, Rosedale School of the Arts, Spring 2024; designed and led by Pantea Eslami).



Performative Turn

In the final phase, students returned to movement, using their collective models as scores for performance. Choreographic sequences emerged from the material qualities of the body-landscape — its openings, closures, tensions, and rhythms. This process illustrated the performative dimension of architectural pedagogy: space was not merely represented but enacted. Students discovered that architecture could inspire movement just as movement could generate architecture, creating a reciprocal dialogue between the two practices.

Figure 4 & 5

Choreographing movements inspired by the collective body-landscape, demonstrating the performative turn from spatial form to embodied action. (archiBODY workshop, Rosedale School of the Arts, Spring 2024; designed and led by Pantea Eslami).



Figure 6

Final performance sequence integrating movement, models, and collaborative spatial awareness, presenting the outcomes of the workshop process. (archiBODY workshop, Rosedale School of the Arts, Spring 2024; designed and led by Pantea Eslami).



3- Educational Implications

Throughout the workshop, students engaged in a process of alternating embodiment and reflection. By moving between bodily awareness, representation, construction, and performance, they experienced learning as iterative and layered. The workshop revealed that architectural methods — drawing, modelling, spatial composition — could serve as tools for performative education, while performance-based approaches could expand the scope of architectural pedagogy.

Rather than treating architecture and performance as separate domains, *archiBODY* demonstrated the potential of a shared pedagogical platform. The workshop showed that embodied exploration of space can foster creative expression, critical reflection, and collaborative meaning-making. For the students, it offered not only new ways of understanding performance but also new perspectives on how learning itself can be enacted through body–space interactions.

Findings and Discussion

The *archiBODY* workshop revealed several key insights into how architectural pedagogy can function as an interdisciplinary framework for embodied and performative learning. First,

students reported a heightened awareness of their bodily presence in space. Through guided explorations of curves, spirals, and trajectories, they came to perceive space not as a static backdrop but as a dynamic field shaped by movement. This aligns directly with Merleau-Ponty's conception of lived space as something co-constructed by body and world, and with Lecoq's insistence that space is revealed through action (Merleau-Ponty, 2012/1945; Lecoq, 2000/1997) rather than abstraction.

Secondly, the translation of embodied gestures into sketches and models encouraged students to externalise and reflect on their experiences. By materialising ephemeral movements into lines and forms, they were able to recognise spatial patterns that might otherwise remain unnoticed. This reflective practice echoes Dewey's emphasis on learning through experience (Dewey, 1938) and his argument that knowledge arises from cycles of doing and reflecting. In this sense, architectural representation served not as an end product but as a tool for deepened perception.

Third, the shift from individual explorations to collective construction underscored the role of collaboration in embodied learning. As students negotiated how their models might join together into a shared landscape, they confronted questions of coexistence, rhythm, and relation. This process revealed the inherently social dimension of space: bodies and forms do not exist in isolation but constantly interact and transform one another. The collaborative aspect resonates with Pallasmaa's call for architecture that re-engages the senses (2005) and the communal dimension of experience.

Finally, the performative turn in the workshop — where students re-animated their collective models through choreography — demonstrated the reciprocal dialogue between architecture and performance. Just as movements inspired spatial forms, those forms in turn generated new movements. This reciprocal exchange suggests that architectural pedagogy, when reframed through embodiment, can act as a catalyst for interdisciplinary creativity.

Taken together, these findings highlight the potential of *archiBODY* as a transferable pedagogical model. By weaving together play, making, and interconnection, the workshop demonstrated that architectural thinking can expand beyond the design studio to enrich performative practices and to foster participatory, embodied modes of learning.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates how architectural pedagogy can extend beyond the design studio to serve as a platform for embodied and performative learning. Through the *archiBODY* workshop, students discovered space not as a backdrop but as an active partner in creative practice, generating new awareness and collaborative possibilities.

The significance of this work lies less in the specific activities than in the transferable model it proposes. By weaving together play, making, and interconnection, *archiBODY* frames architecture as a pedagogy of participation — one that enriches performance-based education while also offering tools adaptable to other disciplines.

The next step is to develop this model into curriculum modules and community-based applications. In doing so, architectural pedagogy can contribute to more holistic, participatory approaches to learning, where body, space, and collaboration are understood not as supplements to knowledge but as integral to how knowledge is created.

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9

The Soup
Embodying Necropolitics

Eleni Kolliopoulou
Department of Performing and Digital Arts,
University of the Peloponnese

Abstract

My presentation during Performing Space 2025 focused on the audiovisual documentation of *The Soup*, a mixed-media performance which was staged on June 3rd at Fournos Lab, Athens. The performance engages with contemporary geopolitics and socio-economic structures, drawing theoretical grounding from Achille Mbembe's *Necropolitics* (2019), which examines how power structures operate through the regulation of death and the subjugation of life. The performance sought to embody the conceptual tenets of *Necropolitics* by translating its theoretical implications into spatial and performative actions.

The Soup also explored the role of rituals in technologically mediated environments, proposing new forms of embodiment and audience engagement in the context of the present digital era. Central questions examined were: How might our perception of space and time be transformed through contemporary rituals? If rituals traditionally serve to anchor participants in the here and now (Turner, 1969), how is this immediacy maybe disrupted — or enhanced — by multimedia stimuli? Moreover, if audiovisual elements such as video projections serve as "openings to alternative spatiotemporal dimensions" (Manovich, 2001), what implications might this have for presence, participation, and immersion in live performance?

During the presentation, selected audiovisual excerpts from the performance were shown, illustrating how projection, sound, and spatial design had been used to construct a multi-layered performative environment aiming to activate a plethora of perception modes to the audience. Overall, the presentation aimed to reflect on the potential of interdisciplinary performance as both a creative and critical tool for engaging with urgent political realities and evolving modes of human experience.

Keywords: Performance, Food, Rituals, Geopolitics, Necropolitics

The Soup. Embodying Necropolitics

This presentation emerged from the research and creative process behind *The Soup* (2025). The performance was staged on 3rd June at Fournos Lab[7] in Athens. The work was partially funded by PSi Constellate 2025[8] and was presented online on July 3rd,[9] followed by Q&A. *The Soup* was conceived as a contemporary ritual that engaged with the audience through intersecting layers of perception and meaning.

One of my previous performances, *Handle with Care*[10] (2020), which was shown during B.I.F.P.A. 2025,[11] was my first performative experiment with food. I will illustrate the performance design of *Handle with Care* and explain how *The Soup* develops on it.

The earlier performance *Handle with Care* was my first performative experimentation with food as a material, sensorial, and conceptual catalyst. Both *Handle with Care* and *The Soup* were conceived as embodied inquiries into deepening audience engagement through heightened sensory experience. In both works, the performances sought to move beyond the visual as the dominant mode of perception, by inviting the audience to engage with the work in a more immersive, multisensory manner.

To facilitate this shift, audience members were asked to wear blindfolds — throughout the entire duration of *Handle with Care* and during selected segments of *The Soup*. The act of temporarily depriving the audience of sight was intended as a gesture of gentle disorientation and reassessment. It was also used as a means of sensitising them to other modes of perception — specifically, touch, smell, and hearing. By deliberately isolating them from the constant visual influx that characterises contemporary experience, both performances aimed to amplify the tactile and auditory dimensions of the encounter, fostering a more intimate and immediate engagement with the performative space. The intention was to isolate them from the intrusiveness of visual stimuli in order to heighten their tactile and auditive perception.

This sensorial reorientation functioned as a key strategy in both works, positioning the audience not merely as observers, but as sensate bodies embedded in a shared, affective field. Prior to each performance, audience members engaged in a tactile exchange, passing the ingredients used in the cooking process from hand to hand. However, while *Handle with Care* aimed to orchestrate an intensified sensory experience, *The Soup* sought to layer this sensory engagement with cognitive and emotional activation. By interweaving heightened

[7] https://fournos-culture.gr/el/fournoslab/
[8] https://www.psi-web.org/the-soup-psi-constellate-2025/
[9] http://www.elenivisualart.eu/category/poetics-politics-of-everyday-life/cooking/
[10] http://www.elenivisualart.eu/poetics-politics-of-everyday-life/handle-with-care-2020/
[11] https://www.capartscentre.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/BIFPA2020-Program-Final-Version.pdf

sensory stimuli with an experimental documentary short film addressing themes of social injustice, displacement, and historical violence, *The Soup* invited a more complex, critical, multi-layered mode of attention and reception. The short documentary was running in parallel with most of the live action of cooking, creating a clear contrast between the familiar (cooking) and the hostile (war-related images, poems, sounds). The short documentary was narrating via a collage of found footage the essence of *Necropolitics*.

Necropolitics and Biopower

Necropolitics is a concept developed by Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe and refers to the power and authority that a state or governing body has over life and death — specifically, the ability to decide who may live and who must die. Instead of governing with the criterion of prosperity and peace, some contemporary governments (but not only) decide to put pressure and exercise their power by creating selected areas/populations where human rights are not observed. In other words, these governments calculate their success and sovereignty in terms of the number of deaths. Building on Michel Foucault's notion of *Biopolitics* (1977), which focuses on the regulation of life, Mbembe extends the idea to examine how modern power operates through death, violence, and control over bodies, especially in contexts of war, colonialism, and systemic oppression. Summing up, *Necropolitics* highlights how certain populations — often racialized, marginalized, or colonized groups — are subjected to conditions of social and political abandonment, where their lives are rendered disposable or ungrievable. In this framework, death is not just a consequence but a deliberate instrument of power.

The Soup also seeks to engage critically with contemporary geopolitical and socio-economic issues and policies, drawing explicitly on Mbembe's theoretical framework of *Necropolitics*, with the intention of embedding its conceptual underpinnings within the structure of the performance. This is achieved through the deliberate juxtaposition of two temporal and aesthetic layers: the slow-paced, live enactment of cooking an African soup from Eritrea — a process rooted in embodied practice and communal ritual, commonly associated with poor standards of living — is set against a video projection composed of a filmic collage referencing traumatic and politically charged historical events in general starring high rank individuals (predominantly males) taking decisive decisions. These include, among others, the assassination of Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba and the rise of Adolf Hitler.

The performance unfolds as a dual-tempo experience, confronting the audience with a tension between the immediacy and intimacy of the live cooking — conceived as a site of shared, sensorial experience and intersubjective connection — and the mediated, affectively charged imagery of historical violence and oppression. The live action progresses within a

slow, organic temporality, reflecting the rhythms of everyday life and care, while the projection operates within a much more accelerated and dissonant tempo, exposing the violent logic of state power and necropolitical governance. In this way, *The Soup* invites a critical reflection on the politics of life and death, while simultaneously foregrounding practices of sustenance, sharing, and silent communion as potential sites of resistance and re-humanisation.

The Soup involved a limited number of participants (around 30 people) in order to preserve its ritualistic, intimate character and ensure the emergence of an ephemeral community. According to Victor Turner (1969), rituals are an essential part of stabilising everyday life: they introduce the viewer to a state of transcending ordinary perception and touch the threshold of *liminality*. The work aimed to activate this special connection with the self and the group through a participatory and relational aesthetic (Bourriaud, 2002) event. The suggestion during my presentation at Performing Space Conference 2025 was that the uniqueness of the performance lies in its combination of structure, austerity, and the contemplative nature of ritualistic process with modern technological means.

The performance aims to underscore the enduring significance of communication as a fundamental condition for the cohesion of communal life. This relational dynamic functions as a connective tissue not only within traditional societies but also across contemporary “smart” social configurations, where the reactivation of shared presence through acts of reverence offers a source of existential hope.

This conceptual intention was partially materialised through the spatial design of the performance environment (see Fig. 1). The audience was arranged in a semi-circular formation encircling the performer(s), fostering a sense of intimacy, collective focus, and participatory engagement. Furthermore, the performance area was only slightly elevated in relation to the audience seating, subtly invoking the spatial and symbolic codes of ritual, and reinforcing a sense of co-presence and collaborative witnessing.

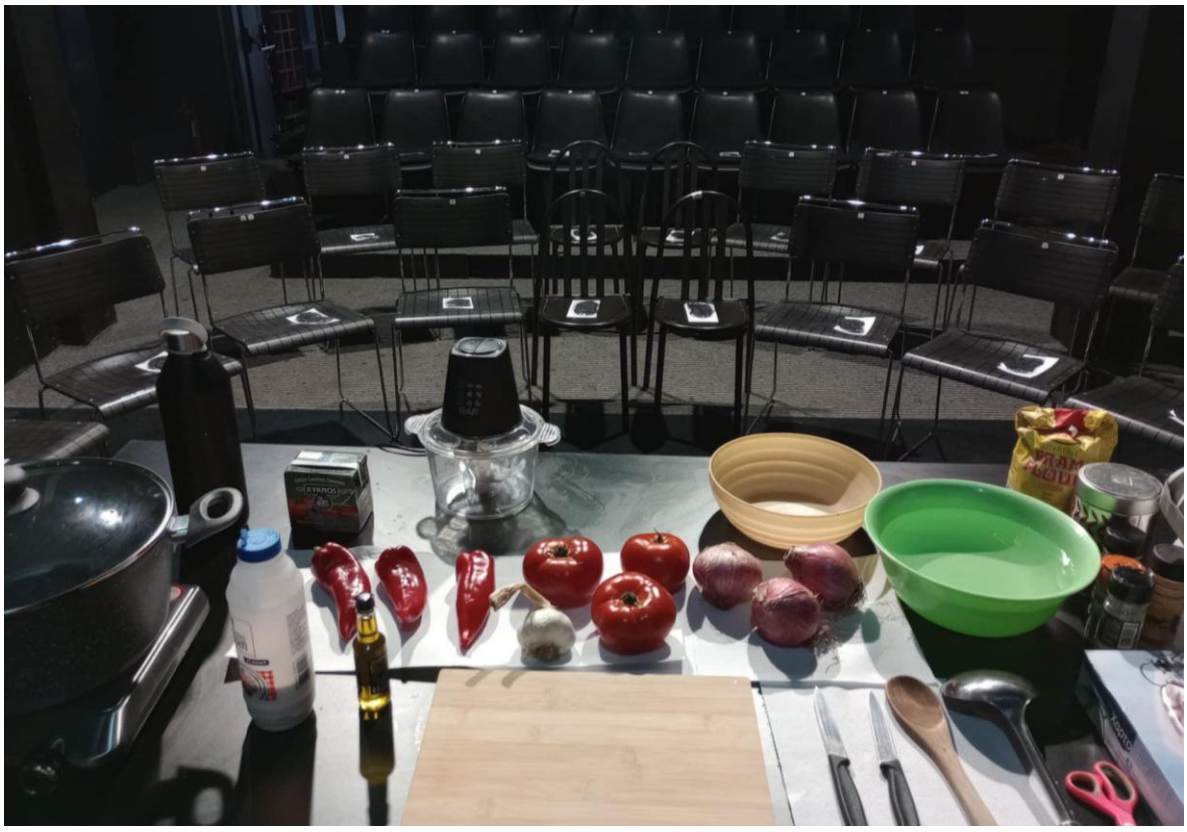
The Ambiguous Role of the Co-Performer: Live-Streaming Reality

In *The Soup*, I directed and performed the piece at the same time alongside my co-performer Stratos Papadoudis, who occupied a deliberately ambiguous, liminal role, shifting between performer and videographer (see Fig. 2). His shadowy presence disrupted conventional performance hierarchies by collapsing the divide between subject and observer, embodiment and mediation. Operating a portable camera mounted on a stick, Papadoudis live-streamed the cooking process, which at intervals interrupted the pre-edited video projection, creating a layered audiovisual and kinaesthetic field where live performance, recorded film collage, and real-time streaming were continuously interwoven.

This hybrid media ecology generated a performative environment that blurred distinctions between reality and representation; witnessing and surveillance; and ritual and spectacle. The aesthetic strategy deliberately cultivated a sense of destabilised perception, compelling the audience to reflect on how “reality” is constructed, manipulated, and consumed in modern technologically saturated societies.

Such interplay also resonates with Philip Auslander’s theory of *mediatized performance*, which suggests that the binary between the live and the mediated has collapsed, giving rise to performances that are inherently hybrid, shaped by both corporeal presence and digital mediation (Auslander, 2008). In *The Soup*, this collapse becomes not only a formal device but also a political gesture, revealing how representation technologies shape affective and epistemological access to truth and power.

Figure 1
Pic depicting the setting of the stage before the performance The Soup *image courtesy by Eleni Kolliopoulou.*



The performance critically interrogated the politics of visibility and control. Mbembe (2019) describes how modern regimes exert power through the management of life and death, often mediating public perception through spectacle and disinformation. In this context, *The Soup* staged a chaotic mirroring of reality, where images of historical violence are not just consumed passively but are implicated in the spectacular logic of necropolitical governance. The live-streamed cooking process — domestic, intimate, and nourishing — thus stands in stark

contrast to the projected violence, provoking a critical tension between care and destruction thus inviting the audience to question how reality is 'served' to us and by whom.

Ultimately, *The Soup* offered a kind of metaphorical nourishment — a “soup for thought” — through which spectators are encouraged to question their roles as both witnesses and consumers of mediated violence and communal rituals.

Figure 2
Video still featuring Kolliopoulou and Papadoudis in The Soup*, pic by Serafeim Arkomanis.*



Conclusion

The Soup invites us to navigate complex conceptual terrains such as *Necropolitics*, to explore questions about freedom of expression — interwoven with poetic fragments that praise peace — and to reconnect with our basic vital needs: food, sharing, silent acceptance. The work embodies the ongoing process of my research into methodologies for integrating the structural logic of ritual within a nuanced conceptual framework, one that is further enriched through the incorporation of contemporary technological media and performative strategies.

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10

Curating Islandness
The Case of Marosi Festival (Stromboli, IT)

Giada Cipollone
IUAV University of Venice

Abstract

This paper stems from the ongoing research project *Performing Islandness. Performance, Dramaturgy and Curatorship of the Island since the Seventies* (@Peril, 2022–2025), which investigates the island as a generative space for performative, dramaturgical, and curatorial practices. It explores how islands operate both as theoretical objects – symbolic, metaphorical – and as specific places where artistic practices are situated. By intersecting Performance Studies with Island Studies, the project seeks to develop a non-continental and decentralized account of performative practices, with particular attention to the Italian context. The first section of this paper outlines the theoretical framework, situating recent debates within Island and Performance Studies. While earlier approaches considered islands "on their own terms" (McCall, 1994), subsequent scholarship has emphasised relational perspectives (Baldacchino, 2018; Pugh & Chandler, 2021). In this context, islands appear as epistemic paradigms: not isolated enclaves, but thresholds where ecological, cultural, and political entanglements converge. Performance Studies provide a productive lens for this paradigm, as highlighted by Schneider's (2020) reflections on liminality and littorality. The second section focuses on Marosi Festival (Stromboli, 2017–ongoing), a long-term initiative founded by Giulia Ferrato and co-directed with Anna Basti. Conceived as an experiment in "insular curatorship," Marosi anchors its programming in dialogue with the island's landscapes, communities, archives and memories. Over time, it has evolved into a festival that weaves ecological sensitivity, live arts, and local knowledge into situated curatorial practices. The paper then turns to the 2025 edition, *Variations on the Singularities of the Sea*, which approached the sea not as scenery but as co-author. Central to the program was *The Last Lamentation* by Valentina Medda, a multimedia work rooted in Sardinian traditions of lament and reimagined as a contemporary ritual for the Mediterranean. Through minimal gestures and layered sound, the work became a performative archive of mourning and transformation. Taken together, these reflections suggest that performance and curatorship, when situated in island contexts, can foster ecological ways of inhabiting, opening imaginaries of care, connection, transformation.

Keywords: islandness, island studies, performance studies, insular curatorship, Marosi Festival

Curating Islandness

The contribution stems from the ongoing research project *Performing Islandness. Performance, Dramaturgy and Curatorship of the Island since the Seventies* (@Peril, 2022–2025), which undertakes a critical investigation of the island as a generative space for performative, dramaturgical, sound-based, and curatorial practices, with a specific focus on the Italian context. @PERIL seeks to systematically analyse the relationship between performance and insularity. The project's overall objective consists of an analysis of artistic theories and practices that have engaged with the island as specific territories, both theoretical and material.

The island functions both as a *theoretical object* (symbolic, metaphorical) and as place and context, where performative practices are situated and dealt with. The aim of the research is to outline a "non-continental" (Glissant 1990) and decentralized history of performative practices, which remains "isolated" even in historiographies.

The overall methodology is grounded in Performance Studies and their potential intersection with Island Studies. This approach wants to establish links with Architecture, particularly concerning territorial planning related to living policies. The project is situated within the broader framework of Environmental Humanities, weaving together feminist thought and political ecology.

A key case study is Marosi Festival (Stromboli, 2017–ongoing), a long-term initiative that integrates performance, research, and place-based practices to articulate an "insular curatorial" perspective. This paper offers a critical reading of Marosi's curatorial politics, with a specific focus on its 2025 edition. It examines how the festival articulates a mode of situated curatorship that foregrounds live arts practices, ecological sensitivity, local knowledge, and collaborative processes. By doing so, it reflects on the potential of performance and curatorship to contribute to emerging ecocritical and relational paradigms within island geographies.

Island as a Theoretical Object

Over the past few decades, Island Studies — emerging in the mid-80s — have offered new critical perspectives for understanding how knowledge and practices take shape within insular geographies. Islands appear not only as localised laboratories of complex ecological relations, but also as conceptual devices for reading the tensions of today: autonomy and separation, tourism and belonging, habitability and risk, fragility and healing. As Deleuze (2007) suggests, "to dream of islands — whether with anguish or with joy — means dreaming of being separated, far from the continent, of being alone and lost; or it means dreaming of starting again, recreating, beginning anew" (p. 7). In contrast, Derrida (2007)

frames insularity as an irreducible condition of singularity, marked by interruptions and separations that resist any stable passage or translation.

Early approaches framed islands “on their own terms” (McCall, 1994). Hau‘ofa’s (1994) seminal text *Our Sea of Islands* articulated a decolonial vision in which islands are not “tiny spaces” but nodes of expansive oceanic connections. More recent perspectives have shifted toward a relational understanding of islandness (Baldacchino, 2018), which describes islands as both phenomenological sites and epistemological challenges (Hay, 2006), like the Anthropocenic one. As Pugh and Chandler (2021) argue, “working with islands as sites of relational entanglements, affordances, and feedback effects has been crucial for the generation of correlational analytics in Anthropocene thinking” (p. 195).

The island emerges as an epistemic paradigm: not a mythic enclave of separation but a material and symbolic site where the most turbulent effects of the global eco-political crisis — and the most radical desires for transformation — converge. The performative arts have been particularly responsive to this paradigm, engaging insular spaces as liminal laboratories for reimagining dwelling, belonging, and world-making. Rebecca Schneider (2020) has offered one of the most compelling arguments for bridging Island Studies and Performance Studies:

> Performance studies may share something with island studies if the shifting aqueous netherworld of sea and shore shares something with the movement into and out of materiality and immateriality that characterizes zones of performance. Dance, theatre, orature, and gestures that repeat are at once singular and citational, continually de- and re-composing. Considered in relation to the larger landmass of ‘the real’, theatrical or performance-based acts such as stories, dances, and plays are not real but not not real, just as Landship dancers are not at sea but not not at sea. In the netherworld of performance, solid states oscillate toward becoming undone, and fluid states syncopate with stasis. The so-called human, too, laps at its own borders as one so-called human plays at becoming another, speaks through another, or takes the shape of a spirit, a stone, a tree, a ship, a wave, a dream, a bird. (...) The suggestion here is that thinking with shoals, and liminality/littorality in general, may enable a capacity toward what we do not/yet/know. (p. 207)

In this light, Schneider’s insight underscores how both fields, Island Studies and Performance Studies, are engaged in theorising liminality, threshold conditions, and the generative potential of oscillation. Islands, as both concept and territory, are cast as theoretical figures to which the performative arts respond with their own utopian

imaginaries, negotiating the thresholds between separation and relation, reality and dreams, memory and projection.

Island as a Specific Place. Marosi Festival, the project

A key case study of this research is Marosi Festival (Stromboli, 2017–ongoing), a long-term initiative that integrates performance, research, and place-based practices to articulate an "insular curatorial" perspective. Marosi Festival was conceived by Giulia Ferrato, whose background spans dance and choreography, a PhD in African Studies, and extensive work as a cultural programmer in the field of performing arts. Giulia Ferrato also holds a deep, emotional bond with Stromboli, one of the Aeolian Islands, the most remote from the main island of Sicily. Stromboli is reachable from Naples by a night ferry that arrives at dawn at the foot of the volcano that dominates the island. The island's imagery is deeply tied to one of the most iconic films of neorealist cinema: *Stromboli, Land of God* (1950) by Roberto Rossellini, starring Ingrid Bergman. The film focuses precisely on the stark exceptionality of this isolated land, shaped by the moods of its volcano, wild and resistant to contamination and change.

Marosi, however, shifts focus from the rootedness of land to the fluidity of water: the very name, *Marosi*, means stormy seas, evoking the waves' energetic and transformative force. The festival is grounded not in the idea of separation, but in the interconnectivity that flows through water. With this vision, Giulia Ferrato founded Marosi Festival in 2017 and later began directing it together with Anna Basti.

Its first iteration, Edition 0, was titled *Dans Festival*. It issued a call to gather and connect artists, primarily from the world of dance. It was a phase of exploration, an experiment in working together within a specific insular site, adapting artistic practices and inventing new compositional methods inspired by the terrain, the landscape, and the local community.

Over time, Marosi has transformed from a platform for encounter and exchange into a fully-fledged festival, one that anchors its artistic programming in ongoing research around themes and works. The starting point is always a question addressed to the territory — a conversation with the place — not a program imposed from outside, but a curatorial approach shaped in dialogue with the land, the people, and the delicate relational intimacies that define the Stromboli context, one densely layered in both environmental and symbolic terms. In this framework, relationships and programming are deeply intertwined, giving rise to a situated curatorship grounded in live arts, ecological sensitivity, local knowledge, and collaborative processes.

Island as a Specific Place. Marosi Festival, 2025

The latest edition of Marosi Festival was entirely dedicated to the sea. Its title, *Variations on the Singularities of the Sea*, affirms a plural conception of the sea: not as a flat, romantic backdrop, but as a force, an agent, a "body of water" (Neimanis, 2017) that receives and gives back, and that heals and wounds. The festival approached the sea as an epistemological alternative to land, as a living body claiming its right to the future, and as an archive of submerged stories. The program unfolded through conversations called "shores", as well as installations, storytelling, and itinerant performances across and around the water.

It opened with the presentation of an initiative still in progress: the *Experimental Sound Archive of the Aeolian Islands*, a research and artistic platform by Marosi Festival and Edizioni Brigantino, dedicated to collecting oral and sonic memory from the archipelago. One full day of programming took place, quite literally, at sea: it was a boat journey from Stromboli's main dock to Ginostra, the island's remote western edge, closest to the volcano and unreachable by public transport. During a three-part concert by the singer Maria Violenza, rooted in the Sicilian folk tradition, the sound of the sea moved through the performance, sometimes amplifying the singer's voice, sometimes swallowing it. Sound drifted across the water, reshaped by waves and distance: the sea became an acoustic filter, a live effect. The curatorial intention was clear: to treat the sea not as scenery, but as co-author.

The edition's core project was *The Last Lamentation*, a multimedia work by Valentina Medda, launched in 2022 and presented here in its performative form. Medda had undertaken an extended residency in the abandoned interior of Sardinia, searching for traditions such as lamentation and embroidery. As the dramaturg and curator Maria Paola Zedda (2020) notes, the work "could be described as a funeral rite for the Mediterranean, conceived as a place of suspension, of absence, of disappearance. The work narrates the tragedy of the sea through a hypnotic vocal and choreographic score, rewriting ritual codes into abstract, contemporary form" (pp. 207–208). Medda gathered recordings and personal archives from women, carrying those memories to other shores, to other voices, to other women. She transformed this fragile repertoire into performance. The choreographic score drew on minimal gestures — the brushing of hair, the tearing of it, the soft touch of fabric, the sob rendered as breath — sealed by a sound composition that layered voice, breathing, recorded traces, and the live sound of the sea.

> Can we, through ritual, tell new mythologies, new stories of origin? How? In yet another attempt to cross boundaries — here between artistic practice and world-making — and starting precisely from mourning, I imagine taking this dramaturgy of lament that I have elaborated out of the space of art, and turning it into a structure

> through which to confront unresolved crises: an instrument of shared care, a grassroots healing practice that allows us to reclaim the process of recovery and rebirth, and that, in doing so, binds us together beyond kinship (Medda, 2025, p. 353).

In this way, *The Last Lamentation* situates itself between memory and sea, loss and resonance, translating the Mediterranean into a performative archive of grief, but also into a space of re-inhabitation and potential reconnection.

Conclusion

This paper has moved from theoretical perspectives on islandness to the situated practices of Marosi Festival, showing how islands work both as conceptual figures and as lived contexts for performance. The island appears as an epistemic paradigm, fragile and generative, bounded and relational, that informs curatorial approaches grounded in dialogue with place and community.

Marosi Festival exemplifies this mode of insular curatorship, shifting attention from land to sea, and from separation to interconnection. Its 2025 edition emphasized the sea as co-author, revealing how aquatic epistemologies can challenge established frameworks and open new imaginaries. Through projects such as *The Last Lamentation*, performance carries memory across waters, reframes ritual languages, and offers new modes of imaging the relationship with the environment and the archives.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that performance and curatorship, when situated in island contexts, can contribute not only to ecological and artistic reflection but also to wider imaginaries of culture, care, politics and transformation.

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11

Resistance to Regional Decline: The Art Village Project in Rural Korea

Joonwoo Kim
Daegu University, South Korea

Sawon You
Korea National University of Arts, South Korea

Abstract

South Korea is confronting a deepening crisis of regional decline, with many small towns experiencing population loss, demographic aging, and economic stagnation. In response, cultural and artistic interventions have emerged as alternative strategies for local revitalization. This article examines the Art Village Project in Gyechon, Pyeongchang County, which has developed over more than a decade through classical music education, the annual Gyechon Classical Music Festival, and a series of spatial development initiatives. The project has redefined the village as a cultural destination, attracting thousands of visitors each year and fostering collaboration among residents, artists, and institutions. By staging performances in everyday settings and linking cultural programming with physical transformation, Gyechon has been repositioned as a performative landscape that encourages participation, placemaking, and community resilience. The findings suggest that the Art Village Project has reshaped the village's public image, expanded its functional population, and mobilised investment from both public authorities and private enterprises. At the same time, the case highlights the challenges of sustaining culture-led development under conditions of rural depopulation. Ultimately, Gyechon demonstrates how art, when embedded in community life and local space, can resist regional extinction and reimagine the future of small towns in Korea.

Keywords: Regional Decline; Art Village Project; Rural Revitalization; Place-making; Community Resilience

Regional Decline and the Rise of Cultural Interventions

South Korea has faced accelerating regional decline since the 1990s. According to the Ministry of the Interior and Safety, 89 out of 228 cities and counties are officially designated as “Population Decline Areas,” indicating persistent outmigration, shrinking birth rates, and rising old-age dependency (Ministry of Public Administration and Security, 2023). These trends jeopardise not only the economic base of small towns but also the viability of community life.

In response, cultural and artistic interventions have increasingly been viewed as alternative strategies for rural revitalisation. Rather than focusing solely on industrial restructuring or large-scale infrastructure, these approaches emphasise the symbolic, social, and experiential dimensions of place-making (Evans, 2005; Richards, 2011). This shift aligns with international discussions on creative placemaking, which argue that cultural activities can generate social cohesion and stimulate local identity while also attracting visitors and investment (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010).

The village of Gyechon in Pyeongchang County illustrates this trend vividly. Facing the closure of its elementary school due to declining student population, the community adopted classical music education as an experimental response. In 2009, Gyechon Elementary School launched the Starlight Orchestra, enabling children to learn and perform music (Fig.1). What began as a survival measure for the school soon became a catalyst for cultural regeneration.

Figure 1

The Gyechon Starlight Orchestra, established in 2009 as part of the music education program at Gyechon Elementary School



Building on this foundation, the Korea National University of Arts and the Hyundai Motor Chung Mong-Koo Foundation initiated the Art Village Project in 2015. This comprehensive programme combined arts education, cultural festivals, and spatial redevelopment into a single framework. The project sought not only to enhance cultural participation but also to reimagine Gyechon as a hub of cultural experimentation and resilience in the face of demographic decline.

Art as a Foundation for Community Renewal

The Art Village Project positioned Gyechon as more than a passive host for cultural activities. It cultivated what might be described as the value of the village: a space of hospitality where residents, artists, and visitors intersected (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010). The physical and symbolic transformation of the elementary school into a cultural venue illustrates how educational institutions can also serve as community anchors when reinterpreted through cultural practices (Fig. 2).

Figure 2
The Art Village Project and the Gyechon Classical Music Festival, based at Gyechon Elementary School since 2015



At the core of this transformation was the creation of the Gyechon Classical Music Festival. First launched in 2015, the festival was not imposed from outside but co-produced with residents, embedding itself in the rhythms of everyday life. Villagers prepared venues, hosted artists, and welcomed visitors, while local businesses benefited from new tourism flows (Fig. 3). The direct economic benefits of such festivals have been documented in other Korean cases, where cultural events stimulate local economies and create positive spillovers in lodging, dining, and retail sectors (Choi et al., 2021).

Figure 3

A festival made by the community, revitalizing the local economy during the Gyechon Classical Music Festival



The festival also pioneered new forms of spatial practice. Rather than restricting performances to concert halls, organisers creatively used village resources — courtyards, schoolyards, and natural landscapes — as stages. These settings not only enriched the audience experience but also redefined the rural landscape as a performative space (Belfiore & Bennett, 2007). By doing so, the festival demonstrated how art can serve as a foundation for community renewal, enhancing cultural participation while reinforcing social cohesion.

Furthermore, resident participation played a crucial role in embedding the festival into the local identity. Active involvement in planning, hosting, and performing strengthened community ties and connected Gyechon with external networks, illustrating how cultural projects can build social sustainability (Son & Krolikowski, 2024). Such participatory frameworks align with broader theories of collaborative planning, which emphasise inclusivity and co-production as being essential for resilience in fragmented societies (Healey, 1997).

Spatial Transformation through the Art Village Project

The integration of the Art Village Project with the annual festival produced visible and lasting spatial transformations in Gyechon. Until 2019, the main stage was located at Gyechon Elementary School, reflecting the project's educational origins and its connection to classical music education in the village. However, from 2020 onward, the festival shifted its primary venue into natural landscapes, symbolising a deeper integration between art and environment (Fig. 4). This relocation diversified the spatial settings of performances and reinforced Gyechon's identity as a cultural village where everyday spaces and natural scenery become active stages. This broadens both the aesthetic and experiential dimensions of the festival.

Figure 4

The new main stage set in nature, introduced in 2020



A second stage, constructed by Pyeongchang County in 2024, further demonstrated institutional recognition of the festival's growing regional significance. This development highlights how cultural interventions can attract public support and policy backing — a dynamic also observed in other international cases where rural revitalisation was tied to cultural branding (Zhou & Zheng, 2022). Building on this growing institutional recognition, more comprehensive plans were initiated through public–private partnerships to secure long-term resources and spatial transformation for Gyechon.

Beyond temporary event infrastructure, medium- and long-term plans for permanent facilities have emerged. In collaboration with Pyeongchang County and K'ARTS Creative Inc., the Gyechon Classic Art Village Project was launched as a public–private partnership supported by the central government (Fig. 5). Beginning in 2024, this four-year initiative is funded with a total budget of KRW 11 billion and aims to transform Gyechon into a cultural village by advancing both hardware and software components. On the one hand, physical development includes facilities such as the Gyechon Welcome Center, designed as a phased project integrating remodelling of existing buildings with new construction. On the other hand, cultural programming is reinforced through initiatives like the Classic Street Project, which envisions redesigning village streets and public spaces to accommodate performances, enhance visitor experiences, and strengthen the village's cultural identity. Together, these projects illustrate how cultural interventions can extend beyond festivals into urban design and landscape planning, shaping not only cultural life but also the physical environment of rural communities.

Figure 5

Comprehensive Project Plan Map for the Gyechon Classic Art Village



Private investment with Korea National University of Arts has increasingly accompanied these developments. Companies have provided resources for infrastructure and programming, reflecting a growing recognition of Gyechon as a cultural brand. Such public–private partnerships are critical for sustainability, aligning with findings that rural cultural revitalisation often depends on multi-scalar governance and collaborative financing (Qian et al., 2025; Liao et al., 2024). The integration of culture with tourism and ecological assets further demonstrates how diversified strategies can support rural revitalisation (Yang et al., 2025). In this way, Gyechon has become not merely a host for cultural activities but a performative village. Its spaces have been reconfigured to accommodate art, tourism, and community participation, demonstrating the material as well as symbolic power of cultural interventions.

Conclusion: A New Possibility for Rural Revitalization

The case of Gyechon highlights how art villages can function as performative spaces, blurring the boundaries between cultural production, everyday life, and spatial transformation. The festival not only reshaped how the village is perceived but also how it is inhabited, expanding its “functional population” — individuals who do not live locally but return regularly for cultural or social activities.

Conceptually, art villages may be viewed as urban retreats: spaces that restore nature, realise collective dreams, and rebuild community bonds. They provide respite from urban pressures while simultaneously offering sustainable models for rural futures. Crucially, the

participatory dimension ensured that revitalisation was not imposed from above but co-created. This participatory framework is key to long-term sustainability, mitigating risks of resident fatigue or external dependency (Healey, 1997; Son & Krolikowski, 2024).

At the same time, challenges remain. As Yúdice (2003) notes, culture's growing instrumentalisation raises questions about commercialisation and authenticity. Gyechon must balance its identity as a cultural brand with the lived realities of residents. Moreover, stable financial support remains essential to sustain initiatives beyond periodic events. Importantly, Gyechon has sought to extend the momentum of its festivals into broader cultural initiatives. Through public–private collaboration, the community has expanded the foundation of classical music education and developed diverse cultural cooperation projects, ensuring continuous local revitalisation and encouraging repeated visits by various functional populations. This cooperative framework demonstrates that sustainable cultural regeneration requires not only festivals but also educational and institutional platforms that anchor long-term engagement.

More broadly, the Gyechon case has attracted attention as Korea faces a nationwide population decline crisis. Rather than suggesting a universally applicable model, this case illustrates one possible configuration through which cultural projects can be linked to demographic challenges, serving as both symbolic and practical responses to shrinking communities. In Korea, many state-led revitalisation programmes are implemented through short-term, procurement-based outsourcing cycles, which often limit the accumulation of local cultural expertise, resulting in event-oriented interventions rather than sustained cultural development.

Against this backdrop, the Gyechon Festival represents a distinctive collaborative arrangement. The Korea National University of Arts has been involved in the continuous development of long-term cultural content, while sustained private funding — most notably from the Hyundai Motor Chung Mong-Koo Foundation — has provided symbolic stability and financial continuity. At the same time, Pyeongchang County has supported local operations and infrastructure, enabling the project to be embedded in everyday village life. Although successful municipality-led festivals do exist in Korea, Gyechon can be understood as a unique model where public institutions, private actors, and local communities work together to secure additional resources and capabilities. In this sense, the case demonstrates a context-specific form of cooperative governance that helps address gaps in cultural content, identity formation and community engagement within existing state-led frameworks, rather than a generic public–private partnership.

Nevertheless, the Gyechon Art Village Project demonstrates that cultural programming, when integrated with spatial transformation and community participation can help to prevent regional decline, even if it does not immediately reverse demographic decline While

comprehensive data showing a direct increase in the number of permanent residents is not yet available, the Gyechon Classic Festival and the associated classical music education programme at Gyechon Elementary School have led to a modest increase in student transfers from urban areas, indicating early signs of renewed local vitality.

Beyond the festival period, the village continues to function through ongoing educational activities and gradual improvements to everyday living infrastructure supported by Pyeongchang County. These efforts aim to stabilise and expand the village's population even during the off-season. In this sense, the festival operates as a spatial catalyst, with changes to the village closely linked to community revitalisation processes (Fig. 6). While the past decade has been focused on ensuring the continuity and maturity of the festival itself, the coming decade will emphasise consolidating everyday life by strengthening local services, enhancing living conditions and fostering longer-term residency and engagement. Gyechon therefore illustrates a transitional model in which cultural projects help to reconfigure local identity, sustain social resilience and open pathways towards more sustainable community life in shrinking rural contexts, rather than a completed demographic turnaround.

Figure 6
Festival as a tool for spatial transformation in villages: Sites of the Gyechon Classic Art Village.



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12

Following the Movements of Trees: Nature as a Portal to Creative Flow and Somatic Expression An Experiential Study on *EcoPoetry* and *VocalAesthesis* in Natural Environments

Alexia Kalogeropoulou
MSc, Phd (c), Poet, researcher

Abstract

This paper investigates the dynamic relationship between nature, creativity, and embodied artistic practices through the experiential workshop *EcoPoetry and VocalAesthesis*. Co-facilitated by Panayotis Terzakis (singer and voice coach) and Alexia Kalogeropoulou (poet and researcher), the workshop blends vocal improvisation, somatic movement, and ecological poetry within forest settings. Central to this study is the exploration of how sensory and kinaesthetic immersion in natural environments enhances creative flow, emotional regulation, and ecological awareness. Employing a practice-based methodology involving site-specific performances, reflective journaling, creative writing and movement improvisation, the research reveals that embodied presence in nature not only fosters artistic expression, but also a deeper somatic connection to the environment. The findings suggest significant implications for creative education, arts therapy, and environmental engagement, highlighting nature as a vital catalyst for holistic creative processes in contemporary contexts.

Keywords: Creativity, EcoPoetry, VocalAesthesis, performance, creative writing.

Following the Movements of Trees

In the digital age, marked by constant stimuli and growing emotional disconnection, many artists and educators are turning back to nature - not only as a source of inspiration but also as a means for meaningful reconnection and renewal. This paper centres on the experiential workshop *EcoPoetry and VocalAesthesis*, which investigates how immersive, embodied practices within natural environments can catalyse creative flow and deepen emotional regulation. Developed by Panayotis Terzakis, *VocalAesthesis* approaches the human voice as a profoundly somatic instrument, while *EcoPoetry* emphasises poetic expression rooted in ecological consciousness and sensory immersion.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on multiple theoretical perspectives to frame the research:

- **Ecocriticism** (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996) highlights the interconnection between literature, art, and ecological awareness, emphasising the role of natural environments in shaping human perception and creative expression.
- **Contemporary environmental aesthetics** (Berleant, 2004, 2018) provides a lens for understanding immersive engagement with natural landscapes as aesthetic and participatory experiences, linking perceptual experience with ethical and ecological awareness.
- **Psychology of flow** (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) explains the conditions under which deep engagement and optimal creative experience occur, informing the workshop's design to foster immersion and focus.
- **Embodied cognition** (Johnson, 2009) and somatic arts approaches (Rappaport & Rubin, 2011; Knill, Barba, & Fuchs, 2004; Koch & Fuchs, 2011) frame the role of bodily awareness and movement in knowledge, perception, and creative processes.
- **Biophilia and arts-health research** (Wilson, 2016; Bungay, Chatterjee, & Hogan, 2021) provide evidence for the positive impact of nature engagement and creative practices on human wellbeing and ecological empathy.

Together, these perspectives create an integrated framework connecting the workshop's practices, movement, voice, and creative writing, to ecological awareness, creative flow, and self-reflective insight. The works of Berleant (2004, 2018) emphasise the aesthetic and participatory qualities of natural environments, while Csikszentmihalyi (1990), Johnson (2009), and somatic arts theorists illustrate how embodied and mindful engagement can foster deep immersion and creative insight. Rappaport and Rubin (2011) highlight the value of reflective expressive practices for accessing internal experience and creative intelligence, and Wilson (2016) and Bungay et al. (2021) situate these processes

within the broader context of biophilia, wellbeing, and arts-based educational practice. This convergence supports the following conceptual cycle: engagement with nature → embodied movement → vocal expression → expressive writing → self-awareness → enhanced creativity → creative writing.

Research Questions

This study addresses the following research questions:

- *How does immersion in natural settings affect creative thinking, artistic expression, and processes of self-reflection?* (RQ1)
- *In what ways does kinaesthetic interaction with nature — such as mimicking the movements of trees — act as a catalyst for creative flow and emotional regulation?* (RQ2)
- *How can creative writing practices, when integrated with embodied and vocal exploration in nature, contribute to increased self-awareness and the articulation of inner experience?* (RQ3)

By expanding the inquiry to include expressive writing and self-awareness, the research highlights the multidimensional ways in which nature can act as a co-creator in human creativity. These questions situate the study within broader discussions of ecological aesthetics, somatic psychology, and arts-based education, emphasizing the creative and reflective potential of embodied practices.

Methodology

A practice-based approach was employed, focusing on experiential learning and creative embodiment. The workshop took place in a forest near Dionysos, Greece, and included:

- Site-specific performance
- Movement improvisation
- Vocal improvisation based on the VocalAesthesis method[12]
- Reflective journaling
- Creative writing based on the EcoPoetry techniques[13]

Participants were guided to attune to the movements of trees through breath, posture, and gesture, embodying their qualities before transitioning into vocal exploration and creative writing. Data was collected through observational notes, and participants' written

[12] Developed by Panayotis Terzakis, VocalAesthesis approaches the human voice as a profoundly somatic instrument.

[13] Ecopoetry is a broad field that focuses on environmental poetics and the human–nature relationship

reflections, which were analysed thematically to identify emergent patterns related to creative flow and somatic engagement.

Embodied Practice in Nature

Participants were invited to root themselves physically and mentally into the forest environment, mimicking tree structures and engaging in slow, intuitive movement. Awareness extended beyond the individual, promoting a collective presence that blurred the boundaries between self and environment. This embodied immersion fostered grounding, openness, and a deepened sensory connection to the living landscape.

Following movement exercises, vocal practices employed techniques such as deep humming and vowel projection, encouraging emotional release and resonance with the surrounding nature. Many participants reported experiencing their voice as echoed by the forest, which enhanced feelings of belonging and presence.

The final phase involved creative writing, where participants transformed their embodied experiences into poetic language. Writing emerged organically from sensory memory, completing a creative loop from body to voice to word, and illustrating the synthesis of ecological consciousness with personal artistic expression.

Key Findings

The findings presented below emerged from a qualitative analysis of data collected throughout the workshop. Data sources included participants' written reflections, post-session questionnaires, creative writing outputs produced at different stages of the workshop, and observational field notes taken by the facilitator. A thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring experiential patterns related to grounding, embodiment, emotional awareness, and creative expression. In addition, comparative reading was applied to early and later writing samples in order to trace qualitative shifts in language, imagery, and affective depth. The attribution of specific outcomes to particular practices is based on the sequencing of the exercises and participants' explicit reflections connecting their experiences to the methods employed.

Nature-based grounding practices increased creative receptivity and imaginative openness. Participants reported heightened sensory awareness and reduced cognitive preoccupation, which was reflected in subsequent writing through richer spatial attention, vivid imagery, and fluid imaginative associations.

Embodied practices in nature contributed to a reduction in internal mental chatter and greater emotional clarity. Participants described a shift from effort-driven writing to a more

receptive, responsive mode of expression, indicating that embodiment functioned as a preparatory condition for reflective and emotionally coherent creativity.

Vocal exercises based on the *VocalAesthesis* method facilitated experiences of resonance, emotional release, and expressive expansion. These effects were evident in the sonic qualities, rhythm, and emotional intensity of the texts produced after the vocal work, suggesting a strengthened connection between bodily sensation, voice, and language.

Initial discomfort related to exposure diminished over time through group support and the environmental anonymity provided by the natural setting. This dynamic reduced self-consciousness and enabled participants to take creative risks with greater ease.

Comparative analysis of creative writing outputs revealed clear qualitative shifts: texts produced after the immersive, embodied, and reflective practices demonstrated richer metaphorical language, more vivid natural imagery, and greater emotional depth than earlier exercises.

> Overall, the findings indicate that immersive, embodied, and nature-based practices support an integrated creative process that enhances both artistic expression and self-awareness, positioning ecopoetry-informed methods as effective tools for relational and experiential creative development.

The key findings of the study can be summarized as follows:

- Nature-based grounding increased creative receptivity and imaginative thought.
- Participants experienced a reduction in internal mental chatter and increased emotional clarity.
- Embodied interaction with nature facilitated intuitive and authentic creative expression.
- Vocal exercises based on the *VocalAesthesis* method helped participants experience resonance and emotional release, further enhancing their expressive capacities.
- Initial discomfort with exposure diminished through group support and environmental anonymity.
- The creative writing produced after these experiences demonstrated richer metaphorical language, vivid natural imagery, and greater emotional depth compared to earlier writing exercises conducted throughout the workshop, indicating an integrated development of creativity and self-awareness.

Reflections and Implications

This research suggests that embodied engagement with natural environments offers a potent avenue for creative and emotional expression. The workshop model promotes a shift from product-driven creativity toward process-oriented, ecological engagement. These

practices hold potential for incorporation into educational settings such as creative writing, voice training, and environmental education programs. Additionally, the integration of vocal and somatic techniques with expressive writing connects directly to the arts, self-awareness, and personal growth, highlighting their value for fostering reflective insight, artistic development, and emotional resilience.

Further research could explore longitudinal effects of embodied ecological practices and their applicability in diverse cultural settings. The findings also call for expanded interdisciplinary collaboration among ecocriticism, somatic psychology, and arts education to foster holistic creative development rooted in environmental consciousness.

Conclusion

In the face of ecological crises and widespread creative fatigue, returning to nature through embodied, co-creative practices offers pathways toward deeper connection and authentic expression. This study advocates for a relational, ecological model of creativity — one where voice, movement, and writing are deeply connected to the living world. Such an approach not only enriches artistic practice but also fosters ecological empathy and holistic wellbeing.

This study explored the interplay between nature, embodied practices, and creative expression through the *EcoPoetry* and *VocalAesthesis* workshop. Findings provide clear evidence addressing each research question:

- **Impact of immersion in natural settings on creativity and self-reflection (RQ1):** Participants demonstrated enhanced creative receptivity and imaginative thought, alongside reduced internal mental chatter. Reflective writing showed richer metaphorical language, vivid natural imagery, and greater emotional depth, illustrating those immersive experiences in nature support both artistic expression and introspective awareness. This aligns with ecological aesthetics (Berleant, 2004, 2018) and biophilia theory (Wilson, 2016), which emphasize the role of natural environments in fostering perceptual engagement and wellbeing.
- **Role of kinaesthetic interaction with nature in creative flow and emotional regulation (RQ2):** Embodied movement, such as mimicking tree structures and attuning to the forest environment, facilitated intuitive and authentic expression while enhancing emotional clarity. Participants' accounts indicate that kinaesthetic engagement served as a catalyst for creative flow, reducing effort-driven expression and enabling responsive, somatically informed writing. These findings support theories of embodied cognition and somatic arts (Johnson, 2009; Rappaport & Rubin, 2011).

- **Integration of creative writing with embodied and vocal practices for self-awareness (RQ3):** Vocal exercises and writing practices combined with movement enabled participants to translate embodied experiences into expressive language, strengthening the connection between body, voice, and imagination. The resulting texts evidenced heightened emotional intensity and reflective depth, confirming that integrative, nature-based methodologies promote self-awareness and creative articulation. This outcome reflects the theoretical convergence of somatic arts, flow psychology, and ecocritical perspectives, illustrating a holistic, relational model of creativity.

Overall, this research demonstrates that immersive, embodied, and ecological practices not only enhance artistic expression but also cultivate self-reflective insight, emotional regulation, and ecological attunement. By linking findings explicitly to the RQs and theoretical framework, the study underscores the value of combining *EcoPoetry* and *VocalAesthesis* method in nature as a model for relational and experiential creative development. These findings reflect preliminary insights from an ongoing study, highlighting directions for further research and continued exploration of nature-based, embodied creative practices.

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13

Reading the City: The Performative Function of Text and the Dramaturgy of Public Space

Georgia Kanellopoulou
Dramaturg, Director, Researcher
MA Theatre and Society: Staging, Didactics and Social Applications,
Department of Theatre Studies, School of Fine Arts, University of Peloponnese

Abstract

This study examines the performative function of written text in public urban spaces and positions the city as an entity to be navigated both visually and textually. The city is a text: layered, unstable, and annotated by its inhabitants. Textual interventions in the urban landscape operate as performative gestures that transform the perception, experience, and memory of space, drawing on performance studies, spatial theory, and semiotics. A stencil on a wall, a handwritten note on a lamppost or a name inscribed in a corner may alter the rhythm and significance of a location, inviting the passerby into a fragmented yet intimate act of reading. The city becomes a palimpsest, marked by layers of presence, intention, and interruption. The paper draws on examples ranging from graffiti and activist slogans to anonymous tagging and poetic street interventions. Using the city of Athens as a case study, it examines how these textual presences raise questions about authorship, legality, ephemerality, and visibility, while also proposing an expanded dramaturgical field in which language performs materially within the urban environment. In dialogue with the work of Barthes, de Certeau, and Lefebvre, the study reconceptualises text as an embodied spatial practice, one that not only marks the surfaces of the city but also participates in its ongoing performance. Text in the city performs with and through space, infusing the everyday with resonance. These textual presences contribute to a dramaturgy of public space, where language becomes part of the spatial and affective atmosphere that shapes how the city is seen, felt, and understood. In this sense, text in public space functions both as an expressive presence and as a perceptual intervention into the city's evolving narrative.

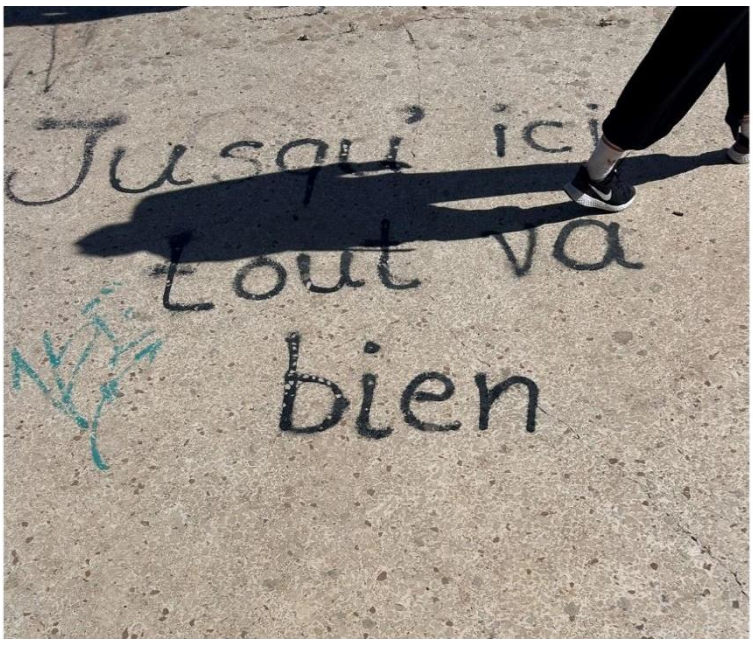
Keywords: Urban Dramaturgy, Performative Text, Public Space

Walking the City

High up on Ymittos Hill in Athens, Greece, an abandoned building stands, its walls a canvas for countless tags and graffiti. The passage culminates as you walk down a narrow corridor to an unprotected balcony overlooking the city. There, inscribed on the floor, is the phrase: "Jusqu'ici tout va bien" or, "So far, so good" (Figure 1).

The impact of these words on a reader can vary significantly, ranging from being unnoticed to appearing light or ironic. However, for anyone familiar with Kassovitz's 1995 film *La Haine* (Hate), the words carry a profoundly different weight. The film famously opens with the lines: “Have you heard about the guy who fell off a skyscraper? On his way down, past each floor, he kept saying to reassure himself: So far, so good. So far, so good. It doesn't matter how you fall. It's how you land”. When this phrase appears on the edge of a balcony overlooking the city, the spatial context intensifies its emotional impact, evoking themes of falling, vulnerability, and the tangible threat of a literal or metaphorical fall. This encounter demonstrates that to move through the city is to engage in a continual act of performative spatial engagement.

Figure 1
The floor of an abandoned building's balcony. Ymittos Hill, Athens. Photograph by the author.



The city's built environment compels a continuous and subconscious decoding. Beyond simple physical navigation, pedestrians actively process a torrent of urban text: every street sign, advertisement, and crucial informal inscription. This constant intellectual and visual activity is how the city's surfaces assemble into a layered and evolving narrative (Figure 2).

Figure 2
Urban inscriptions from cities across Europe. Photographs by the author.



As Andron (2023, p. 2) observes, urban walls and surfaces possess the "capacity to capture and generate cultures of publicness in cities," asserting that "there is no urban culture that is not defined by the way it uses its public surfaces." These surfaces operate as sites of cultural negotiation, inscription, and expression. Similarly, Barthes (2005, p. 35) reminds us that text can act as a "parasitic message", one that breathes secondary layers of meaning into the image, enriching and complicating its interpretation.

Writing the City

Who writes these texts, and to what end? This question immediately reveals a core performative dimension of graffiti. The act of inscribing words onto a wall — whether as a political slogan, a personal tag, or a declaration of love — constitutes a deliberate, performative gesture directed towards a public: the fellow inhabitants and passersby who will, consciously or unconsciously, serve as its audience. (Figure 3)

Figure 3
Urban inscriptions in Greek. Photographs by the author.



Graffiti tags, for example, which seemingly consist of no particular artistry, are frequently at the center of public debate, positioned between artistic expression and urban degradation. For some, a tag represents creative intervention and political voice; for others, it signifies vandalism, disorder, and a threat to the aesthetic coherence of the city. It is often within this very tension, this battle over meaning and control, that the act of writing becomes an act of resistance**.** Fundamentally, these disputes arise from differing views on access, authorship and authority over shared spaces, with the act of writing itself representing a direct challenge to established norms. Nonetheless, a graffiti tag can function as a declaration of presence, a marking of territory, and a performance of identity. "Cities as a whole can be understood as sites upon which an urban(e) citizenry, in the 'practice of everyday life,' performs its collective memory, imagination and aspiration, performing its sense of self both to itself and beyond" (Makeham, 2005, pp. 151–152). In this light, the graffiti tag is a performative act embedded in the dramaturgy of urban space, an act that says "I was here, my name is part of the city" or "I claim my right to this city's surface and narrative".

The centre of Athens, in particular, offers a striking example of this phenomenon, as a city perpetually inscribed, a layered palimpsest of text. As Lefebvre (2003, p. 18) notes “The city (...) is a book that never ends and contains many blank or torn pages” (Figure 4, Figure 5).

Figure 4
Phrases from the Athens' centre. Photographs by the author.



Figure 5
Phrase from the Athens' centre. Photograph by Romanos Lioutas.



Much of Athens' street writing is political, often expressing frustration, anger, and defiance directed toward the state. Walls become platforms for dissent, challenging authority and voicing socio-political grievances. Urban space is shaped by “behaviours whose theatricality can dominate public space, undermining the mimetic conformity” (Stavridis, 2002, p. 23). Such graffiti, in this view, is not only expressive but disruptive, capable of challenging normative uses of space. In this sense, street writing participates in a wider political context, one that negotiates visibility and regulation, where one party writes and the other erases.

Reading the City

Beyond the act of writing itself, there exists a second, equally vital performative function: the act of reading. Reading is an unplanned but active engagement with the history of the city, shaped also by spatial, political, and cultural context. For example, the phrase sprayed outside the Greek Parliament that reads: *“Down with the nation, long live the proletariat”* (Figure 6). While the words carry meaning on their own, their spatial placement, aesthetic appearance, the social event that they are referencing, transforms them into a performative intervention, a pointed critique inscribed at the symbolic heart of state power.

Figure 6
Phrases outside the Greek Parliament. Photographs by Romanos Lioutas.



"Down with the nation, long live the proletariat."



"Shit on the Nazis"

Similarly, one might recall the writing of the names of the fifty-seven victims from the recent Tempi train crash, scrawled in red paint on the ground right before the Greek parliament, only to be erased and then rewritten, countless times (Figure 7). The repetition of this act — and the persistence of the rewriting — becomes a form of collective ritual. It is a defiant gesture against erasure, transforming space into a site of mourning, protest, and political demand. Until today, students, citizens and the families of the victims' guard and protect the written names of the dead, so the city cleaning services don't erase them again, maybe until justice is made. Also, the very placement of this text, by simple rules of space and semiotics directly points the blame or at least the responsibility (Figure 8).

Figure 7

The names of the fifty-seven victims of the Tempi train crash. Photographs by grtimes.gr.





In these examples, the spatial and temporal dimensions of reading are foregrounded. Text not only marks space but also animates it by generating tension, inflecting public narratives, provoking certain emotions and staging encounters between personal and collective memory and institutional authority. The ongoing dialogue between those who write and those who erase reveals a fundamental truth: writing on public surfaces is a powerful form of communal participation in the city's evolving history. It reflects an enduring human impulse, to leave a mark, to be heard, to contribute to the shared narrative of urban life.

The Dramaturgy of Public Space

This constant interplay of written words, their intended and unintended meanings, their placements, and their interaction with the built environment constitutes what I refer to as the dramaturgy of public space. The city is “a theater of social action” (Makeham, 2005, p. 150), positioning the urban environment as an inherently performative setting. And if we define dramaturgy not only as “the composition of a work, whether read as a script or viewed in performance,” but also as “the discussion of that composition” (Turner & K. Behrndt, 2008, p. 4), dramaturgy is eventually a mode of observation and analysis, encompassing the structure, event, and context of a performance.

Figure 8

Black balloons carrying a banner that reads “Murderers.” Photographs by Romanos Lioutas.



"Murderers"

Public text, in this context, operates as both script and performance, contributing to an ever-evolving *mise-en-scène* of the city. And much like text in theatre, it creates meaning. The very act of reading in context draws us into the performance of the urban as active participants. This dynamic interplay between text and context ensures that the city is never static. Meaning is always in flux, continuously produced and reproduced through the acts of writing and reading. “Any surface inscription only makes sense when it takes place. It signifies from the moment of surface encounter as a result of a negotiation with its location” (Andron, 2023, p. 13).

It's crucial to acknowledge, however, that the texts we encounter in the city are not always expressions of collective memory, resistance, or social cohesion. Urban surfaces are truly democratic in their accessibility, and this means they also become canvases for messages that can be divisive, offensive, or even hateful. We see this in the form of fascist slogans, aggressive football team rivalries, or xenophobic statements. While my analysis draws examples primarily from text as an act of resistance, as a means for marginalised voices to claim space and articulate dissent, it's vital to recognise that these are not the only examples that exist in the city and they vary as its inhabitants.

Figure 9

The mock wall of the Academy of Athens. Photographs by the author.



Engagement with urban text often involves an experience of the *threshold*, a "spatiotemporal experience of transition" that marks a shift between states, spaces, or identities. The threshold is an "intermediate place" where one encounters elements that signal the approach of difference (Stavridis, 2002, p. 221). Crossing such a threshold generates a temporary distance from one's destination, creating a condition of becoming, of being prepared to be somewhere else, which, in turn, alters the subject, "radically or subtly" (p. 221). Crucially, thresholds arise through movement and transformation. As such, they can be understood as *scenes* in themselves (p. 232), "crafted from matter and meaning simultaneously" (p. 255). In this context, reading a text in a public space becomes a threshold experience: a passage through meaning, spatiality and subjectivity that temporarily disrupts and reshapes our relationship with the city. For example, there is a mock wall seemingly protecting the Academy of Athens building on Panepistimiou Street (Figure 9). This wall is the ultimate canvas of text, which is usually written every time a protest ends, since all the demonstrations end up in this street. The wall is repainted every morning. However, traces of previous writings can always be seen, or remembered (Figure 10).

Figure 10

The mock wall of the Academy of Athens, graffitied with the phrase “I remember everything.” Photograph by Romanos Lioutas.



"I remember everything"

Conclusion

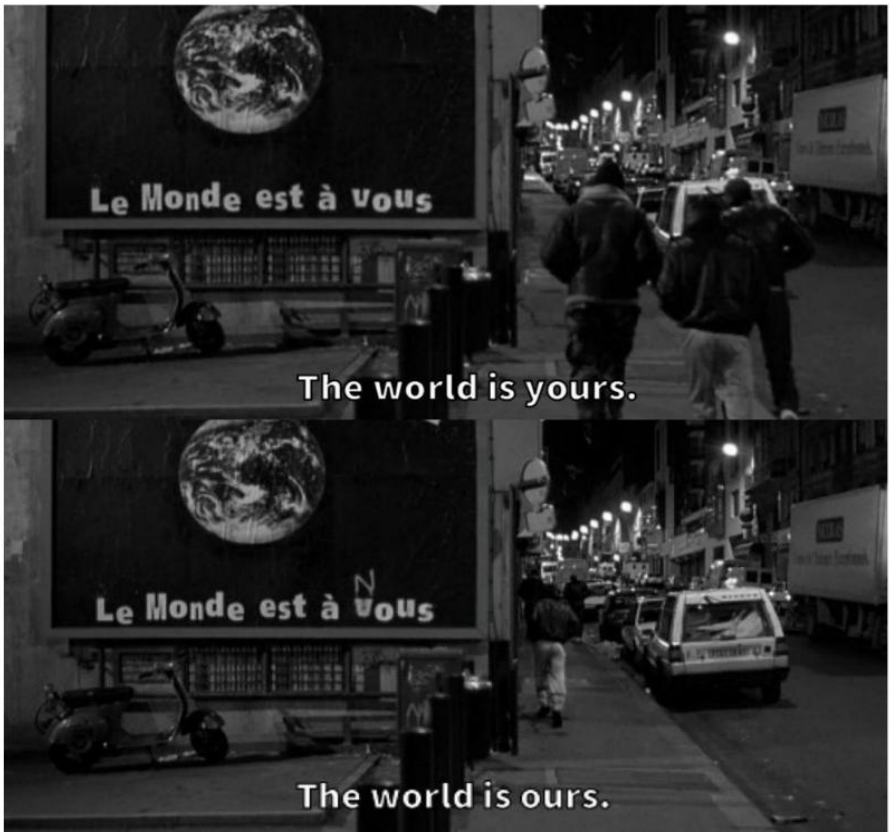
The written word in Athens forms a critical layer of the urban fabric. While cities possess a materiality that performance does not, they remain “as imaginary and ephemeral as performance, because [the city] is a performance of individual and collective values” (Makeham, 2005, p. 157). In Athens, this performance is localised in specific scenes of high symbolic tension, where text intervenes directly in the city’s political and affective life. By examining who writes these texts and to what end, this study demonstrates that authorship ranges from grieving citizens at the Greek Parliament to anonymous writers on the Academy’s mock wall, all of whom use writing as a means of claiming a “right to the surface,” and thus a right to the city itself (Andron, 2023, p. 5).

These locations function as political and intellectual thresholds within the urban fabric, spaces where institutional authority, collective memory, and everyday movement converge. Writing resists erasure and turns the city into a living archive, one that demands to be continually read, protected, and rewritten. In this sense, any urban wanderer becomes a reader of a distinct Athenian history, encountering text as part of an unfolding dramaturgy of public space. Walking through the city thus becomes a performative

practice. Drawing on de Certeau's assertion that "the act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language" (1988, p. 97), this study understands movement as a rhetoric that challenges dominant spatial regimes. Through walking, the pedestrian "writes" the city by assembling fragments of text, place, and memory into lived meaning.

Finally, the figure of the flâneur emerges as a productive lens through which to understand this process. As Stavridis (2002, p. 261) describes, the wandering observer discovers meaning within the fragments of the metropolis. In Athens, the flâneur becomes a reader of a city marked by crisis and resistance, where each walk unfolds as a distinct performative text, both a mental and emotional document of the city's history, written in the very moment of movement (Figure 11). These specific locations operate as scenes in which language performs materially to challenge institutional power. In this sense, the performative encounter between text and surface in the Athenian urban fabric becomes an act of creative resistance, enacting a vital dramaturgy of the everyday and reclaiming the right to the city, a right increasingly threatened by neoliberal politics, gentrification, and the dehumanising forces of postmodern life.

Figure 11
Snapshots of Mathieu Kassovitz's 1995 film La Haine.



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14

Scenographic Void: Aerial Street Performances and the Urban Space

Marcela I. Oteíza Silva
Professor of Theatre, Wesleyan University

Abstract

Street performance scenography engages the material and spatial conditions of urban life, often through built structures and site-based installations. This research expands that field by investigating how aerial scenography activates the negative space above the city. Referring to *Pedaleando al Cielo* (Cycling to Heaven) by Theater Tol (Antwerp, Belgium), performed at Festival Internacional Santiago a Mil (FITAM), this paper explores how the vertical void of the sky becomes a scenographic commons — a space of aesthetic rupture, political contestation, and collective imagination.

The central research question is as follows: how can aerial scenography create meaning in public space by reconfiguring the sky as a performative site? Drawing on the concepts of expanded scenography, ecoscenography, and spatial theory, this paper examines how suspended, kinetic objects can transform audience perspectives and generate ephemeral architectures that challenge the dominance of surveillance, militarisation, and environmental precarity in aerial space.

Findings suggest that the upward gaze, mobilised through scenographic design, activates a counter-gesture of poetic resistance. By suspending bodies and imagery above eye level, the performance interrupts spatial hierarchies and reveals the sky as a charged, geopolitical terrain for temporary world-making.

Keywords: Aerial performance, scenography, urban space, street theatre, atmospheric design

Scenographic Void

In contemporary scenography, the urban environment is understood as an active spatial and social agent that participates in the creation of a performance's meaning. Street performance design, in particular, challenges the boundaries of the theatrical stage by engaging directly with the material and atmospheric dynamics of public space and the cityscape. While considerable attention has been given to grounded interventions — temporary stages, mobile sets, and installations — this paper turns its gaze upward to explore the scenographic potential of aerial space. What happens when the sky itself becomes the performance space?

Investigating the case study of the Theatre Tol production *Pedaleando al Cielo* (Cycling to Heaven[14]), presented at the Festival Internacional Santiago a Mil in Chile, I ask whether the sky can function as a charged non-site, akin to the scenographic abstraction of the black box theatre. The black box is often considered to be simultaneously neutral and contextual: neutral because it provides a "canvas space" where composition can be created, designed, and transformed within a defined architectural volume; contextual because theatre and performance always emerge from specific sociopolitical and temporal conditions, thus bearing an inherent degree of site-specificity.

Here, I propose thinking about these two notions — neutral abstraction and sociopolitical specificity — together, in order to consider the sky as both an abstract and contextual scenographic space. It is a space in which a composition can be created independently of place, yet inevitably oriented towards specific audiences. But more importantly, the sky, as a globally shared yet individually experienced space, becomes a porous membrane that connects and envelops us. In aerial street performance, the charged sky becomes a site of contestation — no longer neutral, but thick with memory, surveillance, spectacle, and resistance.

Pedaleando al Cielo

Performed at the 2015 Festival Internacional Santiago a Mil (FITAM**)** in the Metropolitan Region of Chile, the Belgian company Theater Tol's *Pedaleando al Cielo* is a spectacular example of an aerial operatic circus.

Founded in 1998 by Lot Seuntjens, and since 2023 led by a collaborative team composed of Talitha De Decker, Benjamien Lycke, and Lukas Proot, Theater Tol is known for its large-scale, site-responsive spectacles.

[14] Translated by the author; *Cielo* in Spanish can be translated as both sky and heaven.

> Their interdisciplinary approach blends aerial choreography, live music, visual storytelling, and cinematic imagery, often staged in public or non-traditional urban spaces. Their productions transform urban spaces into poetic dreamworlds, drawing from opera, street theatre, and visual art to craft emotionally rich narratives centered on themes of love, memory, and transcendence. (Theater Tol, n.d., para. 1).

The scenographic composition of *Pedaleando al Cielo* is defined by its vertical axis and aerial suspension, which transform the night sky into a charged sky. A large circular truss structure is suspended mid-air by a crane or rigging apparatus, from which multiple bicycles and performers are lifted and hung — forming a kinetic aerial tableau. The performers, dressed in brightly coloured costumes, are integrated into sculptural bicycle apparatuses. The performers evoke a Western European aesthetic tradition, drawing on celestial motifs, angelic figures, and symbolic ascension to stage a mythic journey between Earth and heaven. The actors/acrobats pedal while rotating high above the street, animating the charged sky with movement, song, lights, and video; effectively imprinting the charged space regardless of their actual location.

Lighting is located strategically to sculpt both the bodies and the metal bicycles against the backdrop of night. The design integrates the negative space, light, and the human form in motion, crafting a fleeting composition that elevates from eye level to hovering above the city. The sky itself becomes the scenographic field — a charged sky activated through visual composition and collective spectatorship.

The dramaturgy of the performance unfolds as a visual and kinetic narrative that privileges spectacle, fantasy, and transformation. Rather than following a linear or text-based script, it is composed of a series of aerial vignettes that evoke ascension, dreams, and communal wonder. The performers embody figures of flight — angelic or celestial travellers — enacting a metaphorical journey "toward heaven." Accompanied by music and synchronized movement, the dramaturgy is driven by visual images and sound.

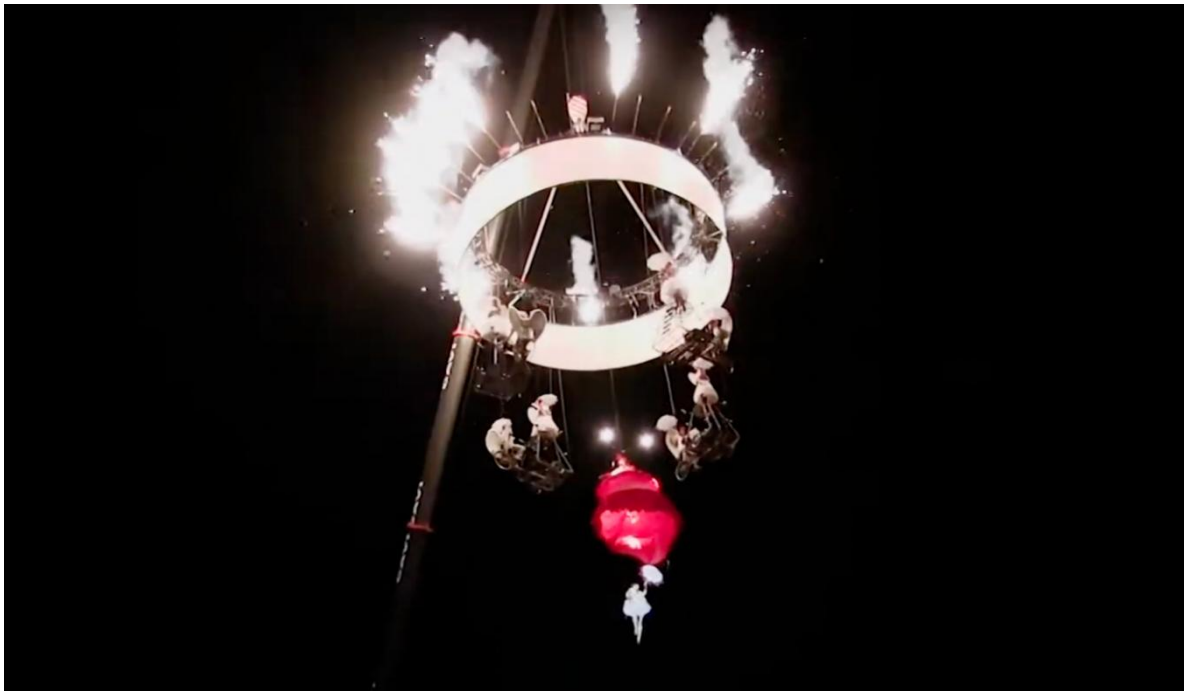
Ultimately, *Pedaleando al Cielo* invites the audience to look upward — both physically and metaphorically—activating the vertical dimension of the city as a site of poetic encounter.

Analysis

During the early seventies, Smithson (1972) discussed the distinction between “site” and “non-site”. Non-site referring to the abstract nature of the non-place of the gallery or museum — similar, in a way, to an empty canvas, a white page, or the black box of the theatre. In his writing, the non-site has specific characteristics, such as closed limits, inner coordinates, addition, centre, non-place (abstraction), and singularity, which are set in opposition to the characteristics of the site: open limits, outside coordinates, subtraction, edge, some place

(physical)D, and multiplicity. Smithson's definition of the non-site suggests a space devoid of context and meaning — a space that, in the contemporary understanding of site-specific work, might not even exist.

Figure 1
Theater Tol Pedaleando al Cielo, Santiago 2015. (Photography from footage Santiago(en) Vivo by the Author, Marcela Oteíza Silva).



In contrast, Kwon (2002) proposed that site-oriented work refers to artistic practices that engage with a site not only as a physical space, but also as a network of meanings, identities, and relations — which are often mobile, temporary, and informed by research or community interaction. The extension of Kwon's site-specificity beyond its original formalist constraints, emphasizing contextual responsiveness rather than fixed emplacement, alongside Smithson's notion of the non-site, help us to understand the kind of charged space utilised by aerial performance companies — spaces where the void of the sky, the non-place, becomes a scenographically responsive and contextually driven space. I argue that this is the charged space of *Pedaleando al Cielo* by Theater Tol.

Drawing on Smithson's "site/non-site" definition and Kwon's reconceptualisation of site-specificity as a network of mobile meanings and relations, I propose that the sky in *Pedaleando al Cielo* functions as a scenographically charged non-site — an abstract yet responsive space. To understand further this idea, I turn to Foucault's (1997) notion of heterotopia, where real, interstitial spaces simultaneously reflect, invert, and unsettle the normative order of society. The sky is thus a real space, yet stands apart from and can even invert or represent all the other sites within a culture. It can be seen as a contemporary

example of a heterotopia, showcasing the complex and evolving relationship between world technology, international political space, and our society.

In addition, the audience's act of looking upwards in aerial street performance renders the audience physically and affectively vulnerable. Unlike in the controlled conditions of a proscenium stage, where spectators remain grounded and shielded, the upward gaze exposes the neck, the chest, and the breath, uncovering a posture of openness and receptivity. In *Pedaleando al Cielo*, this spectatorial position invites a surrender to both wonder and risk: the risk of a certain imbalance, a kind of disorientation, or maybe emotional exposure. Simultaneously, the performance unfolds in a sky that is both local and global: charged and abstract. This sky is shared across borders, yet is shaped by specific political, climatic, and cultural conditions. It becomes a scenographic void that holds multiple meanings. This apparent non-site is charged with multiple entanglements and histories of surveillance, migration, climate change, and political power.

Conclusion

The charged sky activated in *Pedaleando al Cielo* is not simply an aesthetic space: it is a rupture in the fabric of urban life. In Foucault's terms, it is a space that reflects and distorts the order of things. The sky is not a neutral expanse: it is a contested territory charged with the weight of surveillance technologies, migratory routes, military airspace, and environmental collapse. When Theatre Tol lifts bodies into this void, it reclaims the sky from these notions, transforming it into a site of poetic occupation and collective imagination.

The scenographic objects suspended above the eye level of the audiences do not merely create a composition against the backdrop of the sky; they also challenge the structural hierarchies embedded in who has the right to visibility, to safety, and to movement in public space. The performance stages a counter-gesture to sky domination, proposing a visual alternative rooted in performative aesthetics and collectivity against drones, satellites, and national borders.

As Ferdman's (2013) scholarship suggests, scenographic practices that operate at the edges — flexible, mobile and participatory — can disrupt dominant spatial logics. In *Pedaleando al Cielo*, the upward gaze is a gesture not only of wonder, but one of exposure and vulnerability. It activates the body in space — uncovers the chest, the breath and the risk of imbalance — producing a spectatorial posture that resists the norm often inscribed by architectural or proscenium-based theatre.

This paper argues that the sky in aerial street performance is not an abstract backdrop but a charged, geopolitical non-site — a space inscribed with histories of domination and potential for resistance. By inhabiting the charged sky, *Pedaleando al Cielo*

transforms the void above the city into a scenographic commons — a space where suspended bodies, atmospheric effects, and collective attention produce a temporary world. In this ephemeral moment, scenography asserts itself as a political practice: one capable of reorienting our relationship to place, to each other, and to the systems that shape how and where we transit, gather, and live.

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15

Public Space, Enchantment and Resistance

Anthi Kougia
Theatre-Performance & Visual Artist

Abstract

This paper presents three site-specific performance works that reflect processes of ongoing research related to theatricality and the exploration of performance spacing through the experience of enchantment. By setting weird creatures or paradoxical ‘‘off’’ situations in public space, the intention of the artist is to plant small acts of resistance through challenging the hard logic of materials, reversals, surprises, deviations and distortions of the given perspective.

Keywords: Site-Specific Performance, Public Space, Enchantment, Women.

Public Space, Enchantment and Resistance

“Almost a century has passed since Max Weber argued in “Science as a Vocation” that “the fate of our times is characterized, above all, by the disenchantment of the world,” a phenomenon he attributed to the intellectualization and rationalization produced by the modern forms of social organization” (Federici, 2019, p. 188). Federici (2019) writes that “re-enchanting the world is a practice that is central to most anti-systemic movements and a precondition for resistance to exploitation (…) for it connects what capitalism has divided: our relation with nature, with others and with our bodies’’ (p.188-189).

Drawing from Federici’s concept of re-enchantment, in this paper I will present three site-specific performance works, whereby enchantment was used as a means of exploring public space and the limits of theatricality from a feminine perspective and through female bodies. By enchantment I mean acts of challenging the hard logic of materials, reversals, surprises, deviations and distortions of the given perspective, whilst using the absurd and humour as a proposed means of resistance against rigid socio-political systems.

Through the site-specific performative interventions, I intend to explore the grassroots and bottom-up perspective which suggests a radical, feminine, collaborative and politically engaged approach.

The following works — by using public space as a playground- invite citizens to reclaim, redefine and re-imagine their relationship with public space, one that is becoming more and more disenchanted, less and less collective and mostly a platform for consumption.

“TOURISTAS’’ by Anthi Kougia

“Touristas” is considered an ongoing project. Kougia’s adventure started in 2019.The idea is that the artist dressed in a massive costume becomes an ephemeral, in-transit creature and in collaboration with a local photographer, explores various cities in all their trauma and glory.

Touristas” is a very special and not exactly discreet creature that wanders around the world. This creature creates a universe that alludes to various different worlds: from the mythological figure of Atlas that carries the world on his shoulders, to animals such as snails or turtles that carry their own home, able to hide inside their shells. What initiated the creation of the costume was the act of carrying. What do we carry within us when we relocate ourselves in space? The name “Touristas’’ uses irony, as the creature, — a tourist in the city — becomes a sightseeing object itself. In this way, the work attempts to explore how people see and experience what is perceived as the Other.

Figure 1
Touristas, 2019, Lisbon. Photographer: Manon Yanes.



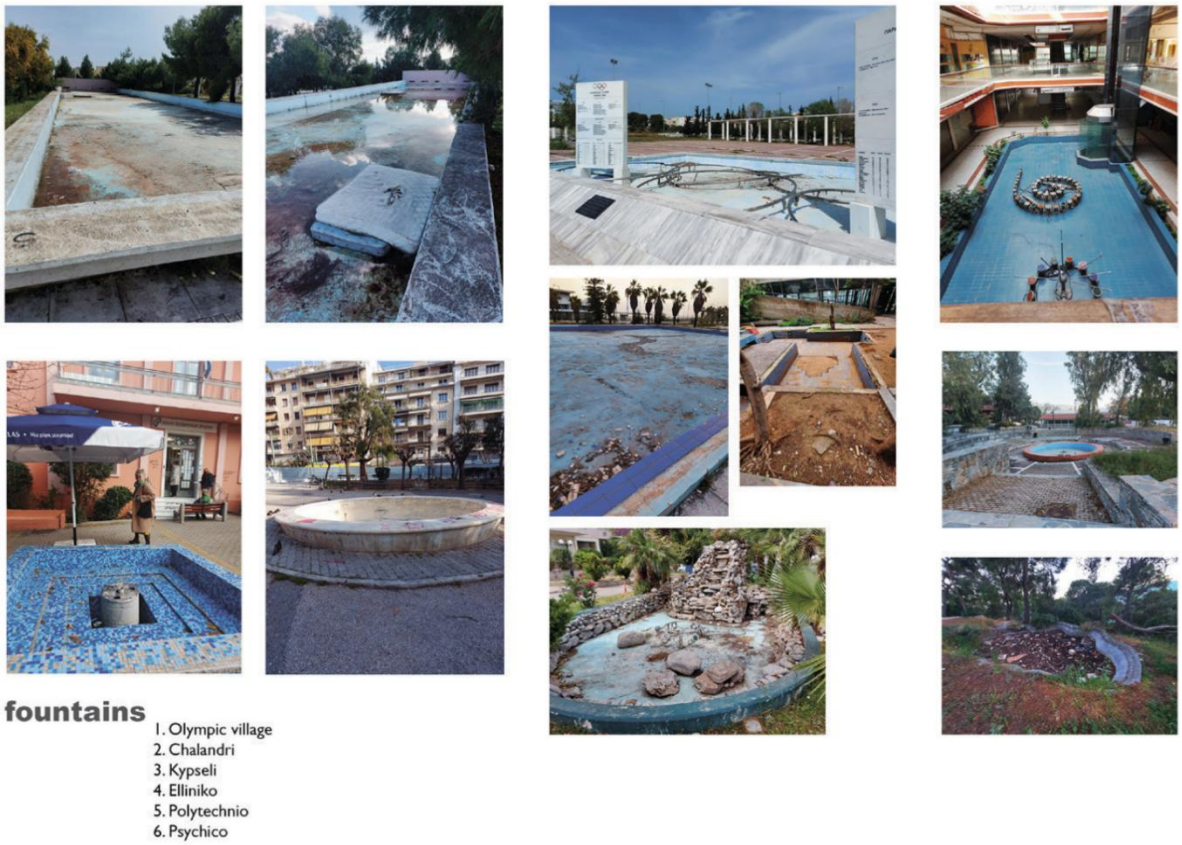
“PARADISE SUFFERS” by Anthi Kougia & Lara Buffard

“Paradise Suffers” is an experimental documentary capturing a series of site-specific performances set inside and around Athens’ empty fountains. The artists map their location, explore, ‘interview’ and ultimately inhabit some of these abandoned sites.

The presence of fountains in the cities is traditionally associated with symbols of cleanliness and purification but also with wealth and prosperity. The work aims to explore the symbolic presence of the empty fountains in the public space of Athens and the way or even containers of wishes and desires (for example, coins landing in their pits.), they have now been transformed into spaces of lost hope and neglect. They stand for remnants of a past prosperity or a fallen utopia. Topographically, and paradoxically, while they are always in the centre, they are empty and derelict. Decay comes into focus.

The performers are dressed in specially designed costumes-sculptures, which are made entirely of family-inherited objects, such as porcelain and lace ornaments. They are fine and fragile and were used for decorative purposes to beautify the home to display an air of luxury, as has often been the case with fountains in the public urban landscape.

Figure 2
Empty fountains of Athens, From Anthi Kougia's archive.



Exploratory Interventions

The performers equipped with their tools, approach each fountain as workers/archaeologists of the absurd and follow a series of performative actions, including measuring the fountains' dimensions, taking notes relevant to their surroundings and collecting samples from their interiors. This ritual is repeated in each fountain that the performers investigate, representing a metaphorical excavation or a utopian wish-granting. This ritualistic pattern highlights the fountain's significance as a public site and imagines it as being part of contemporary, urban cultural heritage.

Interviews

In the beginning, the performers, recalling the fountains' lost cultural and symbolic qualities, treat those as if they were deities and ask them to make their wishes come true. They ask them a series of questions with the intention to juxtapose the past and present qualities, stories, facts, and properties of the fountains within the public space throughout the years. As they proceed, the performers take a closer look at the fountains, both their materiality

and what they stand for. They come to attribute human qualities to them and eventually feel the need to treat them with tenderness.

Inhabiting

The two characters, ultimately, occupy and inhabit the empty fountains by performing domestic and often intimate activities such as bathing, eating, doing laundry and gardening. Drawing from the Greek saying ‘’ΤΑ ΕΝ ΟΙΚΩ ΜΗ ΕΝ ΔΗΜΩ’’ — which translates to “what happens in the house should stay in the house”, the artists completely reverse things and bring it all out in the open.

Figure 3
Film Still from the performance documentary “Paradise Suffers”.



PHILOXENIA & PHILOTIMO by Anthi Kougia & Evdokia Noula

Over the past few years we have been developing two fictional characters, Philoxenia (Hospitality) & Philotimo (often deemed untranslatable). Through these characters, the artists embody the stereotypes and marketable clichés mobilised by the Greek tourism industry, which is repeatedly framed as the saviour of the country’s fragile economy. Philoxenia & Philotimo are the two hostesses of the Greek summer, whose priority is to keep tourists happy and serve their needs with special attention. By employing exaggeration, irony and over-identification, our concern is to explore and then misuse the aesthetical language of touristic national branding.

In autumn 2023 we created a video documenting Philoxenia & Philotimo executing several impromptu performative interventions in the touristic areas of Athens. The work

aesthetically resembles a cheap promotional/marketing video, advertising the services the two characters provide. As part of their provided services, Philoxenia & Philotimo welcome tourists at the airport, clean and mop Syntagma square, organise treasure hunt games on the hill of the Acropolis where the participants are invited to find the hidden democracy, and offer ‘’matakia’’ — the Greek protective measure against the evil eye, in this case against the deprived locals that envy their prosperity.

Through these interventions, we aspire to instigate, document and spread performative narratives that subvert the grand fiction of Greek tourism, confronting thereby the exploitative and devastating conditions of seasonal labour on the islands and the crypto-colonial structures of hospitality.

Occasioned by the rapid touristification and the neoliberal fantasy of rendering Greece an accessible paradise for tourists, our work questions the use of Philoxenia & Philotimo as market products, rather than according to their true meaning, that is, as forms of care and solidarity towards those in need. The work draws on an antithesis, as the Greek state capitalises on hospitality, whilst — during the recent refugee crises — people are being left to drown in the Mediterranean Sea.

Figure 4
Film Still from the video Philoxenia & Philotimo.



Embracing an interdisciplinary approach combining anthropology and performance, we foster a collaborative research framework which will inform our attempt to shape a feminist and resistant response to the above paradoxes. Our interest as artists and our experiences

as precarious female workers, especially during the tourist season, led us to pose questions about Greek ethos and hospitality, which is marketed, selectively exercised and highly associated with economic activity and the branding of Greek summer.

Conclusion

I feel that what spurs my work is the word resistance. Yes, by being playful. Yes, through femininity and softness against rigid systems. Yes, by planting nonsense in dead fountains or mopping the marbles of the Parliament. In an attempt to re-enchant the world.

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16

Walking as Anarchiving: An Aesthetic Analysis of the "Window on the World" Tour

Daniel Dilliplane
University of Milan

Abstract

While traditional walking tours often erase the contributions and perspectives of minoritarian communities from the social fabric of cities, an emerging trend of alternative tours seeks to remedy this erasure with creative, immersive pedagogies. Examining Migrantour's *Window on the World* tour as a paradigmatic case study, this essay explores alternative tours as site-specific performances of inclusive urban place-making. Recognizing that such tours face gaps in historical archives and the absence of material traces in the built environment, my research asks: how do the immersive pedagogies of alternative walking tours use creative performance tools to animate neglected minoritarian histories and perspectives?

Combining participant observation with qualitative semi-structured interviews, my inquiry examines the aesthetic dimensions of Migrantour's tour of Milan's Padua neighbourhood. Designed and led by immigrants, this tour highlights hidden migration histories and cultivates intercultural encounters by sharing personal stories of the contemporary lives of immigrant communities. In addition to creative storytelling, it encourages interactive social and sensory engagement, presenting audiences with archival images, offering them foreign foodstuffs, and inviting them into the worship space of the Muslim House of Culture.

This essay's theoretical framework demonstrates how this alternative walking tour creatively engages with the fluidity and multiplicity concealed beneath the apparent fixity of place. Drawing on scholarship exploring walking as a practice of anarchiving that "attends to the undocumented, affective, and fragmented compositions that tell stories about a past that is not past but is present and an imagined future" (Springgay & Truman, 2018, p. 14), I argue that *Window on the World* participates in the contested politics of site as palimpsest (Kaye, 2000; Kwon, 2002; Turner, 2004) in order to shape more inclusive urban futures. By investigating the largely overlooked aesthetic dimensions of alternative walking tours, this essay contributes to the intersection of performance, cultural heritage, and tourism studies.

Keywords: walking tour, migrant performance, cultural heritage, anarchiving, place-making

Alternative Walking Tours

Historical walking tours play a crucial role in constructing a sense of place through the articulation of local narratives and identities. However, because of their emphasis on monuments and other elements of the urban landscape's built environment, traditional tours often reinforce dominant state-sanctioned heritage narratives that have been shaped through unequal access to the cultural authority and financial resources required for historical preservation and commemoration. As a result, these tours often elide or erase the histories and perspectives of marginalized groups, including women, racial and ethnoreligious minorities, LGBTQ communities, and immigrants.

A growing international trend of alternative tours seeks to counter this erasure of minoritarian perspectives with immersive performance-based pedagogies. These alternative walking tour performances often struggle with significant gaps in historical archives and a lack of existing historical or commemorative sites within the urban landscape. Unable to rely on the conventional visual cues of the historical walking tour genre, these alternative tours incorporate participatory experiences and imaginative performances to animate their neglected histories (Dilliplane, 2025, p.14). Vibrant multisensory dramaturgies bring to life stories and perspectives otherwise rendered invisible within the quotidian experience of urban life.

Examining Migrantour's *Window on the World* tour as a paradigmatic case study within the alternative walking tour genre, this essay interrogates how participatory and immersive multisensory pedagogies deploy creative tools in the affective activation of minoritarian histories and perspectives. It examines the aesthetic dimensions of this tour of the multicultural Padua neighbourhood of northeast Milan, drawing on participant observation of both the tour and the broader life of the neighbourhood alongside qualitative semi-structured interviews with members of the Migrantour programme to illustrate the artistic strategies of the immigrant tour guides who design and lead the tour. I argue that *Window on the World* participates in the contested politics of site as palimpsest, (Kaye, 2000; Kwon, 2002; Turner, 2004) utilising walking as a practice of anarchiving in order to shape more inclusive urban futures through a sensory awareness of neglected pasts.

Walking as Anarchiving Practice

This analysis draws on the concept of the "anarchive", developed by Erin Manning and Brian Massumi, which describes an affective supplement to the traditional archive — the creative reactivation of archival materials as a "feed-forward mechanism" for generating new meanings and futurities (Massumi, 2016, p. 7). Far from serving as neutral repositories of the documented past, archives reinforce dominant ideological perspectives

through preservation practices of selection and exclusion that function as a form of historical gatekeeping privileging the voices of the powerful in the construction of memory. Anarchiving aims to disrupt the capacity of the archive to perpetuate the grand narratives of the state's authorised heritage frameworks by experimenting with the ephemeral affective excess of archival practice to inspire conceptual departures in the present that enable alternative futures.

Stephanie Springgay and Sarah Truman (2018) extend this concept of the anarchive to experimental research-creation and counter-cartographic walking methodologies. They argue that "anarchives, in contrast with official archives, are activities that resist mere documentation and interpretation … approaching matter from new perspectives that may be incongruent with conventional archiving practices, in order to activate erased, neglected, and hidden histories" (p. 107), describing an anarchival approach to walking as "the undocumented, affective, and fragmented compositions that tell stories about a past that is not past but is the present and an imagined future" (p. 14). Walking as anarchiving is fundamentally concerned with how creative and affective engagement with place can generate new relationships between past, present, and future, disrupting the linear temporalities and hierarchical orderings that characterize traditional archival practices.

Migrantour's *Window on the World*

The *Window on the World* tour of Milan's diverse Padua neighbourhood offers a potent case study for examining walking as an anarchival practice. The *Window on the World* tour was initially developed in 2010 as part of the *Our Invisible Cities* initiative of the Migrantour programme. Initially conceived as a collaboration between the Italian responsible tourism company Viaggi Solidali, cultural anthropologist Francesco Vietti, and the non-profit ACRA, the Migrantour programme works with first- and second-generation immigrants to develop migrant- designed and led walking tours of immigrant neighbourhoods in order to promote values of global citizenship and cultural competence. Originating in Turin and Milan, the programme has expanded over the last 15 years beyond Italy to over 20 cities across Europe with more than 40 tour routes led by over 600 first- and second-generation immigrants. These immigrant tour guides — described by the program as "intercultural companions" — draw on their personal and familial stories as well as their knowledge of the life of immigrant communities to construct engaging and vibrant encounters.

One of the first tours developed by the programme, *Window on the World* was created and redeveloped by teams of intercultural companions who represent the broad geographical diversity of the Padua neighbourhood, including individuals from the Middle East, South America, Eastern Europe, and East Asia. The tour's itinerary is a co-creation of these guides and includes stops at the Scuola del Parco Trotter, the Eastern European

grocery store Euromix, the Inka Wasi Peruvian restaurant, and the Muslim House of Culture. The collaboration between the different intercultural companions empowers each guide to serve as a host of the neighbourhood's cultural diversity. The tour's itinerary indicates the neighbourhood's numerous and varied migration histories through creative storytelling, sensory engagement and embodied participation.

Embodied and Multisensory Engagement

The *Window on the World* tour sets off from the Via Padova entrance of Trotter Park. This park is known for its role as the home of the innovative open-air school Casa del Sole, which was initially formed in the early 1920s. The oval shape of the park's central path reflects its origin as a racetrack, but the scattered structures — including its "little theatre" — demonstrate the historical significance of the Casa del Sole. When I attended the tour on Anthropology Day in 2025 (February 22nd), the tour's introductory remarks included an extensive discussion of the colonial ambitions of Italian fascism in the 1930s, as well as efforts of the current government to close down the free summer school for migrants organised by the Network of Schools Without Permits [Rete Scuole Senza Permesso] in recent years. The histories presented spotlight the park as a key battleground where public memory and cultural heritage become sites of political contestation.

Throughout the tour, guides pass around a variety of documents and materials that enrich the stories told at key moments along the route. For instance, just off Via Padova on Via Giorgio Chavez, our "intercultural companion", Roxanna, shared a series of historical photographs depicting the make-shift homes of immigrant communities who moved to the area in the 1950s, following the Korean War. She described the cultural life of these communities, comparing and contrasting it with the present-day structures and lives that we were actively witnessing in the present moment. Situated in contemporary space in this way, these photographs don't simply document what was; they also generate new meanings about what the neighbourhood has become and what it might yet be.

The tour continues down the block at an Eastern European grocery store called Euromix. Here, the group had the opportunity to walk through the store to examine and purchase foods and snacks common to various Eastern European and Balkan cuisines. As we regathered outside the store, Roxanna encouraged the collective sharing of our snacks. She modelled this generosity by distributing an assortment of Romanian snacks that she said reminded her of her childhood, including salty corn puffs, a strawberry cream filled cereal, and a chocolate candy bar called Rom. In addition to providing us with an opportunity to participate in the neighbourhood's immigrant economies, this simple act of sharing and tasting unfamiliar foods became a moment of sensory connection to her experience of migration, allowing participants to inhabit, however briefly, another's cultural nostalgia.

Figure 1
The author holding a heritage potato. (Photo by the author).



This gustatory experience of cultural exchange took on additional significance later in the tour when, in front of a Peruvian restaurant, Roxanna passed around samples of traditional crops indigenous to South America, including heritage potatoes and quinoa (Figure 1). As we handled these samples, we were transported across space and time by their varied and unique textures. Placing particular emphasis on the fact that tomatoes originated in Peru, Roxanna explained how these foods, now staples of Italian cuisine, reveal the intercultural foundations of Italy's supposedly homogeneous national food identity. Here food functions as both an alternative archive and a feed-forward mechanism, revealing hidden histories while imagining more inclusive futures.

One of the most powerful moments of the tour occurred when we were invited to enter the sacred prayer space of the Muslim House of Culture. Removing our wet shoes as we entered the building, the soft warmth of the carpeted worship space was particularly welcoming. Gathering in a circle on the edge of this space, we listened as representatives of the local Muslim community shared the ongoing story of their effort to build a proper mosque in the city that would enable them to gather and worship in traditional ways despite their experiences of migration. Our presence in the space and participation in the cultural practices of this community was more than merely informative; it implicated us in the ongoing efforts of Milan's Muslim community to shape a future for itself in the city.

Conclusion: The Politics of Performance as Place-Making

The creative and immersive pedagogy of the "Window on the World" tour demonstrates how performance can reconfigure urban space through multisensory acts of collective place-making. By acknowledging the contested political history behind dominant cultural heritage narratives, enlivening the historical and contemporary elements of everyday communal life, sharing diverse food cultures that unsettle nationalist myths, and inviting engagement with the struggles of the local Muslim community, the tour reveals the hidden multiplicity beneath the apparent fixity of site. In so doing, it enacts what Nick Kaye (2000) describes as "a working over of the production, definition and performance of 'place'" (p. 3), while embodying Cathy Turner's (2004) claim that performance contributes to place-making as "each occupation, or traversal, or transgression of space offers a reinterpretation of it, even a rewriting" (p. 373).

Issues of migration, belonging, and cultural diversity, continue to play a central role in a political moment marked by the global rise of far-right authoritarianism and anti-immigrant sentiment. In Italy — particularly in light of the electoral success of Giorgia Meloni's right-wing populist Brothers of Italy party in 2022 — the multiplicity of site in the current moment seems to serve more as a kind of cultural battlefield than as an opportunity for inclusive place-making. Political polarisation emphasises the contested character of sites and their layered histories rather than their fluidity and indeterminacy. As Miwon Kwon reminds us, "the phantom of a site as an actual place remains, and our psychic, habitual attachment to places regularly returns as it continues to inform our sense of identity" (2004, p. 165). State-sponsored heritage narratives and the exclusionary nationalist identities they reinforce constitute a hostile environment for the cultivation of more inclusive urban futures. Against this backdrop, Migrantour's *Window on the World* tour foregrounds multicultural realities through simple multisensory and affective encounters. Deploying walking as an anarchival practice, the tour creatively performs place in order to both remember differently and imagine otherwise, empowering marginalised immigrant communities to inscribe their stories onto the urban landscape.

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17

Poe on Paper, or *The Gold-Bug* Was Made of Paper: An Ecological Performance Using Paper as Its Sole Material

Katerina Liapopoulou
Site-Specific Performance Artist

Abstract

The Gold-Bug Was Made of Paper is a performance piece that draws its inspiration from an iconic text by Edgar Allan Poe, while revolving entirely around a simple, everyday yet deeply expressive material: paper. Our intention was not merely to re-enact a story, but to highlight the very process of storytelling — through a medium that speaks, sounds, tears, reflects light — a material that lives and transforms on stage. The performance was conceived specifically for Space Baby, a non-theatrical venue located in the Metaxourgeio neighbourhood of central Athens — a space that allows for intimate interaction with the material and enhances its presence.

Five performers narrate the story of The Gold-Bug, drawing directly from Poe's original text. Paper becomes their only scenographic, costuming, sonic, and interactive tool. Poe's work — among the first examples of detective fiction and a milestone in the popularisation of cryptography in literature — is reimagined through the group's artistic language, grounded in the practice of performance writing.

The performance explores the texture and weight of Poe's original text, offering a new rendition through striking visual imagery, created exclusively through the presence of paper on stage. In this piece, paper becomes a full co-performer; it dresses the bodies; produces soundscapes; shapes the space; and sparks action and interaction with the audience.
During each performance, a visual artist creates a unique live artwork, while a musician sonically and vocally supports the unfolding events — drawing directly from the organic soundscape generated by the paper itself. All costumes, accessories, and props are entirely handmade from papers of various textures, densities, and origins: tracing paper, wax paper, posters, old stock books, wrapping paper, and newspapers. Lighting was designed to make full use of the shadows, translucency, and textures that paper can generate on stage. An ecoscenographic approach is central to the project. The paper used in each performance is repurposed for the next. At the end of the performance cycle, the material is directed to recycling, completing a circular artistic process.

Keywords: site specific performance, eco scenography, paper, Edgar Allan Poe

Poe on Paper: A Performance of Writing, Materiality, and Participation

The performance *Poe on Paper The Gold-Bug Was Made of Paper* was a creative action exploring the relationship between body, materiality, and narration through the medium of paper. The point of departure was Edgar Allan Poe short story *The Gold-Bug,* a tale of mystery and fantasy, which was scenically and spatially transformed into an open installation performance, aiming to offer a participatory and experiential encounter of the story.

Figure 1
*After the revelation of the golden scarab – performer Danai Panagi (*photo: Eva Poulizou).



The central question was: how can a story be written and unfold on paper — literally, spatially, corporeally, and sonically — beyond conventional reading? Paper was not merely used as a medium for writing, but as the primary material of the scenic action — as space, costume, sound, and map. The entire performance space — both floor and walls — was covered in paper of various sizes and origins: plain white paper, recycled sheets, old street posters, commercial paper bags, greaseproof paper, and maps. These layers became more than scenography: they served as the canvas upon which traces, letters, words, shapes, and paths were marked and activated. The slightly adapted story featured a once-wealthy man, yearning for the luxury of his past, attempting to regain it without effort. A shy, reserved friend accompanies him on a treasure hunt, while his only servant — who constantly confuses left and right — plays a crucial and confusing role. This triangular dynamic raised the question: are these three distinct characters, or three facets of a single self? Three

performers embodied these characters, constantly shifting between roles, narrative voice, and gesture. In one pivotal moment, when the hero recounts their night journey across the mountains, the performers pressed their bodies against the paper-covered walls while one traced the other's outline with charcoal. These imprints marked the space with corporeal memory.

Figure 2
Poe's figure rendered in charcoal during the performance (photo: Eva Poulizou).



A key element of this performance was the audience's transition between different spaces. At first, the performer — an invisible singer — welcomed the audience in the exterior area, where, together with a disguised sound technician, they playfully misled the spectators, chasing them with small paper scarabs in a bluff-like action.

Once the audience entered the main space, they could choose to sit on the arranged chairs, remain standing, or even sit on the floor, which was entirely covered in paper. The action unfolded as the characters changed their paper costumes to reflect each new transformation, with all three performers simultaneously shifting from one character to another. All stage effects, except for the main lighting, were created using paper: paper confetti falling from above, the appearance of a giant golden scarab, shadow theatre play, and then a transition to the next space of the performance. According to Richard Schechner, the real takes place in the here and now, rendering any reference to past events relevant to the present. It consists of successive, non-retractable actions within a given space, while the participants perceive the entire process as a transformation.

Consequently, they are led to acknowledge that something of great significance for them is at stake as the event unfolds (Schechner, 1970, as cited in Carlson,2014, p.177).

Figure 3
Mary Contantinou, Katerina Liapopoulou, Danai Panagi in the first performance area (photo: Eva Poulizou).

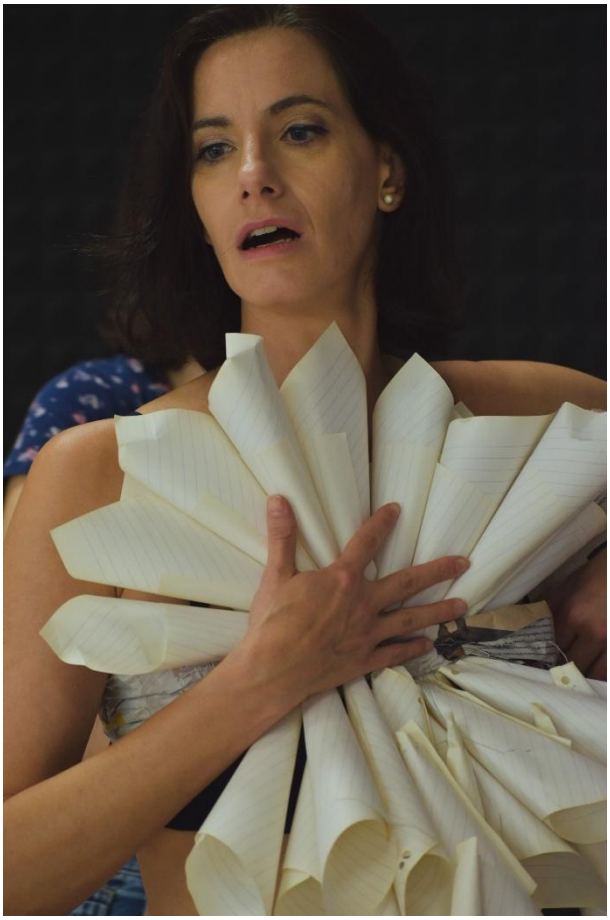


This next area was a rectangular wooden room, featuring a paper tree that unfolded and welcomed the audience. The entire scenography and props in this space were also made of paper — measuring tapes, smaller scarabs, amongst other things. When the characters finally reached the hidden treasure chest, a riddle awaited the audience to solve. The riddle was written on the columns of the space, and as the audience was offered a small glass of cognac — both to warm them up from the biting December cold of Athens and the night on the mountain of treasure — they were invited to solve the word puzzle in order to gain access to their own symbolic treasure.

All materials from the performance's scenographic footprint were destined for recycling, a fact that was ritually declared at the end of the performance. The paper used in the first

show was largely reused in the second, in line with principles of Ecoscenography,[15] and materials from the second were again reused in the third. In the fourth performance, after all scenographic elements had fulfilled their symbolic and performative purpose, the materials were finally directed toward recycling. This entire process took place through a ritual defined by the group of interpreters themselves. The aim was the appropriation of the Other by bridging the spectator with this practice as well as with the mode of functioning of the group. The regulation of a society's relationship with otherness, as an uncontrolled source of events, is structured through a set of activities that, in Anthropology, is known as 'rituals' (Stavridis, 2018, p. 190).

Figure 4
Performer Mary Constantinou (photo: Eva Poulizou).



At the end of the performance, each silhouette was labeled with one of the three characters' names. The audience was invited to fill these figures with words, phrases, colours, or symbols that intuitively resonated with each personality. Through this act, the narration became a shared process, and the spectators were subtly invited to reflect on the

[15] Eco-scenography is a concept developed by Tania Beer (2021) regarding ecological design for performance.

core question: do these figures represent different individuals, or the fragmented aspects of a single psyche? In Performance Art, there is no interpretation of a character role. Yet, two presences emerge as one: that of the Performer who structures the performative framework, and that of the Performer who recalls or re-enacts an experience through the enactment of the unconscious within the body (Mitrou, 2023, p. 60).

Figure 5
Performers Mary Contantinou, Katerina Liapopoulou, Danai Panagi and Asimina Koutsogianni (photo: Eva Poulizou).



Costumes were also made entirely from paper: greaseproof sheets, newspapers, and fabric-paper hybrids. The fragility of the material underlined themes of transformation and decay. As the performers moved, their garments created friction, breath, and rhythm — sonic elements that enriched the performance texture. A musician roamed through the space like a storytelling elf. She created live soundscapes using only paper: folding, crumpling, tearing, blowing through paper tubes, whispering through rolls. These paper-generated sounds accompanied the story and movements, inviting the audience into a multisensory narrative environment.

Audience participation was an integral part of the performance. Scattered throughout the space were simple written or drawn instructions on paper sheets. Audience members were free to engage with them: wrapping themselves in paper, shaking it, cutting it, folding

or simply observing it. There was no right or wrong way to interact: the paper became an extension of their intuition and presence.

Performance writing, as applied in this context, is not just writing for or on stage. It is a weaving of materiality, embodiment, and narration. Writing emerged from bodies, sounds, and actions. The paper became a projection surface, an expressive tool, and a collective diary.

The question was not just what is being narrated, but how. With which materials? Who is invited to participate? And what remains afterwards? In the end, all marks on the paper — words, smudges, sketches, footprints — constituted a second story, a polyphonic map of the collective experience.

Perhaps, then, Poe does not only live in his words, but in the traces left by those who stepped into his story, on a stage made of paper.

Figure 6
The four performers (photo: Evi Poulizou).



Conclusion

In conclusion, the performance highlighted how a single recyclable object can be transformed into a set, a costume, or a partner, transcending its everyday function. The audience's experiential participation, across multiple spaces of a closed studio — even culminating in the solving of a riddle — emphasised the collective dimension of a group of people sharing a common experience in a given moment, and how this reduces distance as they spontaneously converge to resolve a mystery. Finally, the action raised open questions about how performance can exist with a minimal environmental footprint, with limited energy consumption, and how it contributes to building a new relationship with the object, leaving space for further exploration.

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Add book *Ecoscenography: An Introduction to Ecological Design for Performance*.

18

The Body as Deus Ex Machina: Revealing the Stage through *Apparatus*

Gülten Nur Bilgiç
Istanbul Technical University, Turkey
Pelin Dursun Çebi
Istanbul Technical University, Turkey

Abstract

The stage is revealed through performative practices that arise from the interaction of bodies and moment. These bodies are often related to one another in a performative manner. In this paper, a metaphorical framework will be developed through this relationality. The space, as a stage, creates an axis of bodily traces and relationships that can be defined using ropes, ties, and apparatuses. The first body is the performer, or *deus ex machina*, who moves through these mechanisms. The second body, on the other hand, is responsible for establishing the apparatus; it is a productive figure who initiates and has authority. After Futurism, movement became prominent in performance-based practices. Performance became a material for scenes in which spatial boundaries were challenged. In Archias's art discourse, the body is transformed into a concrete body with ambiguous spatial presence, agency, and bodily expression. The performing body, by its nature, becomes a performative and constructed object that relies on the apparatuses to demonstrate its existence. In twentieth-century theatre scenes, the boundaries of ancient theatre gradually faded, and a new definition of stage emerged. Artists, such as Sophie Taeuber-Arp in King Stag and Allan Kaprow in The Courtyard 1962, used action-based and immersive apparatuses to transform space into a performative mechanism. They emphasised that integration by physically or metaphorically connecting discursive or indicative narratives to the ropes, restoring societal realism and roles. This paper examines Euripides' concept of "deus ex machina" through a conceptual approach that explores the stage space using apparatuses that manipulate the movement of the body on it. The performances under consideration involve mechanical systems with attached performer bodies, such as marionettes, humans, or objects. The stage spaces of the twentieth century reveal a new opportunity to reflect artistic understanding.

Keywords: deus ex machina, performative apparatus, performative bodies, architecture of theatre space

The Body as *Deus Ex Machina*: Revealing the Stage through Apparatus

The twentieth century witnessed a radical transformation in which performance, theatre, and stage space broke away from historical continuity and were redefined. This transformation took place under the guidance of manifestos. As Marinetti (1909) emphasized as the “habit of being energetic”[16] the stage space was shaped not only by new aesthetic pursuits but also by the gestures of the individualized body, inclining toward a new genre through the body’s political quests. The body's desire to become an individual created an absurd field of expression on the stage (Marinetti, 1909). At this point, the stage is no longer something to stand on. The new perception of space, which emerged as a result of movement, had a profound impact on the theatre stage, which expanded beyond simply being a platform to become a multifaceted field of performance. Above all, the spectator's position, as well as that of the event and the image of the stage, were fundamentally altered (Hannah, 2019). The stage shed its traditional elements, such as the *proskenion*, *skene,* and *theatron*, and evolved into a new form of existence. This process takes performance away from the public spaces of traditional theatre. This distancing can be defined in terms of individualization, either by reducing it to the scale of private life or by allowing it to exist naturally. It evolves domestically, as Oskar Schlemmer frequently observes in his forays. The stage transforms into a platform for individual action. As a result, the stage can be defined using a subjective lens. The stage is viewed as a space and extension that influences the performing body, directs movement of the body and spectators, mediates the relationship between representation and performance, and transports content; it is an apparatus within the process-event. This apparatus shapes the limits of bodily agency, choreographic material, props, ropes, ties, and lighting, resulting in a machinic logic. On the other hand, it functions as an interface, revealing the relationship between the observer and the observed, a tool for personal conceptualization, and a stage beyond the stage. It exists in the physical presence of the body (Brook, 1968). This performative apparatus operates the body on stage as a tool of propaganda. The stage is understood as a threshold where both representation and performance intersect; at this threshold, the stage exists together with its instantaneous events.

In this paper, the body is conceptualized as “first” and “second” in metaphor. The first body is the performing body, which is in direct communication with the audience. It is a visible body that serves as the stage's primary image. The second body, in contrast, is the constitutive body. It establishes the stage's apparatuses while also serving as a mechanical body. It communicates with the audience in an indirect manner. This metaphor is similar to İnci Eviner's

[16] In his 1909 Futurist Manifesto, Marinetti rejected the artistic understanding of the past, extolling speed, dynamism, and technology. He replaced tradition with a love of danger.

description of Barthes' essay On Bunraku as “the complexity of the relationship between the puppet and the puppeteer, between the one who moves and the one who causes movement” (2025).

Within this complexity, the image of the second body emerges from the deconstruction of the first (performer) body. This is the stage's “deus ex machina.” The stage is formed by combining both bodies. The apparatuses form the stage, while its deconstruction reveals its materiality. This deconstruction is inherently performative. It is performative because it attempts to dismantle a complex, fragile experience that extends over time and space.

Viewing the spectacle and performance arts of the twentieth century through the lens of performative apparatuses allows for an examination of the interaction between stage and body, revealing potential notions and projections that reflect the social realities, oppressive regimes, and performance identities of the time. This lens examines the performer in relation to the body as puppet/marionette, body as body, and object. Thus, performativity is defined as the collective outcome of an effort that spans all of these stages.

This paper proposes a reinterpretation of the *deus ex machina* concept, which originated in Ancient Greek theatre, as a staging mechanism that manifests the image of the stage using apparatuses such as strings, ties, costumes, and spatial arrangements. By tapping into the ghost of the twentieth-century performative environment, a new trail of traces is revealed. As a result, the stage is conceived as an interface to a dual-directional space in which elements of authority and propaganda are produced concurrently. Finally, an approach that focuses on the stage image serves as an existential, critical, and intersectional lens, allowing for discussions of feminist, political, or cyclical discourses.

Deus ex Machina

Deus ex machina is an Ancient Greek theatre term that translates as “god from the machina.” It is a rhetorical stage strategy based on the mechanical apparatuses of tragedy. This narrative device is typically used to resolve an unresolvable conflict in a play or story by introducing an unexpected external intervention. It is an intervention that is independent of the overall performance and contradicts the plot's internal dynamics. In this regard, this method, which contains an element of artificiality, calls into question the narrative's autonomy and credibility with the audience. Aristotle criticizes this technique in Poetics, arguing that events should be resolved using a cause-and-effect structure: The plot resolution should come from the play's internal structure rather than a mechanical device (Poetics, Chapter 15.). In this study, however, this concept is more than just a narrative saviour; it also has meanings related to stage, staging, and the body.

Radical transformations in the performance arts, as well as in the plastic arts, began in the early 1900s. Artists, particularly those working with the body, sought to break free from the constraints of traditional stage arts and experiment with material as a performative element. Material was more than just a stage prop or décor; it was a provocative component that formed the conceptual foundations of the performance. Body art, shaped by the search for new materials, was elevated to an experiential level by the elements and capabilities of its object. Material revealed the body's potential for disclosure. Using commonplace materials, everyday objects, textile scraps, or household items arranged either randomly or choreographically, the body mediated the display of its political identity on stage. Material obtained a customized agency (Phelan, 1993). For instance, material became a topic unto itself as revolutionary theatre in Popova's Magnificent Cuckold stage set. In the end, every commonplace item could be integrated into the story of a new identity, turning into a propaganda tool, or "agit-prop." Texture, colour, light, everyday objects, discourse, representation, the interface-image-agent of space-stage, performer-performed, staging-specific elements, mechanisms, matter, and materiality are all considered forms of material. The presence of material on stage is considered a *deus ex machina.* The performer's body realizes conceptual productions by incorporating them into the stage. Constructivists studied material as movement and object, while Dada artists sought discursive material for the stage. Cubists like those at the Bauhaus[17] used representational materials to build the stage. In all of these pursuits, historical knowledge of stage material is defined as an original yet superimposed layer, not as something detached from its time period. The body itself is a material. While Traza's puppets are the result of a body that disregards contingency, Archias (2016) defines the body, through Rainer, as a "concrete" material of performance. The body is imaged in intimate relation to itself. Butler believes that the body makes gender, norm, and identity visible. This visibility is not solely due to the body's individual effort; as she observes, *“The body is never fully self-sufficient; it is always shaped by another force”* (Undoing Gender, 2004). This “another force” refers to the deus ex machina. Thus, deus ex machina refers to the same force: external, mechanical, and ideological. The body is an integral part of the apparatus, and performativity flows through it. As a result, deus ex machina is interpreted as a complete expression of materiality for the stage.

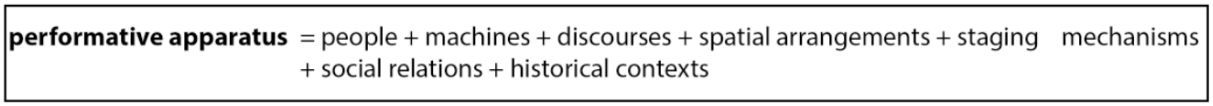
Performative Apparatus

The concept of apparatus extends beyond a mechanical definition confined to space. As a dispositive, the apparatus is as much about what is said about a space as what is left unsaid

[17] The stage workshops in 1921-1923 Bauhaus.

(Foucault 1977). It is a completely diverse ensemble that includes philosophical and moral propositions, theoretical frameworks, regulatory measures, precautions, and scientific statements. Agamben interprets Foucault's definition of the dispositive as apparatuses — architectural, juridical, mediatic, and performative systems — that regulate, direct, and constitute bodies. Barad (2007) defines apparatus as a relational configuration that influences the emergence of reality. The stage apparatus, on the other hand, examines people, machines, discourses, spatial arrangements, staging mechanisms, social relations, and historical context together (Figure 1). In this regard, it is performative. In the context of theatre, this concept, which functions as an apparatus, device, or mechanism, transcends a purely functional definition, and becomes an inquiry into its theoretical antecedents, with the goal of constructing a conceptual foundation. When this inquiry is combined with Derrida's (1997)practice of “deconstruction”, it yields a redefinition that could be read as the “stage of language.” The apparatus is no longer a fixed and closed structure; instead, it manifests as a field of meaning that is constantly deferred, unpacked, and internally contradictory. As a result, Agamben's apparatus demonstrates the formation of the subject within this conceptual elaboration. This subject, difficult to define, is the performer of the apparatus. In this paper, the term "apparat/apparatus" refers to a staging-specific apparatus that affects the body, the stage, and the materiality[18] of the stage from which performance emerges. This structure is not merely a tool or a background arrangement; rather, it is an apparatus that moves the body, triggers events, and continuously structures the space along with its meanings — a dynamic and relational system. It regulates the conditions of visibility within the stage space and mediates the relationship between representation and action. In this respect, it determines how the corporeal existence of space is constructed and staged (Brusselaers & Julian, 2021)[19]. It is a productive structural formation that occurs at the intersection of the body and power. This structure is inherent in the apparatuses' processes of “objectification.” For example, Brusselaers and Julian refer to Vandewalle's Peri-Sphere as a "skinned device," a description based on its provision of multiple perspectives that challenge the cable, joint, and eye-centred logic. In this manner, space becomes visible.

Figure 1
Barad’s definition of (performative) apparatus (2007).



[18] The materiality of the stage has been described in the previous paragraph.

[19] Brusselaers, D., & Julian, H. (2021). A hybrid device to choreograph the gaze: Embodying vision through a historical discourse on optics in Benjamin Vandewalle’s Peri-Sphere. In D. L. Jones & R. G. Smith (Eds.), Performance and posthumanism (pp. 315–335). Springer.

Examining Through Examples

In this study, the proposed first body concept is connected to the second body using a mechanical system. This type of bodily understanding gives rise to the concept of deus ex machina. The analysed performances involve mechanical systems with performer bodies, such as marionettes, humans, or objects attached to them. This section examines examples of this type, including Alfred Jarry's Ubu Roi (1896), Sophie Taeuber-Arp's King Stag (1918), Allan Kaprow's The Courtyard (1962), and Frederick Kiesler's Art of This Century Gallery (1942), through the lens of apparatus.

Figure 2
The deployment of deus ex machina.

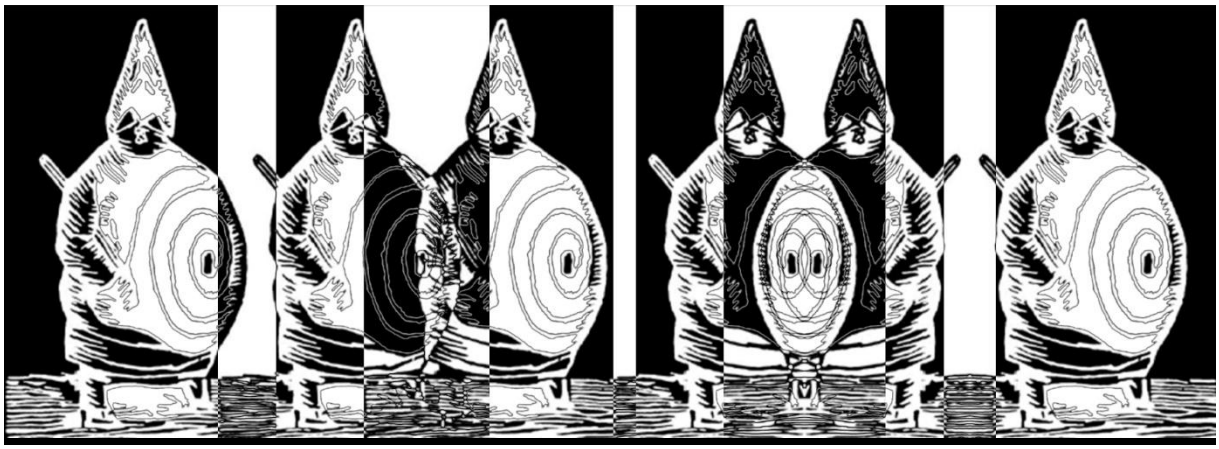
performative.....things.....**are** apparatuses as **deus ex machina.**

Alfred Jarry's Ubu Roi

Costumes serve as apparatuses for deus ex machina.

The costumes in Ubu Roi — the horse's head and the king's inflated costume — represent the shaping and objectification of the performing body by external forces. The costumes conceal and limit the actor's identity, while the horse's head serves as a grotesque, animalized symbol of power. The king's inflated costume restricts the body in an exaggerated and comical way, creating an overly strong and authoritative image. The use of these devices on stage highlights the tension between power and freedom, reinforcing Ubu Roi's critique of authority despite hindering natural movement.

Figure 3
Alfred Jarry's Ubu Roi.



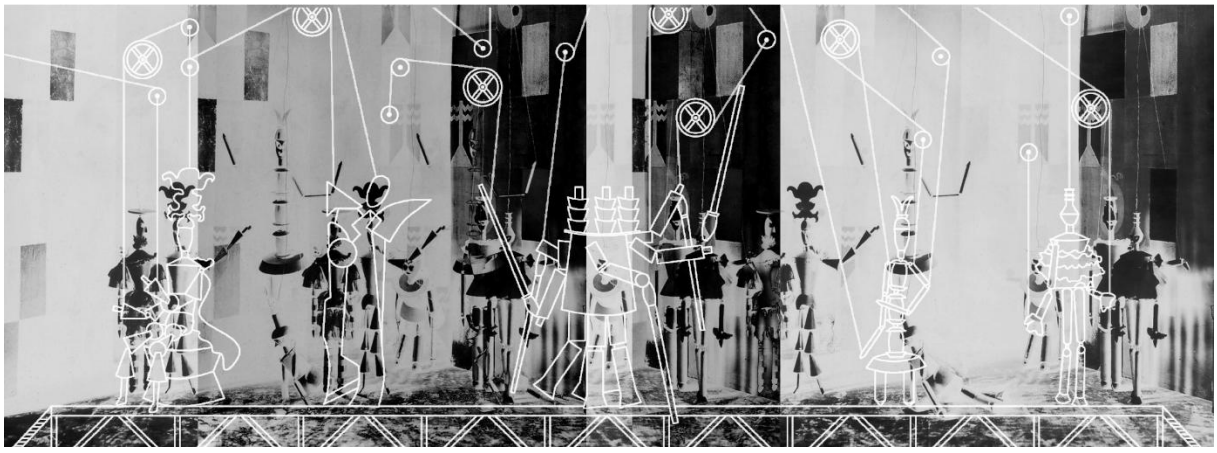
Sophie Taeuber-Arp's King Stag

Ropes and ties serve as apparatuses for deus ex machina.

The play uses abstraction and symbolic bodies to stage the king's search for identity as well as the boundaries between reality and illusion. Taeuber-Arp creates a performance in which bodies are mechanically and externally directed using marionettes tied with ties. These ties strip the bodies on stage of their free will, controlling and objectifying them. This process produces psychoanalytic characters. As a result, the body becomes more than just a vehicle for the narrative; it is also an entity shaped and constrained by external forces. Suspended by strings, these bodies represent deus ex machina on stage, revealing the tension between power and freedom and deepening the play's thematic structure.

Figure 4

Sophie Taeuber-Arp's King Stag.

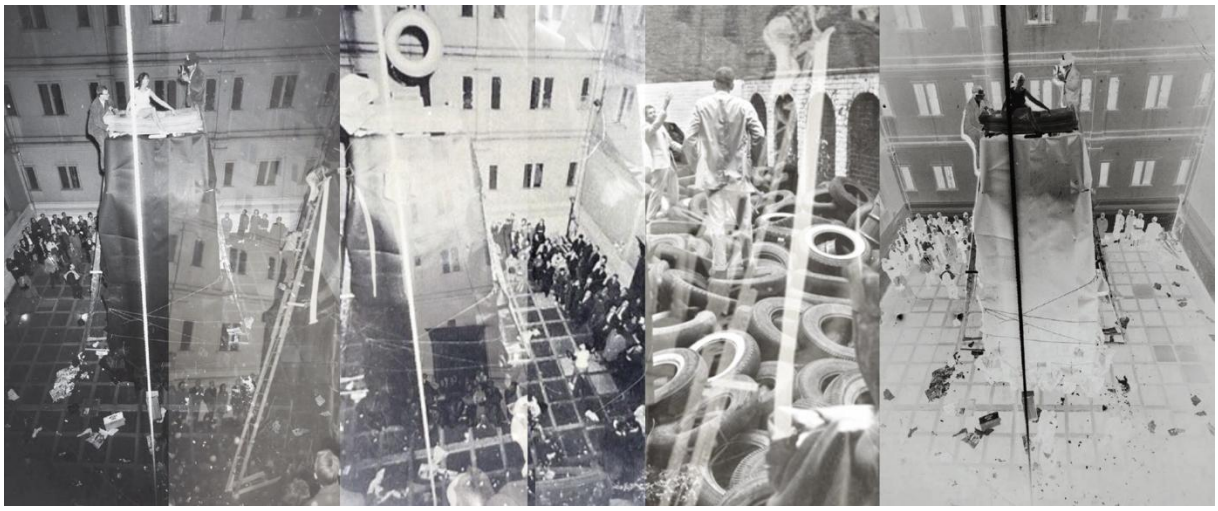


Allan Kaprow's The Courtyard

The objects (ladder, bicycle, mattress, tire) and participants serve as apparatuses for deus ex machina.

This play pushes the traditional boundaries of art by transforming the audience into active participants. The barriers between space and spectators have been removed, allowing the audience to move and interact directly with the performance. Kaprow employs simple objects and spatial arrangements to create a multidimensional and interactive environment. These devices contribute to the piece's dynamic structure and disrupt the hierarchy between the audience and the artwork. The Courtyard emphasizes art as a living, changing, and collaborative process, expanding the concept of "happening" and providing a fresh perspective on performance art.

Figure 5
Allan Kaprow's The Courtyard.

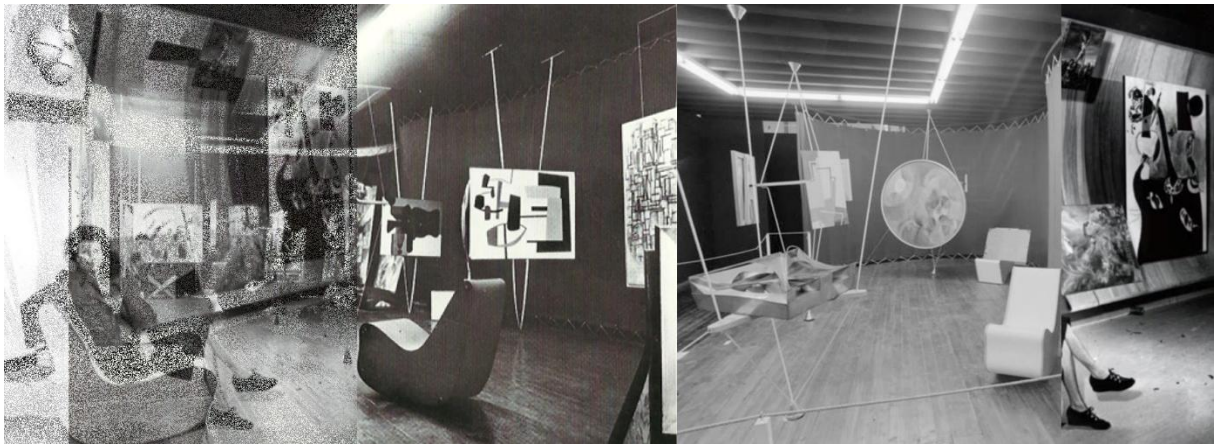


Frederick Kiesler's Art of This Century Gallery

The objects, ropes and exposition serve as apparatuses for deus ex machina.

In this installation, Frederick Kiesler's suspension of paintings with ropes reduces the physical distance between the artwork and the viewer, strengthening their direct relationship. Kiesler intended to reduce the works' material presence and transform them into "eidetic images"; in other words, he wanted the paintings to be perceived as dreamlike visuals floating in space with no frame or support. The ropes not only remove any non-aesthetic barriers that may exist between the viewer and the artwork, but they also transform these barriers into aesthetic elements, reshaping perception, and spatial experience.

Figure 6
Frederick Kiesler's Art of This Century Gallery.



Conclusion

The stage, examined from an exploratory standpoint, is deconstructed by redefining the deus ex machina as an apparatus. This study, which focuses on the image of the stage, reveals a discourse in which the body and mechanism are integrated. The stage exists through bodies, and deconstruction is made possible by access to the stage's apparatuses. These apparatuses are interwoven with traditional theatre elements, as well as twentieth-century absurd stage props. As a result, the deconstruction of the stage is itself a performative act.

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19

SPACING *THAWRA*: Performative Inversions during the Grand Theatre of Lebanon's 2019 October Revolution

Dorita Hannah
University of Newcastle, Australia

Abstract

What spatial desires emerge from impromptu urban performances during revolution? As a transformative event in Lebanon's political history, 2019's nationwide October Revolution (*Thawra)* involved spontaneous and leaderless protests — beyond sectarian, class, religious, gender and cultural divides — which not only led to the government's resignation, but to constructive expressions of civic 'spacing'. Although an inevitably failed mass uprising that challenged the political elite by demanding secular representation, Thawra was initially underpinned by optimism, joy and solidarity, which were demonstrated in how the populace took to the streets to claim public space that had been drastically depleted by half a century of internal war, external pressure and ensuing neoliberal commercial development. Thawra also radically challenged restrictive neoliberal urban development through complex spatiotemporal dynamics that emerged between protestors, the Lebanese security forces, citizen bystanders and the built environment, which was enabled by online platforms and citizen documentation. As a reclaiming of the public realm through temporary transformations of urban environments — in this case, the capital city of Beirut — fleeting spontaneous events enact potential innovations and longer-term transformations. Abandoned venues such as *The Egg* and *Le Grande Théâtre du Beirut* were briefly reclaimed as sites for public assembly and debate, while many more locations were occupied and physically embellished with protest art, spontaneous furnishing and 24/7 social engagement, thereby turning the city inside-out and outside-in through acts of domestication and publication. Such performative assemblages and inversions are here theorised as revolutionary 'spacing' — combining performance (as lived experience) and design (as speculative representations) — which is both situational and relational, transforming familiar settings into a *mise en scène* (staged arrangement) defined by performing, witnessing and participatory bodies, along with meaningfully selected or fabricated structures and objects. Ultimately, this exposes a desire for *diwaniyat*, which refers to *gathering* as spatial action and its designed artefact, positing an accessible civic environment for sociocultural and political spacing.

Keywords: performance design, civic spacing, radical spatial assemblages.

SPACING *THAWRA*

In the upcoming book, *Perform Design Act* (2026), my essay — 'Staging Critical Spatial Acts: What Is (a) Theatre Now we Call it Performance?' — formulates Performance Design as "radical spatial assemblages … responding to the raw 'Real' in the ever-present threat of catastrophe, collapse and epic failure… provoking the public to take spatiotemporal action" (Hannah, 2026, p.16). Examples discussed in the book range from the *Maldives Underwater Cabinet Meeting* (addressing sea-level rise in the face of climate change in 2009) to *The Teeter-Totter Wall* (Pink See Saws at the US-Mexico border in 2019) and Extinction Rebellion's *Tensegrity Towers* (disrupting traffic and media production in the name of a fragile planet in 2020). These exhibit Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of a "carnivalesque spirit" as they enact revelry and resistance, wherein the world is "turned inside out" (Bakhtin,1984) with citizens enacting spatial spectacles that confront, resist, and invert the systems of power that structure their everyday existence in an attempt to reconfigure the status quo.

Such transpositions can be found in Lebanon's nationally dispersed mass uprising of 2019. Known as Thawra, this revolution emerged from a general discontent with the political system, responding to entrenched sectarianism, state corruption and the lack of basic public services, transparency and accountability, among a plethora of other unresolved issues (Khatib, 2022). All came to a head on October 17th when — learning that the government was imposing a WhatsApp Tax as a means of addressing the country's crushing financial crisis — the citizenry took to the streets demanding an overthrow of the existing regime, removal of its leaders and radical social, political and economic reform.[20]

As a transformative event in Lebanon's political history, Thawra involved spontaneous and leaderless protests — beyond sectarian, class, religious and gender divides — that led to the government's resignation on the 12th day. Although ultimately acknowledged as a "failed revolution" because demands for radical change weren't met (Khatib, 2022, and International Crisis Group, 2020), this rebellion, primarily demanding secular representation, was initially underpinned by optimism, joy and solidarity, demonstrated in how the populace claimed public space that had been drastically depleted by half a century of internal war, external pressure and ensuing neoliberal commercial development. However, as a grass roots uprising that mobilised an estimated one million protesters throughout the country, it revived the citizenry's relationship with politics, particularly giving voice to women, youth, the LGBTQIA+ community, refugees and the local dispossessed. Those, as Serene Dardari points out, suffering the effects of "poverty, homelessness, lack of health care and

[20] As a digital space of unmonitored expression, WhatsApp is a communication platform uniquely utilised by the Lebanese to address exorbitant telecom costs, connect with those forced into economic exile abroad and – especially during Thawra – provide a tool for sharing locations, information, strategies and actions.

unemployment (…) chanting their unified demands — people who might have never crossed paths due to the strict sectarian partisanship and lack of shared public spaces" (Dardari, 2019). People requiring new spatial relationships and urban arrangements.

As a researcher in theatre architecture, pursuing the typology as an extended phenomenon and practice no longer limited to the prescribed interior stage, my general assertion is that theatre has left the building (Hannah, 2023/2026) with performance design providing a means to reimagine our daily landscapes through isolated events that reveal a specific 'spacing' — a term referring to situated spatiotemporal action shaping specific environments and how we experience them (Hannah, 2026). This task isn't limited to professional performers or designers and is often initiated and led by activists, artists and academics. One of the defining features of Thawra was a tactical utilisation of the public realm to inhabit an inherently uninhabitable urban environment. This legacy from the Arab Spring and globally dispersed Occupy movement of 2011 — both challenging authority, inequality, and democratic unaccountability — involved thriving communal encampments as a desirous rehearsing of more enduring public amenity: a performative urbanism in which repurposed sites are both symbolic and practical.[21]

Downtown Spacings as Revolutionary Spectacle

> During the weeks of the uprising, activists transformed Beirut's historic core from a no-man's land, an exclusive playground of the rich at best, through a new program that includes soup kitchens, free psychiatric clinics, piazzas for regular public debates, performance spaces, and meeting areas, among other functions. Its large-scale abandoned lots, vast parking areas, and wide roads dedicated to cars were brought to life by daily marches where chants recurrently denounced sectarianism, oppression, and capitalism. (Fawaz/Sherhan, 2020).

Lebanon's nationally distributed revolt was represented by the 6-metre-high cutout of a raised fist, visually pinpointing Thawra's centre in Beirut's Martyrs' Square — an urban void in which the populace spontaneously and formally gathers for celebrations and protests. However, it was in the various adjoining sites of Downtown Beirut where the October revolution was triggered and sustained through a three-month 'de facto' occupation that proffered alternative spacings — via communal actions creating makeshift barricades, encampments and arenas — from mid-October 2019 until 2020's Covid crisis.

[21] See Wolfrum, S. and Brandis, N (2015) where performative urbanism is defined as spaces produced through activities, performance and everyday social interactions. It advocates transformative approaching urban design through human action rather than focusing on static, planned forms.

Thawra is therefore considered an essentially ‘spatial revolution’ (Frederix, 2024, Harb, 2023, Sharp, 2023), which, according to Deen Shariff Sharp,

> centred around urban questions, that notably were both city-based and related to the entire urban fabric, including public services, real estate, corruption, the provision of urban goods and services (such as electricity, water and transport), spatial forms (including highways, public space and buildings), access to — as well as delineations and definitions of — private and public space, and urban identity (2023, p. 8).

Focusing on performance design as the critical orchestration of embodied spatiotemporal events – involving relational constellations of bodies, objects, atmospheres and sites in active dialogue — this paper considers Thawra’s achievement in its communally enacted aspiration for new spatialities currently denied the populace.

Downtown Beirut encapsulates Lebanon’s traumatised urban landscape: shaped through generations of colonisation, conflict and crisis, alongside excessive consumerism and the conspicuous ‘Real-Estatization of Civil Society’ (Nikolas Kosmatopoulos, 2021); resulting in an oppressive “privatopia” (Fawaz/Serhan, 2020) that limits and controls public access and inhabitation. This is exemplified in the post-civil-war development of Solidere, the civic heart of Beirut’s Downtown designed for banking, leisure shopping and Gulf tourism, and subsequent starchitect-driven developments such as Zaitunay Bay, where monitored access to the marina privileges conspicuous consumers.

It was against this combined and enduring spectacle of liberal capitalist economics, war, corruption and sectarianism’s patriarchal politics — reinforced in the signage of an unwalkable city – that the citizenry rebelled on October 17th, 2019, with their own lived spectacle, both united and fragmented. It began on the Ring Bridge — a highway overpass forming a junction between sectarian and secular neighbourhoods, which provided an amphitheatrical vantage point to Downtown — where they brought the city’s dense and unceasing traffic to a standstill, thereby triggering a sustained general strike. Under the watch of nearby security forces, they domesticated this brutal vehicular thoroughfare with carpets, couches, tables, chairs, fridges, hookahs and makeshift shelters, briefly transforming it into The Plaza, which was advertised on Airbnb and also referred to as the ‘House of the People’.

The dissenting citizenry closed banks (already in crisis), established micro-economies and public amenities on reclaimed streets, breached derelict public buildings — such as *The Egg* (an incomplete modernist cinema) and the *Grand Théâtre des Mille et Une Nuits* (a long-abandoned early 20th-century venue) — opening up spaces for gathering, debating and creating rebellious art and actions in Downtown Beirut. The brutalist concrete interior of *The Egg* — an incomplete structure encrusted with bird droppings — became a site for public

meetings and university lectures while metal cladding that shored up access to *The Grand Theatre* was breached after the public beat upon it in a performance of communal invasion. Both venues, long closed to the public, were invaded and reclaimed as sites of discussion and mobilization. A proliferation of graffiti rendered the city a gallery while spontaneous performance transformed it into an urban theatre. Revolutionary spectacle became a means of turning the city *inside-out* by domesticating roads and *outside-in* by making inaccessible interiors available.

Thawra as Grand Theatre … as Spatial Spectacle … as Urban Diwan

Amy E. Hughes sees spectacle providing a methodology for reform "as it rehearses and sustains conceptions of race, gender and class in extremely powerful ways", giving material form to what is "deliberately hidden or secretly imagined" (2012, p. 4). Its instrumental role in the public sphere lies in a "potential to destabilise, complicate, or sustain sedimented beliefs" (Ibid) – something evident in the sectarian billboards of middle-aged and elderly male politicians whose gargantuan visages have long dominated Lebanon's urban landscape, especially its arterial routes where traffic often comes to a standstill securing the gaze. However, during Thawra, it's expressed by bands of women cleaning the city every morning who gathered to chant, dance and raise their often-unheard voices. The populace beat pots and pans with sticks and spoons, which resonated throughout the city, at times rhythmically encouraging song and movement and at others a dissonant cacophony. Here, alongside visual imagery proliferating on mainstream and social media, the sonic provides powerful effects, especially when the city's drone has been quieted.

The gathering public threatened to breach security fencing of Solidere – the civic heart of Beirut's Downtown designed for banking, leisure shopping and Gulf tourism – which also houses Parliament. The precinct had been closed since the 2005 assassination of its developer, majority shareholder, and former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. Here, and in subsequent surrounding developments walking access is made possible only for deluxe shopping, while sitting tends to be reserved for those patronising chic cafes, bars and restaurants. Transgressive gatherings overtook harbourside Zaitunay Bay, defying the signage and security guards prohibiting access to animals, skateboarders, roller skaters, picnickers and hookah smokers.

Perhaps the most powerful, but least spectacular, transformation was in an empty parking space between The Egg and Martyrs' Square, where an encampment of tents was set up by local organisations and political groups holding teach-ins and talk-backs; inviting citizens to learn about their constitutional rights, debate national issues and communally propose public policies. Here, we see the public spontaneously, strategically and

consciously claiming a city previously impervious to them as individual and communal bodies. Fawaz and Serhan (2020) maintain such spatial organisations during Thawra provide "a new repertoire of action that is worth dwelling upon and documenting, one that should motivate city planners in this age of rampant privatization."

Grand Theatre is another way of describing 'spectacle' as manifestation, demonstration and exhibition, which in French (spectacle) and Italian (spettacolo) also means public performance, striking display and impactful situation. Lebanese historian Sana Tannoury-Karam refers to her experience of entering the Grand Theatre during Thawra as a "memorable moment" of transformative empowerment: enacting a revolutionary spatial breach that "re"-claims public space while "claiming the abolition of the private for the sake of the public" (2022, p. 17). The revolutionary spectacle represents a claim for spatial justice through an event demonstrating how the public could set aside the differences that shape their social, cultural and economic landscape by gathering and protesting with each other within an atmosphere of secular comradery. They performed a powerful collectivity, transcending the religious, gender and fiscal divides they resisted.

Just over six months before Thawra, Lebanese actress Nidal Al-Ashkar, who founded and directs the Al-Madina Theatre in Beirut, lamented that theatre in Lebanon relies on freedom of speech, which is lacking in the Arab World; calling for "real, transformative revolutions [to] bring about democratic rule" (Al-Ashkar, 2019). Two decades earlier, while Solidere was underway, she articulated a vision for restoring the Grand Theatre: "It would be marvellous if this theatre can be open 24 hours, people could go on the roof, watch the stars… feel that this theatre is theirs. It must be alive. It mustn't be a place only open to do plays. It must be as if it is an anchor for the city of Beirut" (Naim, 1999).

Those rising up during Thawra were not seeking conventional spaces where someone stands on a raised podium demanding focus and respect as an experienced specialist. They stormed Beirut's streets, waterfront and squares, as well as The Egg and Grand Theatre to re-claim them as porous 24/7 places of assembly. This suggests the notion of an *Urban Gathering Space — Diwaniyat-al-Madinah* — as a potential regional model emerging from Thawra's various spontaneously staged performances demanding an end to Lebanon's sectarian society and consumer-capital urban development. Through spatial revolution it temporarily inverted Beirut's built environment — inside-out and outside-in — to facilitate urban domestication and accessibility, while enabling microbusinesses, commensality, porosity and 24/7 accessibility. Drawing on *DĪWĀN* / ديوان as a reception space for social gathering, eating, drinking, discussion and debate, this arena of hospitality and serious talk typically refers to a place for discussing politics, news, and community matters. *Diwaniyat* — as the act of gathering and its performed scenography — is therefore proffered as a conceptual model of resistant spacing desired and performed for Beirut as a revolutionary

city space. As architecture, action and metaphor of the Arab world, it has great potential to both decolonise and secularise the public realm: effective spacing for further exploration.

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Mapping Temporal and Spatial Dynamics of Imperial Rituals in the Forbidden City

Wen Liang[1], Xiao Yang[2] and Rebeca Zhu Cao[3]

[1]Department of Environmental Art Design at the Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University, Beijing, China
[2]Department of Environmental Art Design at the Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University, Beijing, China
[3]Department of Environmental Art Design at the Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University, Beijing, China

Abstract

Viewing ritual as a distinctive form of social performance, this study adopts an interdisciplinary approach to explore how “order” was structured in the ritual environment of the Ming China, using *dailou tu* (paintings of officials awaiting court) and *chaoyi* (court ritual). Through visual analysis supported by a series of diagrams, this paper identifies three key characteristics that define the spatial logic of Ming imperial rituals. First, ritual order emerges from the interaction among time, action, and space. Time was conveyed through auditory signals at the court ritual by drums, bells, and whips, which directly regulate participants’ positioning and movement, reconfiguring the established spatial structure of imperial architecture. This interaction establishes spatiotemporal units and sequences that correspond precisely to specific ritual stages, forming the foundational structure of the Ming dynasty “ritual space”. Second, although time and space functioned as separate systems within the imperial ritual space, they were not equivalent. Through the use of three distinct auditory signals, the imperial ritual detached time from the ordinary temporal order which thereby became the dominant force in structuring a non-ordinary temporal framework. The cultural and symbolic connections between “the present” and “the past” reinforce time as the more stable element within the ritual spatiotemporal pattern. Third, from a ritual perspective, the Ming imperial city had no fixed or absolute spatial “centre”. Various architectural elements, such as halls and gates functioned as “temporary centres” depending on specific ritual context even if they were not located at the centre. In short, the Ming imperial city’s ritual space operated both as an instrument of ordering and as a product of that very ordering process. The dynamic zoning patterns revealed in the ritual practices of Beijing’s imperial city constitute a critical dimension for understanding the spatial logic of China's built environment.

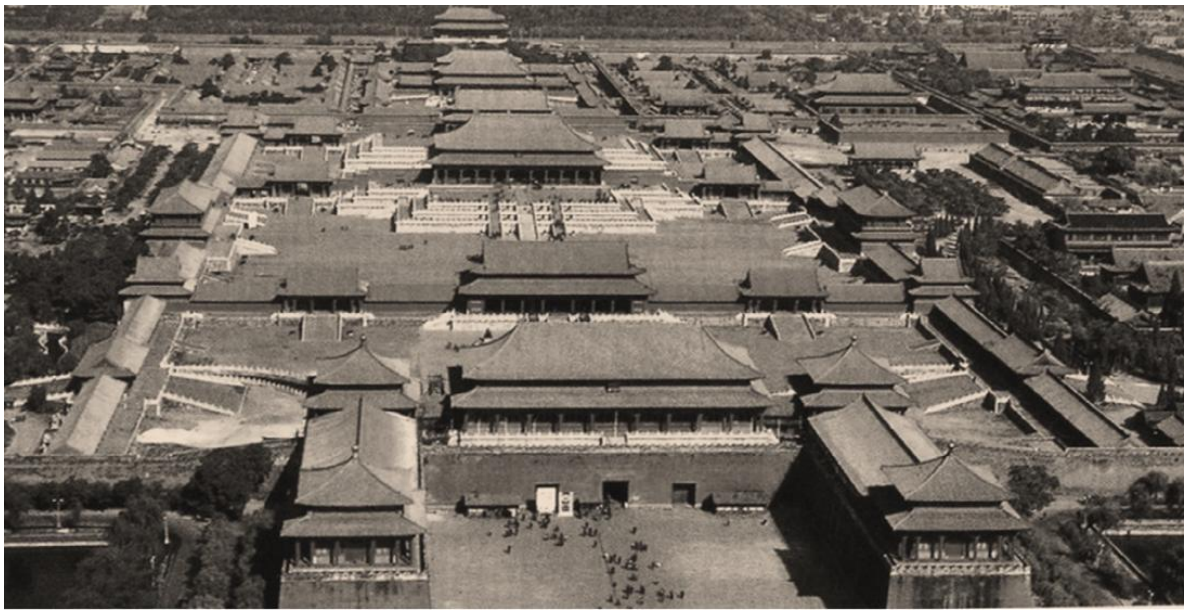
Keywords: imperial ritual, social performance, visual analysis

Mapping Temporal and Spatial Dynamics

The architectural environment of imperial China has often been interpreted as a static collection of buildings arranged within a fixed spatial hierarchy (see Figure1). This study offers an alternative perspective by examining how the built environment of the Forbidden City in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) was deconstructed and reconfigured within the temporal framework of ritual. Moving beyond the grand processional sequence of the central axis, it approaches the Forbidden City as a dynamic stage for political and social performance, rendering it a continuously active ritual theatre (Turner, 1982, p.68-69).[22] The inquiry is guided by a central question: how did auditory signals reconfigure imperial space into ritual order?

Figure 1

Bird's-eye view of the Forbidden City, Beijing, from the album Ground and Aerial Views of China, photographed c.a. 1940 by J. P. Koster. Collection of the University of California, Berkeley Library.



Ritual space is understood here as an integrated narrative shaped by the interplay among scene (space), action (the movement of participants), and sound (a marker of time or ritual stage) (see Figure 2). To capture this interplay, the research adopts an interdisciplinary methodology drawing from architecture, design studies, and anthropology. Focusing on the regular ritual (*chang chao*)[23] as its primary subject, the analysis proceeds

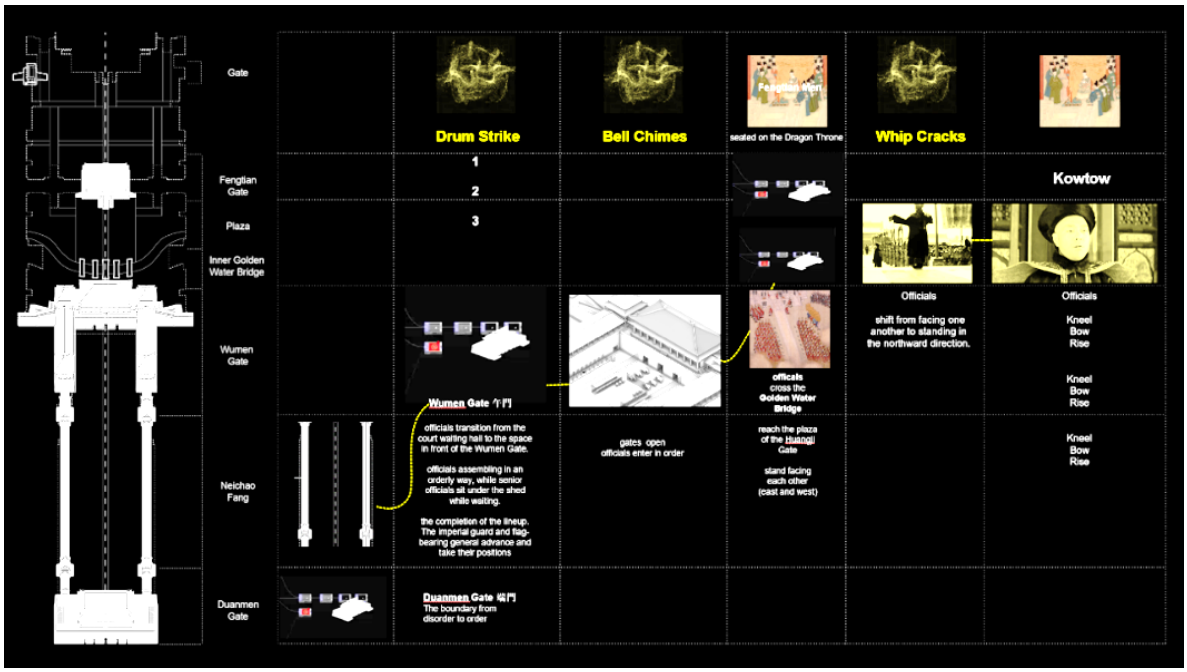
[22] This viewpoint is heavily influenced by the "performative turn" in anthropology, particularly the work of Victor Turner. In his book *From Ritual to Theatre*, Turner (1982) introduces the concept of "social drama," positing that ritual is a structured performance through which communities articulate and address their internal conflicts.

[23] Regular ritual: *chang chao*常朝, a daily morning meeting where officials paid homage to the emperor and reported on state affairs.

in three stages: tracing procedures from historical paintings and official documents; diagrammatically visualising the auditory spaces of drum, bell, and whip; and comparing these with other imperial rituals. The findings reveal that auditory signals produced a non-ordinary temporality that restructured spatial hierarchies, created shifting ritual centres, and transformed the Forbidden City into a flexible and polycentric ritual landscape.

Figure 2

Ritual Performance Display. Created by the authors (*2025*).



Disorder and Order in the Regular Ritual

Dailou tu is a Ming dynasty hanging scroll painting that depicts officials awaiting outside the palace for the early morning court session (see Figure3). The painting is not a record of a single static moment. Instead, it offers a diachronic perspective: its vertical composition unfolds from bottom to top like a timeline, visually guiding the viewer through successive stages of the entire ritual process.

The first scene of this painting, shown at its lower end, depicts officials arriving at the Left Chang'an Gate at *wugeng*.[24] At this stage, the relationship between among action (entering the city), time (*wugeng*), and space (the gate) was loose. The officials' movements were governed primarily by the institutional rule of "gate opening," and the physical boundary of the gate did not alter their state of continuous movement. The real threshold between disorder and order was not the outer Chang'an Gate, but the Duan Gate, which led to the inner court waiting rooms (*nei chaofang*). These rooms functioned as a crucial "backstage" area before the ritual began. Within this space, the previously loose crowd was transformed

[24] *wugeng*五更: a traditional Chinese timekeeping, roughly between 3:00 a.m. to 5:00 a.m.

into a static, spatial, and hierarchical order: the waiting rooms were divided according to administrative department, and the officials' seating was strictly arranged by rank, forming a clear spatial sequence of ascending hierarchy from south to north. This meticulously organised space prepared the officials for the commencement of the ritual performance.

Figure 3

Illustration of the Peking Palace 北京宫殿图 (known as the Taipei A edition台甲本), 192.4 x 155cm. I*mage provided by the National Palace Museum.*



The upper part of the scroll displays the scene where the ritual formally began, marked by the six elephants in front of the Wumen Gate (six elephants were used for the regular ritual, while different rituals required different numbers). When the elephants stood in formation, the static preparatory phase ended, and a dynamic, performative order, triggered by sound, unfolded. The *Da Ming Hui Dian* (Collected Statutes of the Great Ming Dynasty) records this process in detail, showing that sound (the drum, bell, and whip) was intricately linked to specific actions and spatial locations and was the key to activating the order. Shen et al. (1988) in noted that:

> For the morning ritual, when the drum is struck, civil and military officials stand in hierarchical order outside of the Left and Right *yemen*.[25] They wait for the bell to chime and the gates to open, then enter in hierarchical sequence. After crossing

[25] *yemen*掖门: side gates next to the main entrance of the imperial palace.

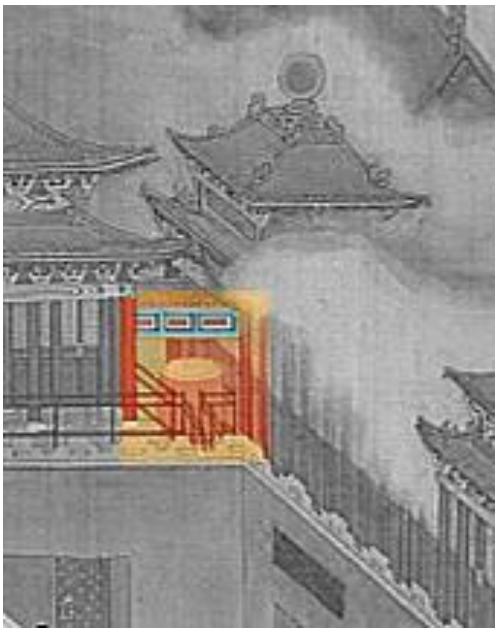
> the Golden Water Bridge, they reach the *danchi*[26] in front of the Huangji Gate, where they stand on the east and west sides facing each other, awaiting the emperor's ascension to the throne. The whip cracks. (juan 44)
>
> 凡早朝，鼓起，文武官各于左、右掖门外序立。候鐘鸣开门，各以次进。过金水桥，至皇极门丹墀，东西相向立，候上御宝座。鸣鞭。

This record clearly indicates that the actions accompanying the sounds of the drum, bell, and whip — such as "standing in hierarchical order" (*xuli*), "entering in sequence" (*yici jin*), and "standing on the east and west sides facing each other" (*dongxixiang xiangli*)— transformed the officials from a static, loose state into a dynamic and orderly whole, enabling them to precisely execute ritual actions within this vast space.

Three Sound-Initiated Ritual Spaces

As interpretations of historical paintings and official documents show, the dynamic unfolding of the ritual was governed by time — specifically, a non-ordinary temporality defined by sound. The spatial configuration of the regular ritual can be deconstructed into three parts: the drum sound space, the bell sound space, and the whip sound space. These sounds detached the ritual from conventional clock time, creating a unique ritual rhythm that actively reconfigured the use of architectural space.

Figure 4
The position of the drums, from Xu Xianqing's Official Career (Xu Xianqing huanji tu), painted by Yu Shi and Wu Yue in 1588 (*album format, Ming dynasty*). *Collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing.*



[26] *danchi*丹墀: terrace plaza, the place where rituals were held.

The ritual proper commenced with a sequence of three drumbeats (Fig.4). The first drum signaled officials to leave the waiting rooms and proceed to the Wumen Gate Plaza, where ritual elephants were simultaneously forming up. At the second drum, a distinction in status became apparent through action: lower-ranking officials assembled in orderly lines, while senior officials remained seated under the sheds, awaiting the signal to advance. When the third drum sounded, the lineup was complete, and the imperial guard and flag-bearing generals advanced to take their positions (see Figure5). These three drumbeats thus served to sequence a complex series of movements, progressively building the visual and spatial foundation of the ritual (see Figure 6).

Figure 5
The imperial guard and flag-bearing general, *from Return Clearing Imperial Procession Returning to the Palace, Ming dynasty. Collection of the National Palace Museum.*



The chiming of the bell signified the next major phase. The gates were opened, and the officials entered the second ritual space, the plaza of Fengtian Gate (see Figure7). The path of movement was strictly dictated by rank: officials used the side gates and outer bridges, while the central axis was reserved for the emperor (see Figure 8). As officials crossed the Inner Golden Water Bridge and formed their ranks, the emperor approached from the north (see Figure9). In the regular ritual, the emperor and officials moved toward each other simultaneously, suggesting some degree of equality. In congratulatory rituals, officials would arrive and wait for the emperor, emphasising their subordinate role. The bell, therefore, did not just mark time: it initiated a set of movements that defined the political relationship between the sovereign and his court.

Figure 6

The drum space: three drumbeats. Created by the authors (*2025*).

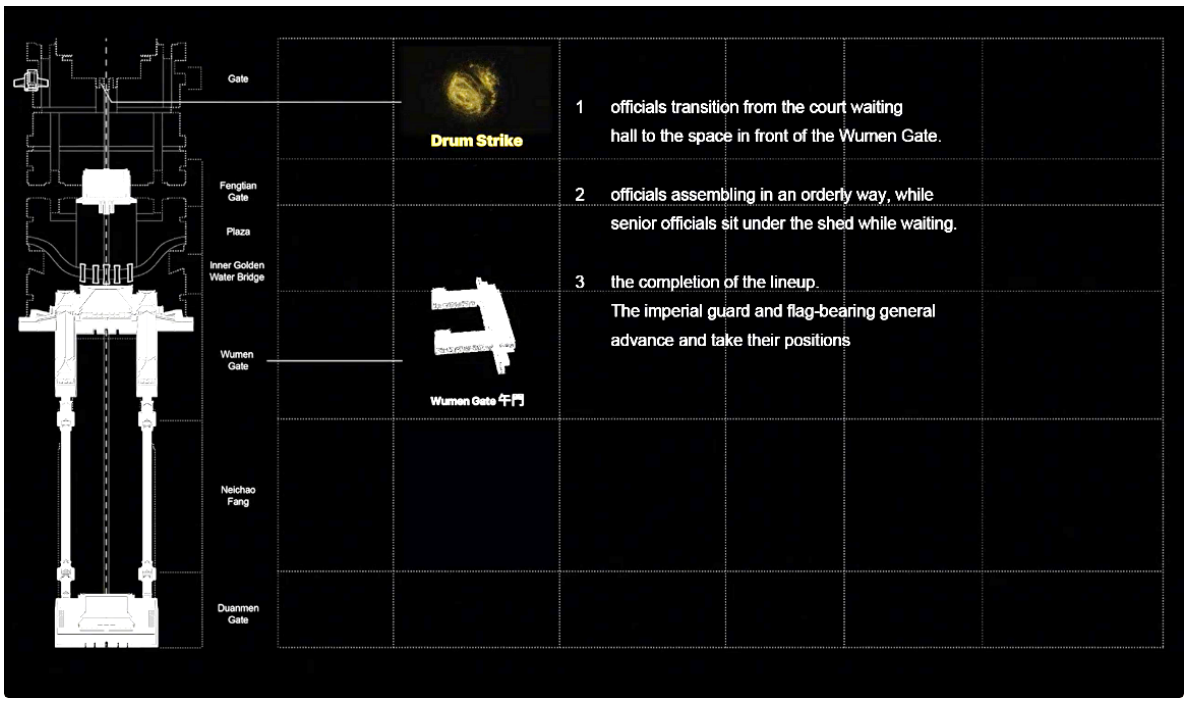


Figure 7

The bell space: Ggates open. Created by the authors (2025).

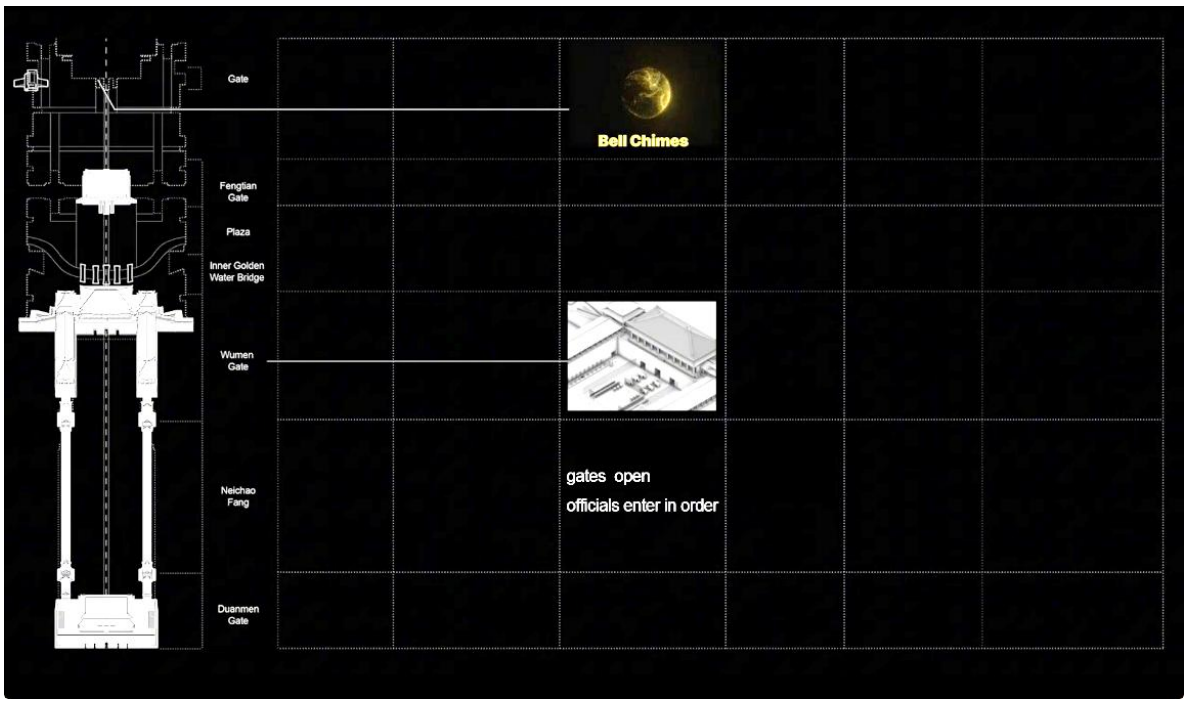


Figure 8

The movement of the officials, from Xu Xianqing's Official Career (Xu Xianqing huanji tu), painted by Yu Shi and Wu Yue in 1588 (album format, Ming dynasty). Collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing.

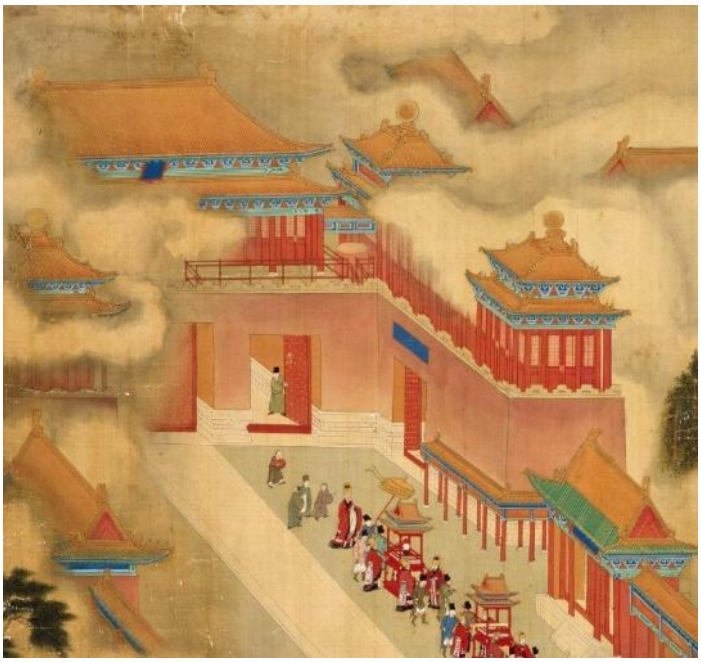
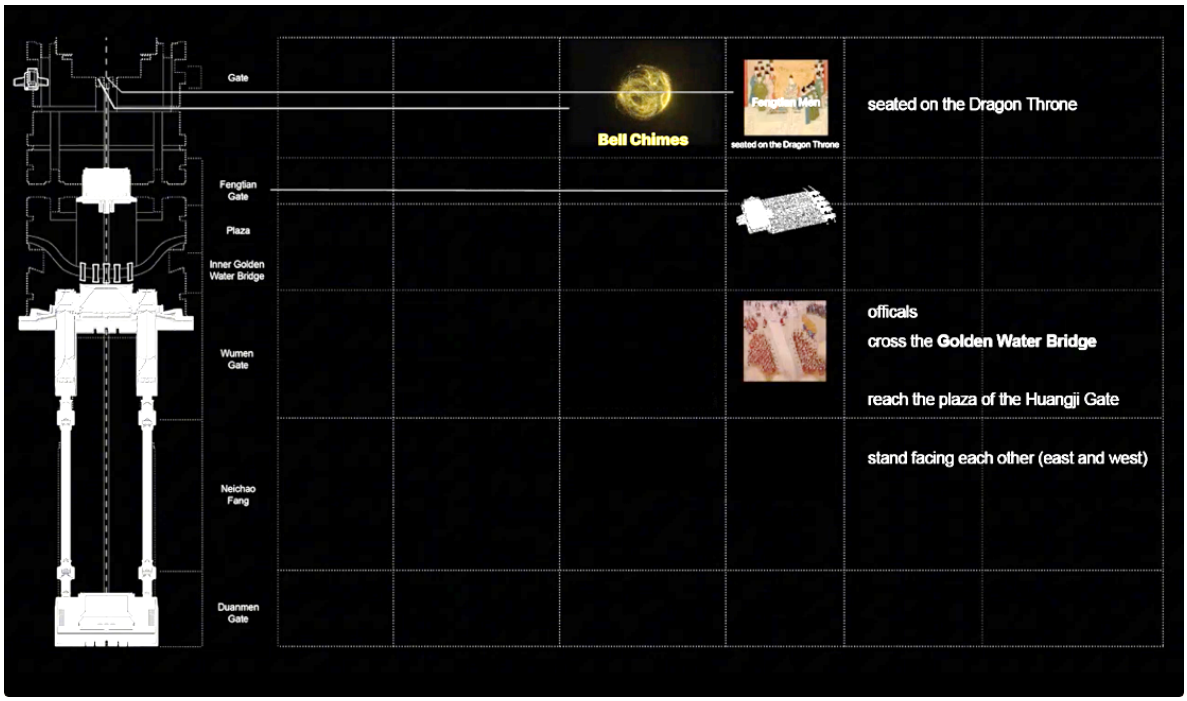


Figure 9

The bell space: M*ovement of the participants. Created by the authors, (2025).*

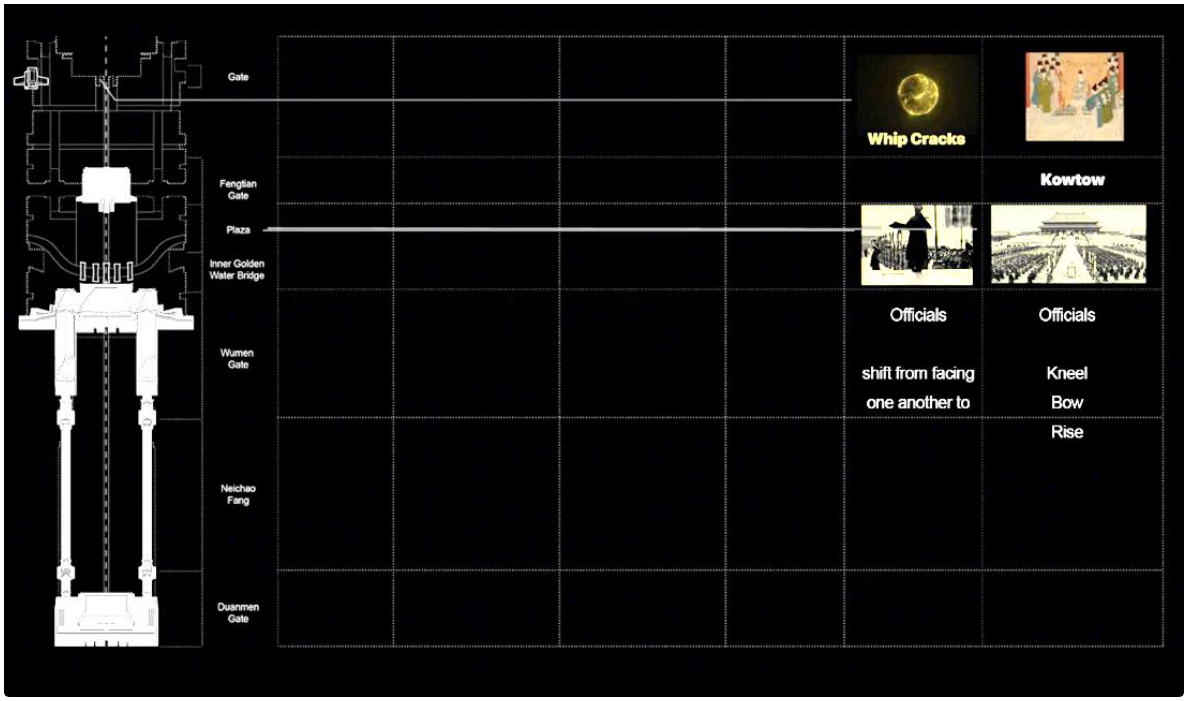


The final auditory signal was the crack of a whip (see Figure 10) Unlike the drum and bell, the whip did not regulate major spatial transitions, instead, it governed subtle movements and postural shifts within a fixed location. Upon the first crack of the whip,

officials, now assembled before the emperor, would shift their orientation, and perform the kowtow. The second crack indicated the emperor's departure and the orderly exit of the officials. The whip's sound controlled the most solemn and direct interactions of the ritual, imposing order at the most intimate scale.

These three sounds, passed down through dynasties,[27] were more than mere signals. They constituted a dominant temporal framework that superseded the spatial logic of the architecture itself, dictating how and when each space was to be used.

Figure 10
The whip space. Created by the authors (*2025*).



The Shifting Centre in the Forbidden City

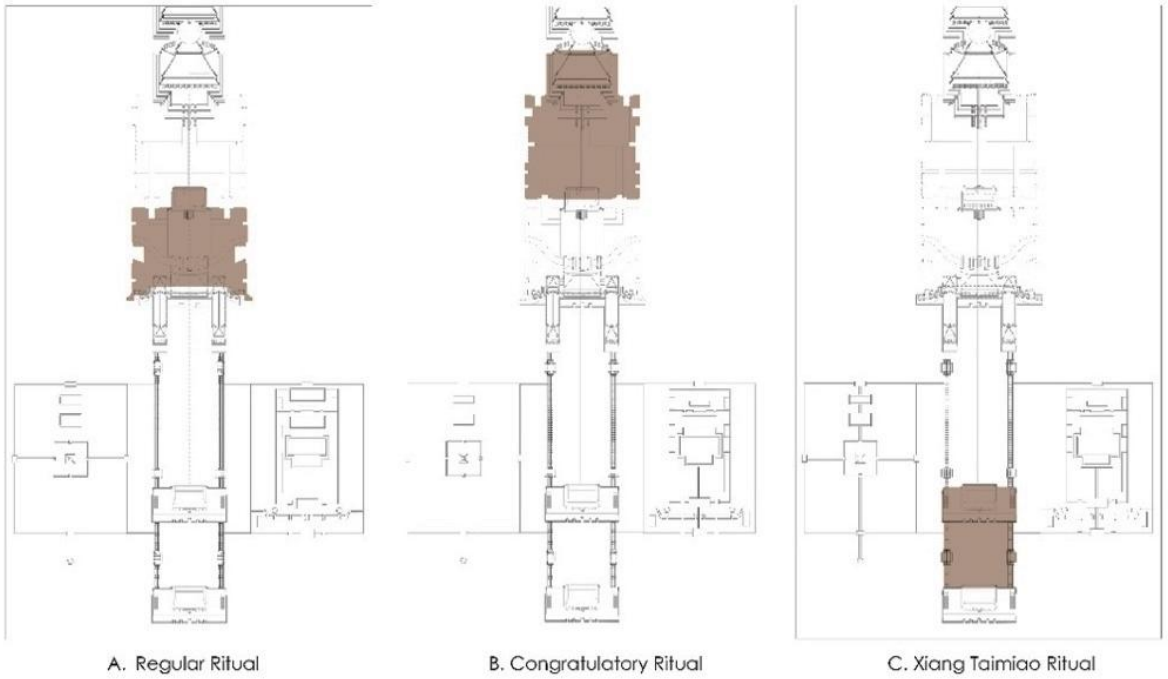
The Forbidden City's nested structure of gates and courtyards creates a flexible framework for imperial rituals. Within this setting, the central area of a ritual is not fixed: rather, it shifts according to specific needs. Ritual practice itself is what activates the space, allowing different architectural elements to function as "temporary centres", whose significance is continuously defined and redefined.

[27] The origins of the three ritual sounds — drum, bell, and whip — are respectively traced to three of the most sacred sources in Chinese tradition. The drum is linked to the primordial ritual music of the ancient ruler Yiqi Shi (c. 2400-2200 BCE), giving it a mythological origin. The bell, as a sophisticated instrument, is attributed to the era of the Yellow Emperor (c. 2700–2500 BCE), the progenitor of civilization, symbolising national craftsmanship and achievement. The whip, according to the *Rites of Zhou*, is defined as an official tool of power for maintaining order, establishing its place in the ritual-legal tradition.

This polycentric nature is clearly demonstrated through the strategic placement of ritual elephants (*yixiang*), which mark the symbolic start of the ritual. In the regular ritual, the elephants were positioned at the Wumen Gate, establishing its plaza as the focal point (see Figure 11-A). However, for other rituals, such as the congratulatory ritual and the *Xiang Taimiao* ritual,[28] the centre shifted dramatically. For more elaborate congratulatory rituals, it shifted north to the grander Fengtian Hall courtyard (see Figure 11-B); and for the *Xiang Taimiao* ritual, the *Da Ming Hui Dian* specifies that for this event, ten elephants were to be arranged *inside* the Chengtian Gate. This directive transformed the area between the Duan and Chengtian Gates (see Figure 11-C) — ordinarily a mere transitional zone — into the central stage of the ritual (Shen et al., 1988).

Figure 11

The Shifting Center of Different Rituals. Created by the authors (*2025*).



The unified plan of the city, with its central axis and symmetrical layout, provides a stable grid upon which these transformations could occur, but it was the ritual action itself that activated specific locations as centres. Therefore, relying on a singular, idealised spatial model like the classic *Sanchao Wumen*[29] risks oversimplifying the inherent complexity and polycentric reality of the imperial ritual system.

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[28] *Xiang Taimiao*享太庙: a shamanic ritual space, also known as Tangzi Jitian堂子祭天.

[29] *Sanchao Wumen*三朝五门: Three Audience Halls and Five Gates, which represents the ideal model of ancient Chinese imperial cities.

Conclusion

The ritual space of the Ming Forbidden City was both an instrument for creating order and a product of that very ordering process. This study has demonstrated that ritual order was not inherent in the architecture but emerged dynamically from the intricate interplay of time, action, and space. A unique, non-ordinary temporality, articulated through the auditory signals of drums, bells, and whips, served as the dominant structuring force, sequencing movements and activating different parts of the built environment. This system allowed for a remarkably flexible and polycentric use of space, where any gate, hall, or courtyard could be temporarily elevated to the status of a ritual centre based on ritual requirements.

By moving beyond a static analysis of architectural forms and embracing a performance-based perspective, we gain a deeper understanding of the Forbidden City as a flexible entity. The dynamic spatial patterns revealed through the court rituals constitute a critical, and often overlooked, dimension for understanding the spatial logic of China's imperial past. This approach uncovers how ritual action inscribes the built environment with deeper meaning, revealing its significance in the narrative of order, hierarchy, and power.

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21

Embodying Space and Text – Performative Presentation of an Academic Publication *Embodying Space: The Inside and the Outside of Soma in a Creative Process*

Bernadett Jobbágy
Doctoral School, Hungarian University of Fine Arts, Budapest, Hungary

Abstract

In my paper *Embodying Space: The Inside and the Outside of Soma in a Creative Process* (Jobbágy, 2024), I examined several possible ways of embodying space as a sculptor or performing artist, to find examples in artistic practices. Space is a process, and so is the body; especially, since the body itself — or the soma, the living body — contains inner spaces, which can and do relate to the spaces outside the body. *How do we perceive space and embody space on this multiple scale? How do we feel space, objects, and other bodies while we co-exist? What do those inside spaces transmit while the performers move or stand still through their presence? How can the director envelope and contain these dimensions and be 'holding the space' in and around the process? How to be the membrane around the fluid space, while maintain space within the membrain itself?* In this paper I juxtapose thoughts of the sculptor Morris and the somatic pioneer Bainbridge Cohen. Through their writings *The Present Tense of Space* (Morris, 1995) and *The Place of Space* (Bainbridge Cohen, 2006), I have found entry points to line up sculptural, somatic, and performative practices dealing with space and/or site-specificity. My performative presentation is an experiment in which I present excerpts of this writing using my body as a tool, accompanied by a pre-recorded soundscape based on the original written publication.

Keywords: embodying space, sensing space, performative presence, body, scale

Background of the Performance

In 2024, my text *Embodying Space: The Inside and the Outside of Soma in a Creative Process* was published. The writing emerged primarily from my experiences of space and of perceiving space as a performer, choreographer, and filmmaker. In its final form, the publication focuses on aspects of embodying space in relation to sculpture and performing arts, placing less emphasis on filmmaking.

For the *Performing Space 2025* conference, I created a condensed version of the text in order to transform it into spoken language within the sound layer of my performative presentation. The excerpt was shaped with particular attention to what could be meaningfully distilled into performance: what supported my dancing and embodiment of the original ideas behind the publication, and what could contribute a sense of poesis to the overall texture of the performance.

The text presented here was developed through a careful process of selection and reduction, until it became (almost) short enough for a ten-minute soundtrack. Its format differs from conventional academic writing, as it functions less as a publication and more as a kind of musical score.

The Written Material of the Performance

Space is a scale.
Space is a difference in density.
Space is relation.
Space and its boundaries – meeting through the surface.
Trespass.

Standing still. Breathing in. The hand rise, open. Hugging the front space.

Corridor. A strong but narrow focus. Compression.

A little pause.

Breath out. Open the arms. Spread. Let it expand, open.

Guide your arms back down.

Sensation of spaciousness enveloping you.

Permeate your whole body.

Letting the space flow on and around myself. - - - Is this the space of the mind?

Letting the space flow on and around myself. - - - Is this the space of the mind?
Is this the space of the mind?

Letting the space flow on and around myself. - - - Is this the space of the mind?

> *A space, where something belongs to, a space that something inhibits, a space which lives inside of something, and the space which is unfolding. The space which is in transformation, and space that informs.*
>
> *We need distance from ourselves, in order to let go. Space to see the larger picture.*

We have spaces in our minds and can have space between our thoughts. There is space (time) before the response and space (time) between action and reaction.

Through movement, dancers constantly intervene with space, and at the same time receive information from it. What most of the spectators can see, is the motion in the outside space, but for me, the spaces inside the body are as important as the outside ones.

Your felt experience will be your truth… you have to own your experience.

“The way spaces feel, the sound and smell of these places, has equal weight to the way things look” (Holl, 2005, p.7).

Being aware of that or not, we are affected by this felt quality of space and the spatial arrangement. According to McCormack:

> The relation between moving bodies and spaces is more than physical because it is always more than a relation between two discrete things: it is a relation between things already in process. […] Certainly, space is not reducible to the status of a passive, three-dimensional container within which the intentional action of an embodied, moving subject unfolds. Space, in other words, is never a backdrop for something more dynamic (2013, p.2).

I am working with and through the moving body, or bodies, as they unfold in space and time. The body relates to space and relates to another body or object through space. The performer's body also relates to the audience's bodies and the other way around. The dialogue with space is happening towards the inside space and towards the outside space, pretty much at the same time, and the skin lays there, as boundary and borderland.

skin

membrane

the border between fluid-filled and air-filled spaces

Earth

cell

fluid

alive

a space, that expands and condenses simultaneously

a space

membrane

The skin itself consists of different layers, which come from different embryological origins: the superficial layer, epidermis, originates from the ectoderm, and the deeper layers — dermis and hypodermis or subcutaneous layer — originate from the mesoderm (mesenchyme). Therefore, the skin is a meeting of layers that orient us both towards the outside world and the inside world. Spaces are related to each other and are also within or around each other.

The Outside

I am lying down. Lying down and grow. I feel the coolness of the floor,

and I feel as past my body,

the micro distances glide by.

Kinesphere — “the sphere around the body whose periphery can be reached by easily extended limbs without stepping away from that place which is the point of support when standing on one foot” (Laban, 1966, p.10). This spherical space around our body shifts as soon as we shift our weight (Thiriot, 2013).

Gravity is one of the basic and general forces acting upon us. It offers a very physical sensation of reality, the existence of the body on Earth with its weight and presence. At the beginning of the 20th century, new dance trends liberated the body from previous forms[30] and let gravitational force become visible in dance.

Contact Improvisation technique developed out of the exploration of the human body, in relationship to others' bodies and gravity.[31] Definition: two bodies create a singular one

[30] Ballet in a way is a complete illusion of weightlessness.

[31] This form of improvised partner dance roots back to 1972 and credited mainly to Steven Paxton, Nancy Stark Smith, and Lisa Nelson.

through a point of contact (for example back to wrist, shoulder to thigh, head to foot, back to back) so they can share the weight equally between themselves and then create a movement dialogue that can last as long as both of them are completely engaged in it. Therefore, it is about the weight exchange with the other person and a dialogue with the floor and space. Moreover, dancers are aware not only of their individual centre of gravity but also of the centre of gravity of the dance itself.

Becoming aware of weight, gravity, and space …
to feel the embodiedness of our physical reality…

A way of embodying space is through working with gravity and anti-gravity — relating to earth and heaven. This entails sensing, feeling, and acting upon the weight of the body, or being pulled by the space around.

“Most of us walk around in a split universe, the sensorial one in which the sun rises, and the rational one in which the earth turns” — writes Paxton in his book *Gravity* (p. 41).

In physics, gravity is a fundamental interaction that causes mutual attraction between all bodies with mass or energy.

… mutual attraction between all bodies with mass or energy.
… mutual attraction between all bodies with mass or energy.

Gravitational force is registered in the inner ear, in the labyrinthine system, and also in every cell of the body. Perception of touch, proprioception together with the vestibular system is the first sense to develop and underly the development of other senses[32]. Based on and supported by the senses, our reflexes develop:

> Primitive reflexes, righting reactions and equilibrium responses are a continuum of automatic patterns of movement that underlines our volitional movement. These patterns develop in response to the interaction between our internal state of being and gravity, other people and space. (Cohen, 2012, p.124)

Speaking about the process of dance and creation, […] one thing is, […] that in a learning process, dancers practice movements (choreography or training material) again and again, as many times, that they don’t have to *think about it* – that’s the moment when they actually learned it, embodied it: the moment from when the body remembers. The pattern is created and already sunk to subcortical levels. What has entered, or *passed into the body* can be recalled in a faster response cycle. It is the way to master any movement-based skill, from drawing to dance, and the way to release higher brain capacity for creative thinking. The other thing […] is that in our developmental process, we embody and integrate

[32] Later, the development of our movement toward space is supported by all senses – the taste and smell orient us in the near space; while hearing and vision connects to the space further away.

primitive reflexes, righting reactions, and equilibrium responses, but oftentimes dancers have to unlearn (re-write) some, to make themselves able to do multiple movement patterns and qualities. The head righting reaction is definitely one to unlearn, so that the head can drop if we imagine so, or explore space as a limb.

On Baghramian's voice:

> To take a pose, is in itself a temporary state, that needs the act of releasing to be able to formulate or form the next pose. You need a rest, at least to release the joints. The act between the two poses, that uncertain moment of contemplation captures my full attention.
> To get out of any kind of static mechanism, and frozen poses, and rethink our position, seems to be an important part taking further in our societies in general. The whole idea of poses and releasing the poses is actually to re-question every time our position, and not to get stiff. (BOSS, 2020, 00:21–1:10).

and not to get stiff… the act between the two poses, that uncertain moment of contemplation is something Morris (1978/1995), and the philosopher Mead (1934/2015) calls:

- the *I mode* of the self;
- *the present-time experiencing self, consciously reacting* (Morris, 1995, p.177).

Experience of physical space is inseparable from an *ongoing immediate present*. "*Real space is not experienced except in real time"* (Morris, 1995, p.177) He also refers to this as a *filmic experience*, in contrast to a *series of stills* when one recalls the spatial experience from the mind's space, from memory.

Relating Baghramian's thoughts to a state of mind that Bainbridge Cohen names as sitting in the synapse, this is the prerequired state in performing art, and more generally, for being present in any action.

Process of Creation

After distilling one possible essence of the original publication, developing the sound layer of the performance became another challenging yet inspiring phase of the process. As an editor, I am capable of basic sound editing and often use my own voice as a tool, though I do not consider myself a musician.

Following the text recordings, I also made field recordings of everyday sounds — such as stirring chia pudding in the kitchen or my cat licking its bowl. These recordings were later transformed using digital effects including reverb, echo, and distortion in certain sections, along with subtle noise reduction.

For the atmospheric music, I worked with an AI-based tool, generating soundscapes through the Riffusion[33] online generator. I used prompts such as *electronic/synthesizer music, no vocals, no lyrics, space-themed, ambient atmosphere*. This iterative process produced multiple variations, with selected results serving as the basis for subsequent prompts.

Media

sound of the performance: https://youtu.be/4Aa1gsnvE98

video documentation: https://vimeo.com/1114627813/e7ccce6a91?share=copy

Feedback and Conclusion

This process of double translation was one of the most exciting experiences of my research at the HUFA Doctoral School. About a year after writing a publication grounded in bodily experiences of space, I found it deeply rewarding to translate that text back into spatial movement and bodily presence. Performing it felt like a gift and the audience's response was unexpectedly warm and supportive. Rather than approaching me with handshakes or formal congratulations, colleagues from the conference came to hug me from their heart and excitement. Some told me "what a beautiful presence" I had, while others suggested that the piece could be further developed into a full solo performance, with the "hard-core academic text" remaining as a sound layer in the background.

Taking into account both the feedback and the experience of creating and presenting the work within the framework of *Performing Space 2025*, I consider this event a genuine research moment — in the strongest sense of practice-based artistic research: one that naturally generates new questions and initiates the next phase of inquiry.

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22

Living in Motion: Muleteer Corporalities and Territorialisation in the Maule Mountains, Chile

Valentina Sáez
Universidad Católica del Norte y Universidad de Tarapacá, Chile

Abstract

This presentation presents the reflections that emerged during a doctoral research project that investigates, from a mobile ethnographic perspective, livestock mobility in the Maule Region, Chile, also known as *arriería* (muleteering). The methodological proposal allows the body of both the researcher and their collaborators to be placed at the centre of a mobile way of life.

The mobile living of muleteers posits an everyday life in which the moving body is the protagonist: the actors lead their animals along mountain routes, sleep under trees, cross rivers, ride for hours or days, and flood the landscape with sounds, presences, and emotions. Muleteering practice constitutes an embodied practice that weaves a strong relationship with the spaces they dwell in, which are not only travelled but become territories laden with meaning through ongoing practices and relations. Following Ingold (2012), we understand the environment as a work in constant construction, in which both humans and non-humans interact, generating a sensorial experience that shapes the way we dwell in it.

Thus, the mobile living of the mule drivers questions the classic categories of domestic space, workspace, and the rural, as it is redefined in the experience of mountain mobility. In parallel with ways of life increasingly influenced by virtuality and urban sedentarism, muleteering remains a living practice, strengthening the embodied and relational experience with the environment.

This article invites us to rethink territorialisation from the perspective of the bodies that walk, ride, and feel, proposing an ethnography that moves with its interlocutors and gives rise to situated and embodied forms of knowledge.

Keywords: Muleteering, dwelling, mobility, corporality, territorialisation.

Living in Motion

This article presents reflections derived from ongoing doctoral research on the practice of extensive mobile livestock farming in the Maule Region, Chile, known locally as *arriería* (muleteering).[34] The purpose of this doctoral research is to understand *muleteering* persistence as a complex social phenomenon in the contemporary context. Within this framework, fieldwork opened the possibility of analytically exploring the corporeal dimension and its role in the emergence of territorialities.

Muleteering is a type of livestock farming practiced by men and women dedicated to raising, reproducing, marketing, or using for subsistence different types of animals such as goats, sheep, cows, and horses, taking advantage of the seasonal availability of pastures. During the winter, both muleteers and animals remain in the valley or the foothills (wintering). Later, they begin the summer season, moving for days to the mountain pastures, where they remain for long periods. This strategy, recognised in various contexts as transhumance, is also practiced in Europe, Central Asia, and Africa (Dong, 2016; Zinsstag et al., 2016), forming part of a set of global pastoral practices.

Drawing on the ethnographic experience developed during my doctoral research, I propose to analyse muleteering as an embodied practice inscribed in human and animal bodies. I will also explore how transhumant mobility, sensory perception, and interaction with the environment become fundamental elements for understanding the production of territory and spaces through processes of territorialisation.

I highlight the use of a mobile methodological approach, which follows the journey of muleteers in the different stages of mobile livestock farming (wintering and summering), also putting the researcher's body in motion. This approach has been fundamental for reflecting on how the moving body dwell and relates to the environment when carrying out these types of practices. At the same time, it has allowed us to question what we understand by domestic space, work, and rurality.

Body in Motion: Muleteering as an Embodied Practice

Muleteering is not only a practice aimed at raising and transporting livestock, but a way of life that encompasses the experience of being in the world and is deeply embodied in the body. Muleteers walk, ride horses, cross rivers, sleep outdoors, and travel across territories

[34] This article forms part of a doctoral research project in social anthropology conducted within the Doctoral Programme in Anthropology at the Universidad Católica del Norte and the Universidad de Tarapacá (Chile). The research is situated within the fields of rural anthropology and mobility studies, and examines the practice of the extensive mobile livestock farming (arriería) in the Maule Region, Chile, through a mobile ethnography. The dissertation is supervised by Dr Carlos Chiappe (UCN). This research has been funded by ANID BECAS/DOCTORADO NACIONAL 21220628.

for days and nights. The body becomes the protagonist of this movement, establishing a relationship of mutual impact with the environment.

The journeys involve long hours of riding, hiking along mountain trails, river crossings, and steep ascents and descents that are inscribed in the corporeality. Following Csordas (2010), muleteering can be understood as an embodied practice, conveyed in gestures, postures, modes of somatic attention, bodily skills, and perceptual dispositions. The muleteer's body is challenged in its strength, balance, and endurance, while also establishing an interdependence with the animals that accompany them. During mobility, the human body is in constant contact with the bodies of animals of different species: one sleeps next to dogs for warmth, rides the horse's body to move, and maintains a situated attention through one's own body that articulates landscape, herd, and movement.

The relationship with the horse is exemplary in this sense. Through continuous contact, the muleteer develops somatic modes of attention that allow him to read the animal's and the terrain's responses with his own body. As Csordas (2010, p. 87, author’s translation) points out, these modes are "culturally elaborated ways of paying attention to, and with, one's own body, in environments that include the embodied presence of others," in this case animals, trees, rocks, hills, or rivers. Thus, it is not only vision or hearing that guides action, but also the legs, posture, and muscular tensions, which transmit information to the horse and, at the same time, receive its own. In this way, through small tensions in the legs, changes in body balance, and different sounds, the rider establishes a dialogue and a direct connection with the animal. Thus, in the sense proposed by Marcel Mauss (1971), it develops a traditional body technique that has been passed down through generations.

In everyday practice, this body dialogue allows one to regulate the distance between horses, avoid the risk of crushing their legs, choose appropriate places to mount (Figure 1), and recognise the limits of passage according to the animal's size. Similarly, the horse perceives the rider's presence in its body and adjusts its gait to that co-presence. This relationship between the body of the muleteer and the body of the horse is an embodied relationship that is part of the muleteer practice and is expressed in the muleteer's corporeality. The continuity of this practice transforms the human body: muleteers describe how long days of riding are inscribed on their bodies, leaving physical marks such as bowed legs and other bone problems.

The body, understood from the perspective of Merleau-Ponty (2010) and Csordas (1994), is not a mere instrument, but the place from which the world is known and dwelt in. Along these same lines, Le Breton (1990, p. 7, author’s translation) affirms that "human existence is corporeal". Thus, every action — riding, herding, sleeping under a tree — produces embodied knowledge that is inscribed in experience. Correspondingly, Ingold

(2012) emphasises that the environment is not a passive setting but rather is shaped by the constant interaction between humans and non-humans.

Figure 1
A muleteer steps onto a stone in order to mount his horse. Photograph by the author.



Participant observation during cattle drives between valleys and mountains (2023-2025) allowed us to observe how human and animal bodies are integrated into a dialogical relationship. The swaying of the horse, the muscular tension of the rider, and the constant attention to the herd shape a complex experience of co-presence, in which the body constitutes a conduit of knowledge and relationship with other living beings.

Territorialisation in Motion

Moving away from the idea of space as something static and "given," and following Ingold (2012), we understand the mountain range as a work in constant construction, the result of interactions between humans and non-humans that generate sensory and affective experiences. It is through the muleteer´s moving body that this space is experienced, recognised, and continually shaped in relation.

In this context, speaking of territorialisation implies understanding how, through inhabiting space in motion, muleteers' bodily presence participates in processes through which space becomes meaningful. When actors appropriate space, concretely or abstractly, they territorialise it (Raffestin, 2011), transforming it into territory. The muleteers' mobility

along paths, tracks, and trails is not mere transit: each route travelled, each rest under a tree, each river crossing generates a territory of dwelling, full of meanings and embodied experiences that shape the muleteers' trajectories.

The mountain range space thus becomes a lived and dynamic territory, in which humans, animals, the climate, and non-human elements participate. In this process, the muleteers and their animals advance as a large, mobile assemblage through which space reconfigures in movement. Shouts, whistles, barks, bleats, and the sound of walking on stones create a soundscape that, as it expands through valleys and forests, transforms the space into a sensitive territory of dwelling.

Figure 2
Shelter, garden, corrals, and hills in a summer pasture camp. Vegas de Guaiquivilo, Colbún, Maule Region. Photographer: Teo Rodelas.



This way of living questions the classic categories of domestic and work space, which in muleteer's life dissolve into mobility. Home is not a fixed space: it is continually constructed and redefined in movement.

Muleteer's territorialisation is not reduced to geographical boundaries or formal land ownership, but is understood as a relational process through which territories emerge from mobile practices involving bodies, materials, and landscapes. Every nap under a tree, every

river crossing, or every mountain lodge becomes places of significance, socially produced as a site of dwelling.

During the summer, muleteers' families set up temporary and precarious shelters made of stones, wood, plastic, or zinc. These condense the domestic and the productive: cooking, raising children, and caring for animals all occur in the same space. The nearby hills are grazing areas, and the corrals and water sources are part of the same spatial framework (Figure 2). Even during transfers, the home is mobile, built on the move. Stones become walls or seats (Figure 3), trees become closets (Figure 4), and the fire pit becomes a kitchen and a centre for socialising.

Figure 3

Inside the shelter, where stone is transformed into a wall. Photograph by the author.



Figure 4

A tree is used ad a cupboard to store and hang muleteering implements. Photograph by the author.



Territorialisation is thus expressed as an assemblage where the human, the animal, and the material participate together.

The concept of territorialisation we propose here distances itself from the classic vision of a fixed space and is understood as a continuous process in which the muleteers are participants in the ongoing formation of the environment they dwell in. As Ingold (2012) argues, knowledge is not constructed piecemeal, but rather "grows within us as we move skilfully through an environment that resembles meshwork" (p. 75, author's translation), a word he uses to refer to "mesh." In it, the muleteer mobilities are simultaneously a production of knowledge and a way of knowing: "moving is the way in which the body knows" (Ingold, 2012, p. 82, author's translation) and constructs the environment it dwells in.

Mobile Ethnography and Situated Knowledge

The analysis of these dynamics was made possible through moving ethnography. This methodological strategy involved accompanying the muleteers on their journeys, participating in their work, and bodily experiencing mountain life. It wasn't about observing from the outside, but rather being with them and sharing their journeys, which allowed for a deeper and more situated understanding of the territory and the relationships they maintain with it.

Mobile ethnography not only records information but is built on shared experience. It draws on the muleteers' daily experiences and the emotions and affections that emerge in the interaction. Through this process, a bodily and situated knowledge is generated, emerging from the continuous interaction between the researcher's body and the bodies of the muleteers on the move.

Riding horses for hours, walking with the herd, crossing rivers, and sleeping outdoors were all part of the fieldwork. The researcher's body became a record: the night's cold, muscular tension, the dampness of the rain, fatigue, and hunger were inscribed as ethnographic data. This allowed us to understand that the territory is not captured solely through sight, but also through smell, hearing, touch, and emotions. The smells of wet animals, smoke, and dust; the sounds of barking, bleating, and screaming; the sensations of heat, fear, joy, or fatigue are all part of an embodied knowledge.

The mobile ethnographic method allowed us to understand muleteering through the movement of one's own body, accessing dimensions of the practice that are not conveyed through words, but are part of being immersed. It is the sensory experience that underpins Ingold's (2000) idea of the "environment", which goes beyond conceiving space as a passive stage. Her perceptual shift proposes studying the world in constant construction, where human and non-human beings interact. Integrating this perspective is fundamental to contemporary anthropology, which is called to produce knowledge from co-presence and to include all organisms and manifestations of the environment as part of the analysis.

Conclusion

Muleteering in the Maule Mountains persists as a living practice that articulates humans, animals, and environments in a mobile dwelling. More than a means of production, it constitutes a way of life through which territories in motion emerge and questions the classic categories of domestic space, workspace, and rurality. Territory is not a fixed space, but a dynamic construction that emerges from the interaction between human and non-human bodies in motion.

The mountain space, often rendered invisible as an interstitial space, is redefined as a living space. In a world marked by virtuality and urban sedentarism, muleteering recalls the power of movement as a way of dwelling. The mobile body not only traverses space; it experiences and participates in the ongoing transformation of space through movement.

Rethinking territorialisation from this perspective allows us to recognise the value of mobile practices as sources of situated knowledge, collective identity, and cultural continuity, demonstrating their relevance in a contemporary context of territorial transformations and pressures.

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IN A CLEARING

Helen Robertson
Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London

Abstract

This paper explores how my site-responsive and performance-based art practice embodies and re-inflects aspects of Hannah Arendt, Luce Irigaray and Adriana Cavarero's philosophical writings. At a juncture between philosophy and art I discuss my working methodology and how this seeks to embody a form of practice-based ecological thinking.

The idea of a performative political arena is discussed in relation to Irigaray's writings on air; she speaks of "the clearing*"* — "the place of entry into presence" (Irigaray, 1999, p.1). This clearing embodies "the condition of possibility, the resource, the groundless ground" (p. 5); here subjects flow into each other in non-appropriative relational interplay. Through discussion of my performance *its song* — an ambulatory reading of fragments of Irigaray's writing set in dialogue with danced movement - I elucidate orchestrations of body, text and architecture in relation to Irigaray's clearing.

Cavarero's writing on the uniqueness of each voice and her reference to Levinas' distinction between "the saying" and "the said" is used to explore how the specificity of live performance — its ephemerality and situatedness — can bring to the fore and "recuperate 'the very significance of signification"' (Cavarero, 2005, p. 29); discussing this in relation to *[these roarers]*: a durational participatory performance made in collaboration with Bernice Donszelmann and Lucy Gunning on Whitstable beach, that drew together movement, the rhythm and fragility of speech with the rhythm and mutability of the coastal borderline.

I use Arendt's concepts of natality and plurality to explore a politics of participatory space and collective embodiment. Arendt's idea of "the gap between past and future" (Arendt, 2006, p. 12) is important here, as for her the present moment is a gap in which we can become "challengers" (p. 4) thinking and acting anew. My performance *TO LIVE* (currently in development) that enacts interplay between dancers, an oboist and gestures of protest is discussed in relation to this.

Keywords: Performance, Architecture, Feminism, Embodiment, Space, Politics

IN A CLEARING

At a juncture between philosophy and art this paper discusses my site-responsive installational and performance-based art practice's embodiment of aspects of Luce Irigaray, Adriana Cavarero and Hannah Arendt's philosophical writings. Such live work can be said to enact a complex fusion of life as it unfolds and a meta space of presentation and representation: a structure that is pivotal to the three works by me discussed here.

Architectures in Air (Brixton Tate Library, 2023) was a site-responsive curatorial project realised in collaboration with artist Bernice Donszelmann. In the library's flexible multi-use room, a collaborative architectural intervention acted as a frame for curated events and ongoing library activities (see Figure 1). A spatial arena was demarcated by painting the existing banks of low-level heating pipes blue. Thus encircled, the "void" of the room's body of air was given status as a condition of possibility. Through this gesture our curatorial focus on air was aligned to the more holistic attitude of Eastern philosophical traditions in which "Vacuum is all potent because all containing" (Okakura, 1956, p. 45).

Figure 1
"Frame/Tilt*"–a site-responsive architectural painting, Brixton Tate Library 2023 (Bernice Donszelmann and Helen Robertson)*.



My performance *its song* (see Figure 2), worked with interplay between an ambient live reading of fragments of Luce Irigaray's *The Forgetting of Air* (1999) and a danced choreography that embodied ideas of breath and architectural voids.

Figure 2
"its song", *performance view Brixton Tate Library 2023 (Helen Robertson with Antoinette Brooks-Daw)*



In Irigaray's text, air is seen to resist appropriation, as it exists within us and beyond, allows movement, sustains us and is something we share. Her book enacts a dialogical form, as if in conversation with Heidegger — "to take away from him this solid ground" (Irigaray, 1999, p. 2) — her response expounding a notion of "a clearing"; "the place of entry into presence" (p. 3). This concept of a clearing is "Of air."; an embodiment of "the condition of possibility, the resource, the groundless ground" engendering a radical space of reciprocity and resonance (p. 5). Here, intersubjectivity is part of a flow that cannot be separated out into fixed subject positions.

> From their mouth are breathed sounds that mean to say nothing — that are just the inspiration that will strike the other with feelings and thoughts overspilling these sounds. A versicle for the most part inaudible to that which they forefeel in the wind. (p.178)

Here, Irigaray articulates a space of embodied sensory relation, a space of *becoming* where edges dissolve. In this space processes of signification, that is to say, the specificity of the situational, live, ever-shifting interplay between bodies and place — that constructs signifieds — becomes more important than, or dissolves, what is said. Through this, language's desire to fix and contain falls apart, leading us towards embodied states that

connect to forms of understanding that are non-verbal. In resonance with this, *its song* worked with interplay between breath and bodily movement: the reader and dancer circling the room, each other and the audience; each element interdependent as well as free.

[these roarers]

[these roarers] (see Figure 3), a participatory event made in collaboration with artists Lucy Gunning and Bernice Donszelmann on Whitstable beach (Whitstable Biennale, 2018) also enacts a dialogical structure.[35] Across the space of a day, friends, the wider public and students read to each other from a series of curated texts, whilst also performing simple choreographed movements embodying the rhythm of voice, breath, wind and tide. Through this, excerpts of appropriated texts from different historical periods referencing sea, land, weather and human agency were brought into dialogical relation with the mutability of the coastal borderline and the contingent embodied experience of those present.

Figure 3
"[these roarers]", *performance view, Whitstable Biennale, 2018 (Bernice Donszelmann, Lucy Gunning and Helen Robertson)*.



An intimacy was created as participants came together in groups of three, drawing close to listen to one another's voices amidst the sound of the elements and footfall in the shingle. At times words were lost in the wind and waves, shared air passing through the lungs of each reader dispersing to infinity. The interrelation this created was perhaps felt all the more

[35] Helen Robertson, Lucy Gunning, and Bernice Donszemann, *[these roarers]* - press release (June 2, 2018), https://www.helenrobertson.net/-these-roarers--text.html

strongly at moments when the voice became inaudible; the immersion in rhythm — the movement of bodies, air and water — giving rise to a non-verbal synchronicity and a heightened sense of the interrelation and interdependency of bodily and wider climatic fields.

Reading aloud here created an embodied interplay in which processes of signification — that is to say, bodily movement, the sound of the voice, weather and site — became almost more important, or as important, as what was said. In *For More than One Voice: Towards a Philosophy of Vocal Expression* Cavarero (2005) discusses a lacuna in western philosophy: its failure to explore an ontology of unique specificity embodied in each individual voice, and the philosophical canon's focus on logos prioritising the signified at the expense of embodied processes of signification. With reference to Emmanuel Levinas, Cavarero speaks of a need to "recuperate 'the very significance of signification'" (p. 29). She argues that the focus on the said rather than the saying overlooks the contextual and the embodied, divorcing us from our interconnection with each other and the wider contextual ecological fields we are part of. In my view, live work is a space in which to address this problem, as the very liveness of performance and site-responsive installation — its ephemerality, and situatedness, and its staging of relational and embodied processes of signification — enact an idea of lived and transient relations, destabilising the logos within the field of liveness.

TO LIVE

In *TO LIVE* (a live performance currently in development; see Figure 4) written text is set in counterpoint to choreographies of bodily movement (danced and pedestrian) and an oboe score embodying spatial reverberations of breath. In parallel to an activation of text, two dancers enact interplay between the disciplines of ballet and contemporary dance — one embodying air and lightness, the other, earth and the grounded. An activation of breath links both and is affirmed and unsettled through the haunting reverberating oboe score. Whilst devised separately, each choreographic score — textual, danced, pedestrian and musical — will respond to the given space, the scores coming together in a semi-improvised live interplay with spatial specificity.

Working to problematise Western philosophy's foundational disjuncture between the logos and the haptic, the work's contrapuntal pedestrian choreographic element, in which sixteen A1 posters are held up at intervals, uses dialogical interplay between the written word and the corporeal. The unstable paper surface of the posters, the sensuality of their different coloured grounds and the movement of their rectangular geometries through air within the field of the performance's architectural arena embeds the text in a movement that is relational and contextual in interplay with living bodies.

Figure 4
An iteration of TO LIVE *made for camera: video still of this filmed choreography* Hanging in the Balance, *Five Years, London 2023 (Helen Robertson, supported by CSM Research)*.



The posters present fragments from political philosopher Hannah Arendt's prescient writing on the destructive forces of capitalist and totalitarian ideologies, wherein "no-thingness and no-bodyness threaten to destroy the world" (Arendt, 2005 p. 204), juxtaposing these with fragments of text by Cavarero (2005), whose political philosophy responds to Arendt (see Figure 5). Western philosophy's reliance on the abstract is for Cavarero (2000) a form of violence. "It is almost as though it is the attribution of universality itself that makes a monster of Man" (p. 8). In response to Arendt, Cavarero (2000) explores how recognition of the embodied uniqueness of each individual can allow for an inter-relational approach: vulnerability and interdependence being fundamental to the ethics of non-violence Cavarero expounds.

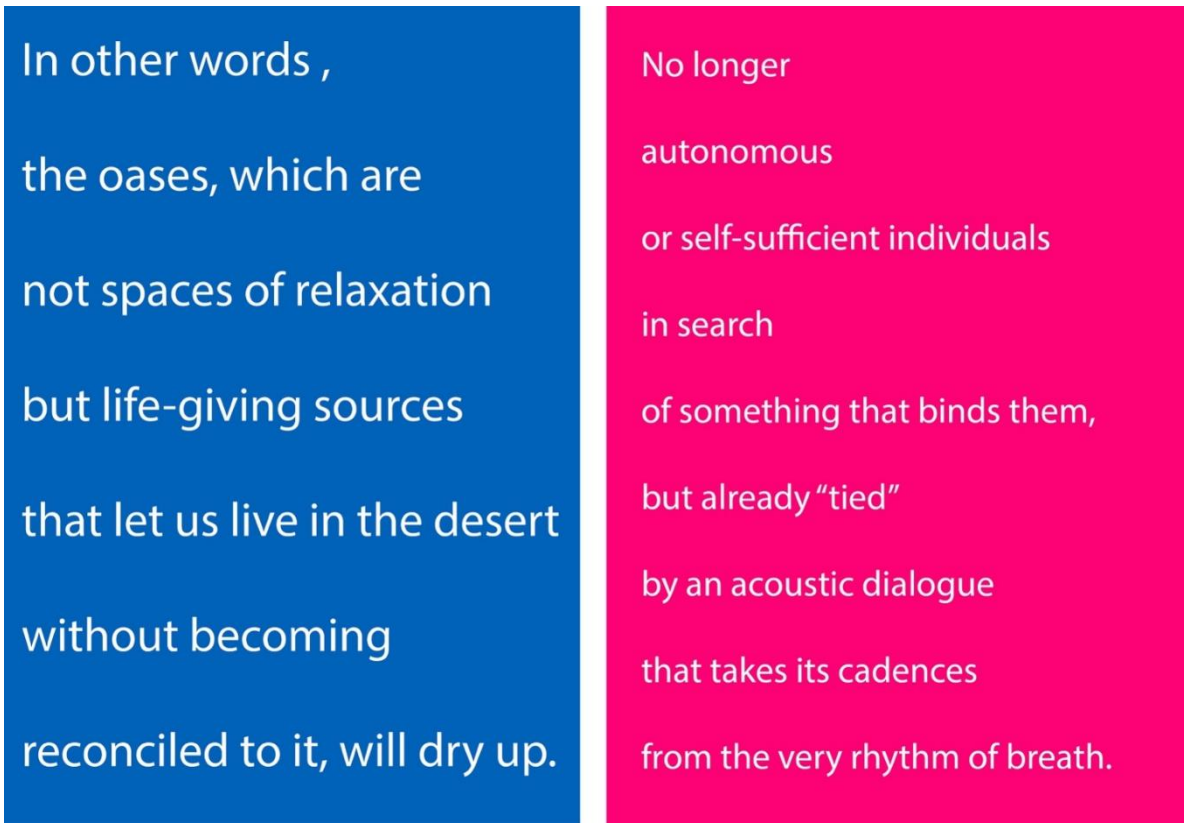
TO LIVE embodies Arendt's image of the "oases in the desert". For Arendt (2005) the "oases" were metaphorical, symbolising a space of resistance to the alienation that capitalism and totalitarian politics engender. Describing this alienation as "worldlessness" (p. 201), she saw "the oases" as vital for nurturing creative thought. "Without the intactness of these oases we would not know how to breathe, and political scientists should know this" (p. 202).

In the contemporary political context — global warming increasing exponentially, driven by the prevailing capitalist and neo-liberalist mindset — Arendt's "desert" which is now real, has new import, as does Cavarero's ethics of non-violence.

Counter to Western philosophy's preoccupation with death, Arendt's idea of "natality" allows for a transformational notion of politics wherein each new life holds the potential to

think anew. Arendt (2006) explores the notion of a “gap of time between past and future” (p. 12) in which we can become “challengers” (p. 4), each individual within the plurality having the potential to act on the world. For Arendt, existence is not essence but appearing (I see this as a form of *becoming*) — the individual “exposed*”* and “exposing*”* within a plurality; a being in relation to others that is inherently political (Cavarero, 2000, p. 21). Live performance for me enacts this gap (see Figure 6): it has the potential to bring into consciousness this political space because it plays out in real time, heightening the contextual nature of lived experience and our awareness of our relation to each other.

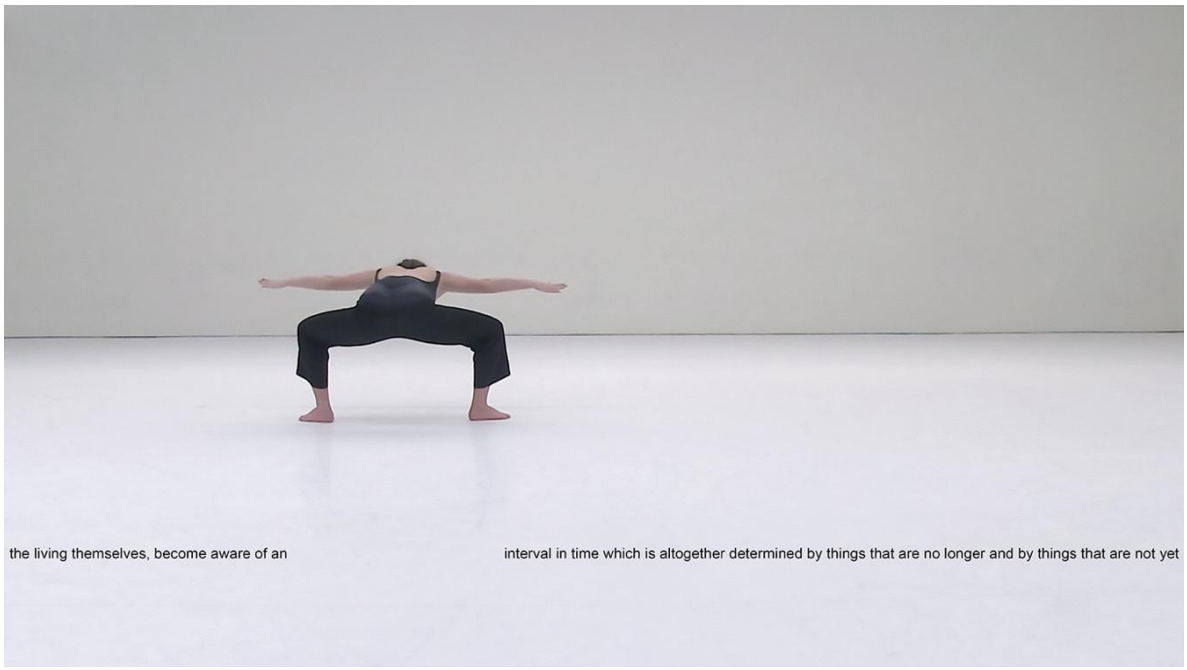
Figure 5
“TO LIVE”, *A1 Posters (Helen Robertson). Text from* The Promise of Politics *(Arendt, 2005) and* For More Than One Voice *(Cavarero, 2025)*.



Conclusion

By working with the sensory and the spatially embodied, each work discussed seeks to heighten the audience’s sense of participatory involvement, so they become part of the choreography — they too are *exposed* and *exposing* — the performance arena involving them in their own sense of agency and interdependence. The speculative, plural and political nature of this multi-sensory live arena thus holds potential to shift entrenched appropriative attitudes prevalent in contemporary Western culture.

Figure 6
In the gap between past and future, digital print, 2021 (*Helen Robertson*).



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Playing in the City: Practice and Poetics of Reclaiming Urban Space

Dimitra Kordomenou
Architect, Independent Researcher[36]

Abstract

Drawing from Henri Lefebvre's line of thought regarding the search for an *other* form of urbanity, as developed in his text *The Right to the City*, and aspects of Richard Schechner's theory on performativity, this article aims to process performative field actions as social and artistic practices of renegotiating the relationship with urban space and time. The study approaches key ideas from Henri Lefebvre's explorations concerning the city as a space of claiming a new urbanity, such as the transformative powers of art, playfulness and the imaginary, working on their intersections with Schechner's approaches to the concept of performativity, which identify play and ritual as inherent to every expression of performance. The proposed framework is utilised for the analysis of two case studies of artistic performative practices in public space: *Children's Games* (Francis Alÿs, 1999-ongoing) and *Revolution Bodies. Walking in the Centre of Athens* (Diana Sabri, Eleni Tzirtzilaki, 2014). The very nature of such practices — oscillating among daily life, art, social practice, and activism — is perceived and explored as a transitional space, necessary for unleashing the imaginary and engaging with *other* spatialities and expressions of the possible. As a result, they emerge as practices that encapsulate the transformative potential Lefebvre seeks in the context of reclaiming urban life, thus providing a research field rich with material for further elaboration and potential expansion of the discourse around urbanity.

Keywords: performativity, Lefebvre, public space, reclaiming

[36] This paper develops work originally undertaken during the author's Master's studies at National Technical University of Athens, School of Architecture.

Playing in the City

This essay explores aspects of the evolving discourse on urbanism and urban space, emphasising the interplay between urban society's development and the negotiation of urban space, drawing on Henri Lefebvre's ideas about the city as a space for claiming a new urbanity and its intersections with Richard Schechner's theories on performativity, before examining selected examples of performative art practices in public space. The nature of these practices — oscillating between everyday life, art, social engagement, and activism — provides the transitional space required for the liberation of the imaginary and the interaction with spatialities and expressions of the possible. It encompasses, in a way, the transformative dynamic that Lefebvre seeks within the framework of reclaiming urban life, thus providing a field of research with abundant material for further processing and possibilities for expanding the discussion on urbanity, as presented within the current context.

The first part of the study synthesises an understanding of the emancipatory role of performance as an artistic practice, referencing Lefebvre's *The Right to the City* and Schechner's concepts of play and ritual. Following Lefebvre’s analysis, urbanity is explored at the level of everyday life and the claim for a transformed urban experience. Lefebvre emphasises the interrelation of social reality and art, envisioning the city as a dynamic work of art to be collectively experienced and reimagined, while Schechner’s theories of performativity are also employed, highlighting central concepts such as play and ritual, which are argued to underlie all forms of performance. These frameworks are used to signify performance as a social and spatial practice that shapes and reclaims urban experience.

The second part examines case studies of performative art practices in urban spaces, specifically Francis Alÿs's *Children’s Games* (1999-ongoing) and the walking action *Revolution Bodies* (Athens, 2014) by Diana Sabri and Eleni Tzirtzilaki. The study of both works allows the emergence of aspects of the urban experience within the emancipatory framework set by Lefebvre and under which they are approached, while simultaneously presenting in a characteristic and particularly tangible way the concepts that Schechner's positions employ. The selected cases foreground the temporal and experiential dimensions of urban life, through which the city emerges as a lived and contested space where art becomes a mode of claiming, transforming, and reimagining urbanity.

Ultimately, the present exploration aims to broaden the understanding and signification of urban space through the lens of performative art practices, considering their socio-political context and transformative potential.

Praxis and Poiesis I: In search of the movable centrality

Henri Lefebvre's 1967 article *The Right to the City* explores the transformative potential of urban spaces during a time of social and political upheaval. Lefebvre argues that life in the city should be seen as a work of art and emphasises the importance of reclaiming urban space and time through creative and emancipatory processes. Throughout his text, he acknowledges the obligation of theoretical reflection to redefine the forms, functions, and structures of the city, as well as social needs, including the human need for play as a non-productive activity. This emphasis on the need to construct a world through the imaginary, which is rooted in creative activity, in a way transcends the fragmentation of labour, as happens with manifestations such as sexuality, sports, art, or knowledge.

Leaving aside representation, ornamentation and decoration, art can become *praxis* and *poiesis* on a social scale: the art of living in the city as work of art. (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 173).

Lefebvre also discusses the role of art in transforming reality and restoring the sense of work. He envisions a new humanism that emerges from the reforming of the city[37] and life within it, proposing the idea of "ephemeral cities" and "movable centralities" to challenge traditional urban structures. Ultimately, Lefebvre outlines the concept of an emancipated urban subject that shapes the city and is in turn shaped by it, emphasising the dynamic interplay among individual subjectivities, collectivities, and urban spaces.

> Why not oppose ephemeral cities to the eternal city, and movable centrality to stable centres? All audacities can be premissed. Why limit these propositions only to the morphology of time and space? They could also include the way of living in the city and the development of the urban on this basis (p. 155).

Praxis and Poiesis II: On the performance continuum

The concept of performativity, influenced by the socio-political conditions of the late 20th century, has significantly impacted the fields of intellect and art. Richard Schechner defines performance as "restored behaviour", or “twice-behaved behaviour” (Schechner, 1985, p. 36, 150), while associating it with being, doing, the exhibition of doing, and the interpretation of this exhibition (2013, p. 28), highlighting its repeatability and symbolic nature.[38]

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[37] Lefebvre defines the city as “the projection of society onto the ground” (p.109). This definition brings attention to the implicit signification of the physical space (the ground) through the social relations and regulations constituting society.

[38] In an even more general framework, Goffman defines performance as any activity of a given participant in a given situation that serves to exert influence, in any way, on any of the other participants (Goffman, 1959, 15–16).

Schechner identifies seven key functions of performance: entertainment, the creation of beauty, identity formation or modification, community building, healing, teaching, and the management of the sacred or demonic. These wide-ranging functions suggest that performativity can encompass nearly all expressions of the human condition and behaviour, a scope intensified within the framework of increasingly mediated contemporary communication.

He also suggests that two central concepts permeate the broader spectrum of performative behaviour and exist in its individual expressions: the concepts of play and ritual. According to Schechner, the performance of rituals plays a significant role in managing transitional periods throughout the human experience and in the formation and maintenance of a community. At the same time, he recognises in ritual the dynamic of creating a place of transcendence by expanding experience to another space and time, suspending the limitations of social reality.

As for play, Schechner goes as far as defining performance as “ritualised behaviour conditioned by play” (Schechner, 2013, p. 89), emphasising its inseparability from its playful aspect. With its spontaneity and lightness, play contrasts yet balances ritual’s gravity, while both enable transitions to otherness through the activation of the imaginary, fostering creativity and new modes of experience. Within this study, particular attention is given to the non-productive quality of play (Caillois, 1961, p. 5,10) (Schechner, 2005, pp. 9-10): unlike economically driven processes that aim to produce wealth or material goods, play resists productivity and instead restructures behaviour in imaginative and transformative ways.

Playing in the city I: Children’s Games

Francis Alÿs[39] is a Mexico-based Belgian artist who explores urban space and human activity through his work. He focuses on everyday practices, particularly walking, performing “paseos”, walks that “resist the subjugation of public space” (Tate, n.d.) and question city structures (Vitali, 2018, p. 237). His work investigates urban tensions and the interplay between the poetic and political.

The selected project, *Children’s Games,* spans twenty-six years so far (1999-2025) (Alÿs, n.d.) and captures scenes of children's play at various global locations and quite different landscapes, from peaceful cities to war-torn areas. This series brings attention to the contrast of the light-hearted nature of childhood backed by children’s imagination and the human-made environments that host it.

Children’s Games include playfulness as a central aspect of performance, simultaneously aligning with Schechner’s theories. Play, in this case, appears not as a

[39] For more on the work of Francis Alÿs, see Bloemheuvel & Guldemond (2019).

symbolic artistic gesture, but as an authentic quality of childhood, expressed through lightness and spontaneity. Yet, when framed through the artist's selective gaze and spatial choices, these moments take on poetic and political dimensions. Children's activities can thus be read as oscillating between play and performance, depending as well on the viewer's perspective — an essential element of all performative actions. For instance, the simple hand game of two girls with stones in Kathmandu reveals not only playful spontaneity but also ritualistic repetition, suggesting a deeper performative quality.

Viewing this example as a performative practice, several of Schechner's functions become evident: identity formation, community creation, and the production of beauty. Correlating these elements with spatial aspects of performance highlights how children uniquely experience and appropriate environments, echoing Lefebvre's vision of urban life as a work of art. Through this framing, Alÿs reveals spaces of the possible, where a child's engagement with space reveals parallel possibilities of existence. In doing so, he reintroduces playfulness as a liberating dynamic, suggesting its emancipatory potential even within adult urban life.

Playing in the City II: Revolution Bodies

The second performative action examined took place in the centre of Athens, organised by the Nomadic Architecture Network, a group that intervenes in urban spaces with actions that blend art and architecture, focusing on areas in crisis, migration, displacement, gender differences, and the claim of common goods. The actions of this group, through embodied performance and the spatial transformations it brings to the urban landscape, express the political existence of the individual subjectivities that comprise it, as well as the ephemeral collectivities created within it.

Revolution Bodies. Walking in the centre of Athens, organised by Diana Sabri and Eleni Tzirtzilaki on April 3, 2014, involved a route from the Free Self-Managed Theatre Embros to the National Garden, with stops at significant locations such as Kotzia Square and Omonia Square. During the walk, readings and narrations related to the history of these locations were made, addressing events such as the occupation of the Municipal Theatre by refugees of the Asia Minor catastrophe (1922), the murder of Alexandros Grigoropoulos (2008), or the events of December 1944 in Athens. The action critiqued the dominant narratives of the time, such as *Rethink Athens* and the *Discovering the National Garden* programme, which marginalised residents and their rights to the city.

This performative action, through walking practices, organised an ephemeral collectivity that brought back parts of urban memory, intensifying the emotional charge for the participants. The action blurred the boundaries between everyday/social and artistic

practice, creating a transitional space of dialogue with an *other* urbanity. The collective wandering body, created during the performative action, reclaimed multiple temporalities of past, present, and future narratives, emphasising the non-productive appropriation of urban space. At the same time, the readings and narrations reinforced the collective memory of resistance and political claims within the city, forming a community through shared ritual processes and reappropriating the urban narrative.

Conclusion

This essay has explored Henri Lefebvre's ideas on urbanity, focusing on the liberating dynamics of claiming urban space and time, and experiencing the city as *work (oeuvre)* (Lefebvre, 1996, p.66) rather than an exchange value. Throughout this investigation, the concept of art is fundamental, as, for Lefebvre, it embodies precisely this transformative dynamic, transcending the fragmentation of productive labour. At the same time, the materialisation of this reformative force has been traced in the formation of a potentially collective urban body. These expressions of the liberation of creativity and the imaginary were approached in relation to Schechner's analyses of performativity. The connecting link between the two frameworks has been identified in the concept of playfulness, which, according to Schechner — in a manner that aligns with Lefebvre's narrative (regarding the qualities of work versus product) — is characterised, among other things, by non-productivity.

Within this framework, the study has examined performative in-situ art practices, highlighting their ability to open transitions to other places and their role in facilitating the understanding of abstract meanings. This outcoming theorised playfulness can be admitted to some extent to have lost its dominant quality — that of the liberated imagination that transcends everyday experience and introduces novel worlds. However, the return to literal children’s play activates through memory and emotional experience the precise perception of playfulness as the light mechanism that encompasses in its authentic form the unimaginable dynamics of transcending war landscapes. The successive urban temporalities were also revealed as an integral element of experiencing the city as work. The emphasis on the appropriation of time, through the multilayered temporal narratives developed during the performative walk *Revolution Bodies*, intensifies the activation of collective memory and reinforces the formation of a collective body that reclaims urban space and the layers of its narrative.

In an attempt — albeit with considerable reservation and even greater abstraction — of condensing Lefebvre’s approach of urbanisation, it might be suggested that one of its major achievements lies precisely in having shed the weight of its own signification. In the face of a heavy, serious, forceful, and rigid system of capitalist production, Lefebvre counters with

the light, creative, childlike, and dreamlike play. Without altering the essence or substance of his radical proposal for a renewed appropriation of urban experience, it is the very manner of claiming it that ensures access to data and dimensions which the sterility of design is incapable of foreseeing. Perhaps it is precisely this capacity to unfold potential other worlds that renders the category of performance — suspended between social practice and art — a promising meeting point for the reflection of theorists and the praxis of poets.

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Let's Inject Some Randomness into the City: Reflecting on Eliza Soroga's Site-Specific Performances in London and Prague

Eliza Soroga
Independent Performance Artist & Scholar, Athens, Greece

Abstract

From 2014 to 2023 I created a sequence of three site-specific performances developed in public spaces. Making art in public spaces is a purposeful choice; the real world, as opposed to the theatre world is subject to randomness, an element which adds unpredictability to the artistic practice as a desired challenge and risk.

The first performance was in London Bridge (London) entitled *Breakfast on London Bridge* (2014). It experimented with a simple rhythmic contradiction: how a slow-pace everyday action of having breakfast blends in with the quick-pace of a rush hour on a Monday morning.

The second one, in Oxford Circus (London), entitled *Women in Agony* (2015) intended to make a comment on urban alienation, neurosis, uniformity and consumerism. Sixteen women gathered in the middle of the pavement amongst fashion victims in rush hour and simultaneously screamed.

The third one took place in Prague's historic centre entitled *IN QR WE TRUST* (2023) reflecting on post COVID-19 changes and the rapid digitalisation of our everyday lives. The latter was part of the Prague Quadrennial Performance Design programme.

In this essay, I would like to reflect on these works by posing some research questions: What is the dialogue between everyday life and Performance and the urge to create a rare encounter with passers-by? How do we conceive of lived public experiences as revealing the possibilities for re-inventing public spaces? How do we incorporate the reality of the chosen sites reaching out for the *poetics of places* by using the site-sensitive approach into the making? What does unpredictability and randomness have to offer to the experience of public space?

These performances witness the possibility of a new public sphere, open to the unpredictable vitality of spontaneous authentic reactions. This is achieved through injecting randomness, spontaneity and risk into a metabolism stunned by repetition and routine.

Keywords: site specific performance, re-inventing public spaces, randomness and the city, Prague Quadrennial Performance Design 2023

Let's Inject Some Randomness into the City

In this essay, given my experience working in public spaces, I would like to reflect on the dialogue between everyday life and performance, and the urge to create a rare encounter with passers-by. I will discuss the conception of lived public experiences as revealing the possibilities for re-inventing the public realm. I will also consider how the reality of the chosen sites is incorporated into the work, reaching toward ae "poetics of places." I will then examine the role that unpredictability and randomness play in the experience of public space.

Breakfast on London Bridge (2014)

The performance experimented with a simple rhythmic contradiction: how a slow-pace everyday action of having breakfast blends in with the quick-pace of a rush hour on a Monday morning. Before implementing the idea, we stayed on site for long hours observing its rhythmic patterns and/in relation to our inner body rhythms.

> The rhythmanalyst will not be obliged to jump from the inside to the outside of observed bodies; he should come to listen to them as a whole and unify them by taking his own rhythms as a reference: by integrating the outside with the inside and vice versa. (Lefebvre, 2004/1992, p. 19)

We remained silent and also chatted while observing the passers-by's reactions. The site underwent the transformation ed from weekdays to weekends. We chose to work at the busiest moment; the rush hour on a Monday morning. The choice of costumes and props was designed to fit the old British 'tea culture'. London Bridge serves as a symbolic and physical connector between two distinct urban spheres: the northern 'Bank' district, characterised by its office culture, and the southern, more affordable residential area where many office workers reside. To be placed at the centre of the bridge was a stenographic choice: we wanted to incorporate the reality of the site and thus be inseparable from it without being decorative or illustrative.

Neoliberal systems have produced what Harvey calls "time-space compression." People rush to work and public spaces transform into places-in-between home and work.

> I use the word 'compression' because a strong case can be made that the history of capitalism has been characterized by speed-up in the pace of life, while so overcoming spatial barriers that the world sometimes seems to collapse inwards upon us. (Harvey, 1989, p. 240).

As a response to the above, we performed a slow-paced breakfast for six hours in silence. Passers-by were mostly indifferent — they had to rush to work — but some stood there and twitted photos. It became viral on twitter for a while. People didn't

approach us at any time except a police car that stopped and asked; “So you are just having a tea?” We nodded and they said, “Enjoy your tea, have a nice day!”

Figure 1
Breakfast on London Bridge, a performance by Eliza Soroga and B Hanusova. London Bridge, 2014. Photo by Manolis Mavris.



Women in Agony (2015)

This performance took place at Oxford Circus in London, one of the most commercially active streets in the world. Sixteen women gathered in the middle of the pavement amongst fashion victims during the rush hour and simultaneously screamed. The intention was to comment on urban alienation, neurosis, uniformity and consumerism. Sennett (2003) states ‘‘in Marxist terms *commodity fetishism* identified from mass production and homogeneity of appearance’’ (p. 20). Fashion industries make people feel the need to be unique and special, but they all end up looking exactly the same. The performance was first filmed on a quiet Sunday morning — the only occasion for which we were granted permission by the City of London — and was subsequently repeated multiple times with different performers during various rush-hour periods.

The choice of location was proposed by B. Hanusova, with whom we had previously collaborated on *Breakfast*. We met at Oxford Circus station and agreed to walk blindfolded from there along Regent Street to Piccadilly Circus station. It was a dreadful experience but we committed to it until the end. This heightened our perception of the city’s soundscape and amplified our sense of its dynamic, fast-paced character. The concept for the performance emerged for me immediately after the walk, once the blindfolds were taken off.

Owing to the considerable logistical demands of the project, it was decided that I would develop it as a solo work.

Figure 2

Women in Agony, A performance by Eliza Soroga, Oxford Circus, London, 2015. Photo by Rocio Chacon.



Broadly inspired by the Expanding Theatre movement, the idea developed following the tradition of "*theatrum mundi"* and Balzac's *La Comédie humaine*[40]*,* where the city can be seen as a stage, and of course the Fluxus movement, and Happenings, which blurred the boundaries between life and art. As Maciunas (1963) states: "Promote a revolutionary flood and tide in art, promote living art, anti-art, promote NON ART reality to be grasped by all peoples, not only critics, dilettantes and professionals".

For me it is important to create art, in this case, a flash mob, that can be witnessed by everyone in public space; a living public experience which intends to twist the expectations of its viewers and puzzle them as its form is designed to remain unclassified. Is it a protest? Is it an advertising campaign? Is it art?[41]

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[40] In *La Comédie humaine*, Balzac describes the world as a stage where individuals play roles, and society functions as a grand theatrical production. This aligns with the classical concept of "theatrum mundi," which views the world as a stage and life as a play.

[41] When I was developing this work, I got an offer from a women's clothing brand to use this action as part of their advertising campaign. Inevitably, "it's the non-conformists, not the conformists, who

This performance intends to investigate the vague line between everyday life and performance. It was conceived in a site-specific manner: first the place was chosen, then the artwork followed. Making art in public spaces is a purposeful choice; the real world, as opposed to the theatre world, is subject to randomness, an element which adds unpredictability to the artistic practice as a desired challenge and risk. Some people screamed along with us but most of them maintained silence. It was magical to witness this place transforming, the noise abruptly disappearing for a few seconds. The feeling was ritualistic, and the experience unfolded overall like a ceremony.

IN QR WE TRUST (2023)

IN QR WE TRUST (formerly entitled *I Like 2020*) took place in Prague's historic centre, the Old Town Square, and reflected on post COVID-19 changes and the rapid digitalisation of everyday life. It was part of the 2023 Prague Quadrennial Performance Design programme.

A mixed crowd of performers from different cultural backgrounds, ages and professions took over the centre of Prague, all wearing QR code T-shirts from their Covid certificates[42]. When they reached the Old Town Square, they simultaneously screamed.

The performance acquired its significance through its presentation in public space, where it was directed towards passersby and intended to be experienced collectively. The shared reality of the pandemic provides a common point of reference: similarly, this performance is designed to be experienced in public space and made accessible to all, whether as participants or as observers.

The streets of Prague served as the scenography of this work, functioning as a shared space for collective movement and the creation of memorable experiences, while simultaneously linking the homes in which people were compelled to isolate during the pandemic. In a symbolic realm, they stand for any capital city centre; they create a kind of opening, a possibility for a “derive” in psychogeographical terms.

> One of the basic situationist practices is the dérive [literally: ‘drifting’], a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. Dérives involve playful-constructive behaviour and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll. (Debord, 1958, para. 1)

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are driving consumer spending. Brand identity is all about product differentiation; it’s about setting the product apart from the others” (Heath & Potter, 2005, p. 106).

[42] These certificates are issued after they have been vaccinated against COVID-19, tested negative or recovered from the virus.

Taking its cue from the curatorial concept's phrase "Think of what urgently needs to be performed"[43] under the theme of RARE experiences of the Prague Quadrennial 2023 and the pandemic, this promenade performance invited people to gather, walk together and scream.

Figure 3
IN QR WE TRUST, A performance by Eliza Soroga, Old Town Square, Prague, 2023. Photo by Jiri Kralovec.



Several months after the performance had concluded, I began to consider how the work might assume a more general scope, less directly tied to the pandemic. The QR code alone was sufficient to function as a metaphor, particularly in light of the radical shifts towards digitalisation of everyday life witnessed in recent years.

In this context, the individual's physical identity became secondary to their digital imprint. During the COVID-19 pandemic, access to freedom was often contingent upon a simple scan. The title of the work derives from this context: just as the phrase "In God we trust" signifies faith in a higher authority, QR codes have come to function as new forms of authority in contemporary life.

[43] The performance was curated by Carolina E. Santo.

Conclusion

This essay examined three site-specific performances presented in the public realm, with a focus on the “poetics of place” characteristic of each location. Each performance was analysed according to a set of key factors: 1) the dialogue between everyday life and performance, 2) the urge to create a rare encounter with passers-by, 3) how public spaces can be potentially re-invented through these actions 4) the significant role that unpredictability and randomness play in shaping the experience of public space.

These performances witnessed the possibility of a new public sphere, open to the unpredictable vitality of spontaneous authentic reactions. This is achieved through injecting randomness, spontaneity and risk into a metabolism stunned by repetition and routine.

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A Moment in Digital Time
Pause During Performative Gameplay

Eleana Pandia
Ph. D Candidate of the Department of Communication, Media and Culture,
Panteion University, Athens

Abstract

In digital culture, the pause in video games has evolved from a mere functional interruption into a complex act of temporal resistance. Far from being a mechanical convenience, it serves as a cognitive necessity and a performative tool that shapes player experience, narrative pacing, and audience engagement. Drawing from the traditions of theatre, music, and dance — where silence and stillness function as punctuation that lends depth and nuance — the video game pause emerges as a site of agency within the accelerated temporality of contemporary media.

As Schmalzer observes, pause menus “reveal computational modes of time and space that are always present in all aspects of videogame play” (2020, p. 2). In an era when Twitch viewership exceeded 20 billion hours and global gaming revenue reached $187.7 billion in 2024; the cultural and performative dimensions of pausing have never been more significant. This paper explores the pause as cognitive sanctuary, dramaturgical device, technical affordance, and philosophical gesture of resistance.

*Keyword*s: pause, performative gameplay, strategic gameplay, cognitive pause and somatic recovery

Pause across the Performative Arts

Bergson's concept of durée distinguishes the qualitative, continuous experience of lived time from the homogeneous, quantitative time measured by clocks and scientific calculation (Bergson, 1910, pp. 98–104). The act of pausing in games suspends computational processes, granting players temporal sovereignty and creating a liminal zone where experiential time asserts itself. Drawing on Taylor's concept of the repertoire as embodied knowledge (2003, pp. 20-21), the pause can be understood as a performative act in which meaning emerges through the withholding and resumption of action through timing, bodily stillness, and gestural latency rather than through stable textual or representational forms. Sontag describes silence as an active aesthetic strategy that operates through withholding, restraint, and refusal rather than expressive fullness (1967, pp. 3–10). Fischer-Lichte's work on stillness and temporal suspension as performative events that intensify presence and generate transformative feedback between performers and spectators (2008, pp. 38–45) helps us understand pausing as a performative act that produces meaning through temporal modulation rather than representational content. As a performative operation, pausing reconfigures temporality, redistributes relational expectations, and delays narrative resolution, thus contributing to the production of situational social and narrative realities rather than simply marking an absence of activity.

In music, the pause — or rest — is as essential as sound. Cage's 4'33" (1952) radicalized the notion by presenting silence as performance, shifting the focus from composed sound to environmental listening. This aligns with Adorno's (1976, pp. 51-54) observation that musical rests punctuate time, structuring the listener's consciousness and preventing saturation. More conventionally, musicians use phrasing pauses to create anticipation and emotional resonance, echoing Aristotle's claim in the Poetics (1998/ca. 335 BCE, 1447a13–16) that rhythm and harmony are inseparable from mimesis, or the representation of human action.

In dance, stillness interrupts the kinetic flow, emphasising the embodied temporality of movement. Foster (2011, pp. 111-116) argues that pauses in choreography destabilise the expectation of continuity, foregrounding the dancer's vulnerability and presence.
Bausch (2006) and Cunningham (1968; 2002) employ silence and suspension to create moments of heightened intensity, in which the absence of motion invites audiences to reconsider the ontology of dance as continuous movement in time, a conception critically interrogated by Lepecki (2006, pp. 15–18).

Thus, the pause in performance is not an interruption but a constitutive element: it organises rhythm, creates interpretive space, and resists the cultural imperative of constant

motion. As Cage (1961) demonstrated, silence itself is never empty; it is full of potential, awaiting interpretation.

Pausing in the Digital Realm

Early arcade games omitted pause function, reflecting an economic model based on continuous coin consumption. The introduction of a dedicated pause button with the Atari 5200 in 1982 marked a shift towards individualised temporal control. By the mid-1980s, titles such as The Legend of Zelda integrated pause into core gameplay systems, embedding it within role-playing mechanics. In competitive settings, pauses became strategic tools for disrupting opponents and recalibrating performance, while in online multiplayer games the absence or restriction of pausing reflects tensions between individual agency and collective temporalities.

From a cognitive psychology perspective, pausing during streaming and performative gameplay operates as a temporal disruption of predictive processing, generating short-lived information gaps that heighten anticipation and mental simulation (Clark, 2016, pp. 1–6; Gottlieb et al., 2019, pp. 559–563; van Dijk & Zeelenberg, 2019, pp. 65–67). Professional players employ pauses as brief intervals for strategic analysis, cognitive recovery, or psychological pressure, a form of temporal mastery that parallels how actors and musicians use silence to shape meaning and attention (Campbell et al., 2018, pp. 7–9; Rink, 2002, pp. 35–38; Noice & Noice, 2006, pp. 564–566).

It is argued that pausing complicates the flow state, which is characterised by seamless action and diminished self-awareness (Shakeri Hossein Abad et al., 2018, pp.3-5). Gaming, however, often requires a form of engaged mindedness, a metacognitive readiness that can benefit from temporal breaks. Research on unconscious thought suggests that such pauses may enhance decision-making by allowing complex information to be integrated outside the limits of conscious deliberation (Dijksterhuis & Nordgren, 2006, pp. 101–104). Thus, far from undermining flow, pausing during game play can sustain it by regulating attention, emotion, and physiology.

Pausing during a gaming session typically entails a full halt of computational processes, producing a genuine temporal rupture in play; in single-player contexts, navigating pause menus situates play within an alternate temporal and spatial frame that reshapes the player's experience of time and action (Schmalzer, 2020, pp. 1–2). In multiplayer environments, however, unrestricted pausing introduces risks of exploitation, prompting developers to experiment with limited or consensual pause systems to preserve fairness and temporal integrity (Zagal & Mateas, 2010, pp. 848–850). Speedrunning communities further expand pause mechanics through techniques such as pause-buffering, which allows frame-perfect inputs and reveals the hidden temporal architectures of code (LeMieux, 2014, pp. 1–4; Newman, 2019, pp. 8–12).

Within a culture of constant acceleration and instant consumption, the pause operates as a form of temporal resistance. It reclaims presence and purpose against the imperative of constant engagement. Echoing Foucault's concept of technologies of the self, pausing enables players to exercise agency through reflection and recalibration within systems otherwise designed to capture and sustain attention (Foucault, 1988, pp. 16–18). This article examines pausing in performative gameplay, while suggesting that pauses in interactive media can also be understood as more than functional interruptions. The pause marks an intersection of cognition, performance, and philosophy, offering moments of reflection, structuring narrative and dramatic tension, and resisting the accelerationist logic of digital culture. Whether employed tactically, performatively, or reflectively, pausing reframes gaming from continuous consumption into a practice of temporal mindfulness.

Pause to Think, Feel, Understand, Decide and Relish

The physiological benefits of pausing extend beyond simple rest to include processes of emotional and cognitive regulation, as evidenced by research in performance psychology and neuroscience (Beilock, 2010, pp. 47–52; Altenmüller & Furuya, 2016, pp. 261–275).

The emotional regulation function of pausing is particularly important in high-stakes performance contexts, where heightened anxiety and stress can significantly impair performance quality (Yoshie et al., 2009, pp. 345–363). Gaming performers must manage not only the cognitive demands of gameplay but also social anxiety, performance pressure, and audience expectations. In this context, pauses function as brief intervals for emotional regulation and psychological recalibration, supporting both moment-to-moment performance and longer-term sustainability (Albulescu et al., 2022, pp. 6–9; Kou & Gui, 2020, pp. 1–4; Poulus et al., 2025, pp. 12–15).

Sustained attention and fine motor control in gaming can generate physical tension; as with other skilled performers, pauses enable somatic recovery and postural recalibration (Altenmüller & Furuya, 2016, pp. 261–275). Evidence from sustained attention research indicates that brief breaks restore attentional resources and reduce errors (Ariga & Lleras, 2011, pp. 439-443), suggesting that pausing in gaming similarly mitigates cognitive fatigue during prolonged or high-intensity play. The physiological dimension of pausing also intersects with broader questions of embodiment and technology. Gaming relies on a form of embodied cognition in which visual perception, motor control, and cognitive processing are tightly coordinated in real time (Clark, 2008, pp. 24–27). Pauses provide moments for this embodied system to recalibrate, supporting sustained coordination and optimal functioning across extended periods of performance.

Pause at Play

Contemporary esports provide rich empirical examples of strategic pause deployment in competitive gaming, demonstrating the practical application of theoretical frameworks around temporal control and performative agency.

In major tournaments like *The International 202*1, which featured prize pools exceeding $40 million, teams strategically deploy permitted pauses not only for tactical discussion but also as psychological tools for disrupting opponent rhythm and managing pressure (*Esports Insider*, 2025). These practices demonstrate the performative dimensions of pausing, where temporal control becomes a form of competitive communication.

Modern competitive titles such as *League of Legends*, *Dota 2*, and *Counter-Strike 2* have developed sophisticated pause systems that balance individual team needs with match integrity. The 2024 *League of Legends World Championships* in London demonstrated how pause timing and duration can become significant factors in match outcomes, with teams using strategic pauses to break opponent momentum during crucial moments (*Esports Charts*, 2025). These examples provide concrete evidence for theoretical claims about pause as performative utterance.

Audience connection in gaming is often mediated through pausing. Professional players use brief pauses to analyse game states, evaluate options, or recover during moments of heightened intensity — practices widely understood to influence competitive outcomes (Esports Insider, 2025). Such temporal manipulation renders gameplay performative in a theatrical sense, as pauses, timing, and suspension function analogously to dramaturgical devices that structure action, shape audience anticipation, and organize cycles of tension and release, consistent with performance theory's treatment of games and play as enacted spectacle (Schechner, 2002, pp. 22–30).

Streaming contexts provide different but equally revealing examples of pause mastery, demonstrating the application of performance theory to digital media contexts. With platforms like *Twitch* recording over 20 billion hours watched in 2024, successful streamers have developed distinctive pause styles that become part of their performative identity (*Twitch*, 2024). The technical challenges of streaming — including issues with buffering, connection stability, and audience retention — have created new pressures around pause behaviour that extend beyond traditional gameplay concerns.

The development of browser extensions such as "Click to Pause" for *Twitch* reflects audience demand for greater control over temporal experience in streaming contexts (GitHub, 2024). These tools demonstrate how pause functionality has become essential not just for performers but for audiences navigating an increasingly complex media landscape where attention management becomes crucial for engagement. This technological response

to pause needs provides empirical support for theoretical arguments about temporal agency in digital environments.

While pausing can function as a powerful design and performance tool, its implementation in competitive online multiplayer games requires careful regulation to prevent exploitation, such as deliberate interruptions that disrupt gameplay flow and competitive balance (Zagal & Mateas, 2010, pp. 848–850).

Nevertheless, in many online cooperative games, pause functionality may be more feasibly implemented through constrained designs such as opt-in activation, limited duration, or mutual agreement among players (Schmalzer, 2020, pp. 41–44). In performative gaming contexts, pausing ultimately affords players greater control over pacing and narrative progression, emphasizing key moments and cultivating suspense in ways that structure entertainment experience (Hanson, 2018, pp. 112–115).

The emergence of pause-centric games such as Superhot, in which time advances only through player movement, signals new possibilities for pause mechanics as core gameplay principles rather than auxiliary functions. Such designs suggest future trajectories in which temporal control is more fully integrated into fundamental mechanics, giving rise to genres organized around the deliberate manipulation of time and attention (Hanson, 2018, pp. 118–121).

This evolution illustrates how philosophical concepts of temporal agency can be operationalized within interactive media design. This article has examined the pause in digital gameplay as more than a functional interruption. Across artistic, cognitive, and performative domains, the pause emerges as a site of agency, reflection, and temporal mastery. In competitive and streaming contexts, it operates as both a strategic tool and a dramaturgical device, shaping performance and audience engagement. At a broader philosophical level, pausing interrupts the accelerationist logic of digital culture, offering opportunities to recalibrate attention, regulate emotion, and sustain long-term performance. By foregrounding the significance of stillness alongside action, the pause reframes gameplay as a practice of temporal mindfulness — one that enables players and audiences alike to engage not only with purpose, but also with meaning.

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27

Streetstories
Instagram as Drift

Katerina El Raheb
Department of Performing and Digital Arts, University of the Peloponnese, Nafplion, Greece

Abstract

Streetstories is an artistic practice that has emerged over the past five years (2020–2025), rather than being deliberately designed. It arose out of necessity — an embodied practice that consists of walking, discovering, capturing, and posting as Instagram Stories frames of rather insignificant dislocated things.

It celebrates the notion of chance — the spontaneous act of photographing seemingly unimportant textual objects found while walking on the street and sharing them. This project embraces the following principles: artistic practice as a minimal gesture of everyday life, resonating with Perec's concept of the significance of insignificant (Highmore, 2018) and the idea of chance. It serves as a gentle reminder to frame the minimal messages and symbols that are spontaneously encountered.

In an age of constant speed and endless scrolling on social media — where everything can be filtered, polished, altered, or AI-generated to attract attention and engagement — *Streetstories* represents a conscious, perhaps radical choice to frame, share, and archive unimportant textual traces or small objects that catch my eye while walking. While presented exclusively through Instagram Stories, the project intentionally resists the platform's aesthetics of curation and enhancement on which I reflect in this paper.

Keywords: Instagram, Chance encounters, Embodied practice, Urban trace, Significance of insignificant

Figure 1
A screenshot of Streetstories *(2020-2025). A playing card found on the street. Photo by the author.*



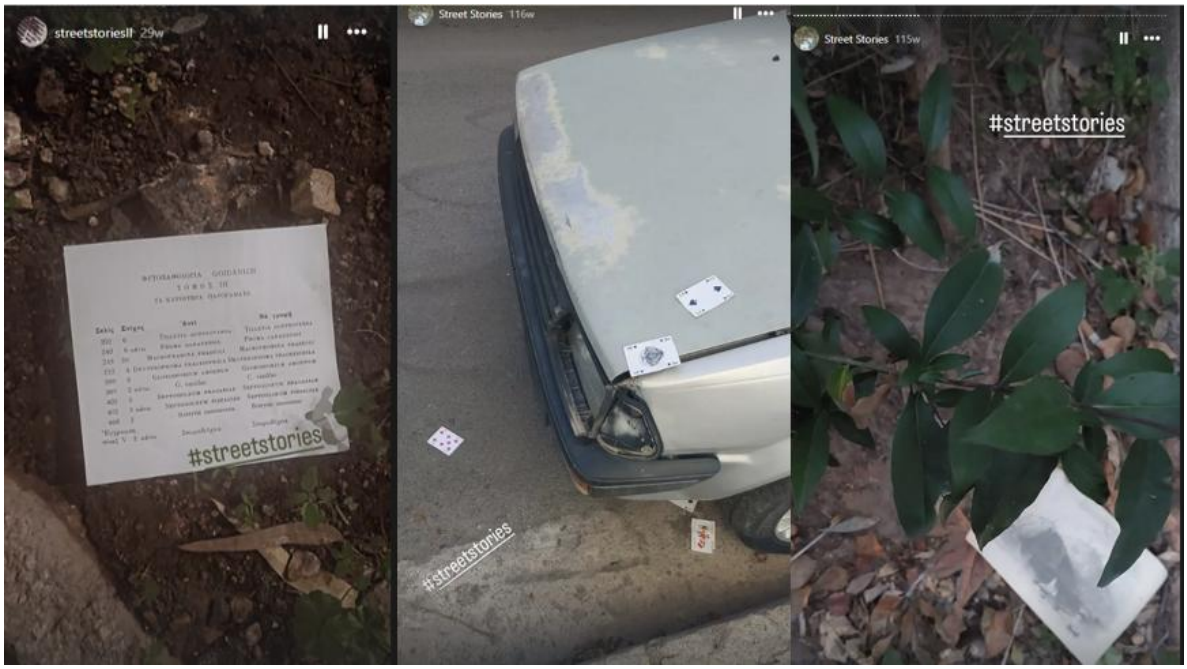
What is *Streetstories*?

Streetstories is an ongoing artistic practice born from curiosity and chance, shaped by unimportant paper traces found in public space. During COVID, when walking became the primary way to engage with the unpredictable and break the lockdown routine, *Streetstories* first emerged through the discovery of scattered playing cards. The project began as a form of urban divination: a generative fortune-telling practice in which found objects became messages, symbols, or fragments of unseen narratives. These encounters framed the street as a space of serendipitous meaning, where the residue of everyday life could be read like a shuffled tarot deck. Over time, *Streetstories* has grown into a sustained exploration of the mundane and discarded, documenting ephemeral textual fragments, packaging, notes, signage, and other overlooked materials encountered while walking (Figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8 and 9).

The project continues to evolve in real time, at its own pace, leaving the decision of the next post to the moment when the street reveals itself — like an urban fortune-teller. It unfolds without scheduling, production, or design, shaping itself through the consistency of its practice. The random elements that are lost and found have established their own rules for what *Streetstories* is and what is not. Instagram in *Streetstories* case, functions as a heterotopic digital space — ephemeral, accessible, and attuned to the temporal rhythms of walking and witnessing. It becomes an invitation to create an algorithmic ritual celebrating unimportant, mundane traces within a medium often dominated by spectacle.

No filters or visual corrections are applied, countering the hyper-aestheticised “Instagram gaze”, to use a widely now used term that was introduced by Feldman and that was critiqued by Jurgenson (2019,). Instead, *Streetstories* embraces Manovich's (2017) concept of vernacular visuality: image-making grounded in immediacy, awkward framing, and the refusal of spectacle. Through this approach, Instagram becomes a heterotopic digital space — ephemeral, accessible, and attuned to the temporal rhythms of walking and witnessing.

Figure 2
Streetstories *screenshots (2020-2025). Photo by the author.*



Presented exclusively through Instagram Stories, the project resists the platform's aesthetics of curation while embracing ephemerality. Each story lasts 24 hours, reflecting the transient nature of the depicted object, which may drift away with the wind, pedestrian steps, or the morning street cleaning.

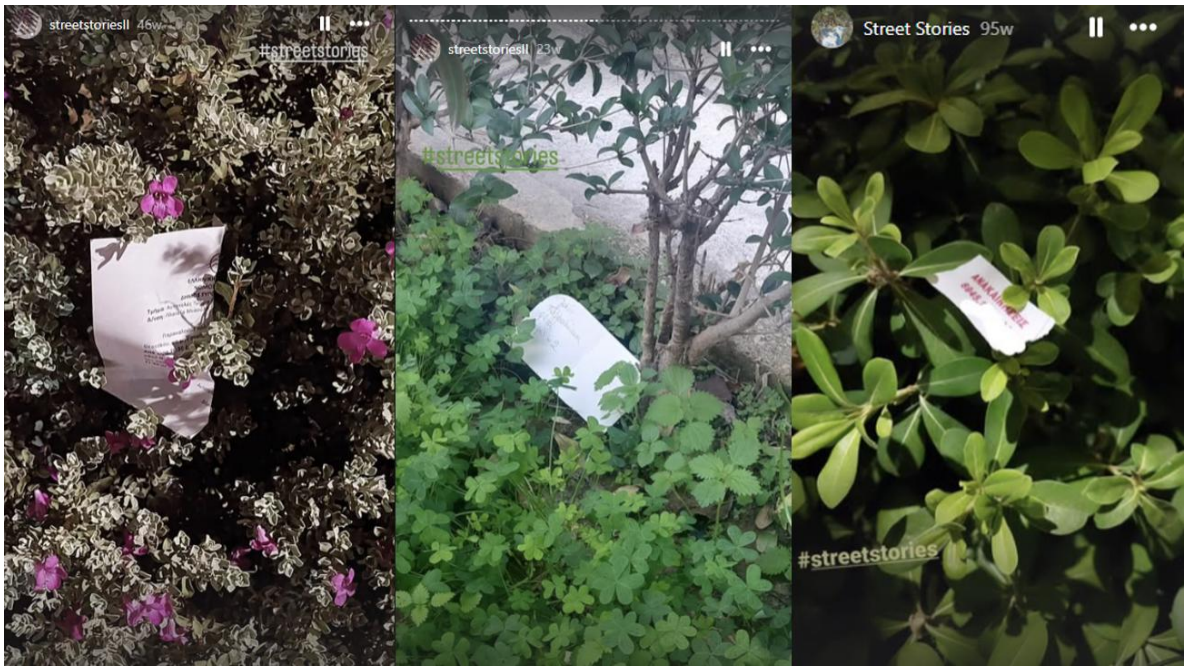
The practice draws on De Certeau's (1984) concept of walking as a spatial tactic, where the pedestrian inscribes meaning onto the urban landscape. The found objects, captured spontaneously and without intervention, function as what Foucault (1986) termed heterotopias: real yet othered sites that disrupt normative spatial and narrative logic

From Instagrammism to Drifting

The question of why people post, share, view, or like content can be examined from various perspectives: digital and social media marketing, human-computer interaction, media philosophy, or sociopsychology. Unquestionably, social media are powerful tools for companies' and professionals' visibility and marketing (Kietzmann, 2011). Researchers have identified several reasons why individuals spend time on social media: social interaction,

information seeking, passing time, entertainment; relaxation; communicatory utility, and convenience utility (Whiting & Williams, 2013). Posting on social media is usually a way of curating a persona and a brand — not only through professional profiles but also through individual ones. We are often asked to self-censor to maintain a certain image based on an "imagined surveillance" (Duffy & Chan, 2019, p. 119-138).

Figure 3
Notes grown on trees. Streetstories *(2020-2025). Photo by the author*.



Jurgenson (2019) criticises the hyper-aestheticised "Instagram gaze," while Manovich (2019) recognises Instagram's influence in shaping a whole lifestyle. Data analytics can categorise images people post on Instagram based on characteristics such as colour, contrast, shapes, and objects, using automated algorithms of pattern recognition on the frame of pixels or through metadata (e.g., time of day, location, demographics). Manovich, however, brings a social dimension to this analysis, introducing the concept of *Instagrammism*, which categorises posts as casual, professional, or designed. Instead, *Streetstories* embraces what Manovich (2017) calls "vernacular visuality": a mode of image-making grounded in immediacy, awkward framing, and the refusal of spectacle. Through this, the project re-appropriates Instagram as a heterotopic digital space — ephemeral, accessible, and attuned to the temporal rhythms of walking and witnessing.

What is worth capturing? Chance, Algorithms and Digital Embodiment

From a phenomenological perspective (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; 1968), embodiment is not merely about having a body but about acknowledging that every small gesture or act,

such as taking a picture as an embodied act. According to theories of embodied cognition (Clark, 2008), every conceptualisation is a metaphor or a name given to an already recognized embodied experience. *Streetstories* deliberately exclude any visual representation of my body; embodiment exists through the frame as a memory of walking, discovering, and capturing.

Figure 4
Streetstories *screenshots. Streetstories (2020-2025) Photo by the author*.



I came to see the act of capturing as inherently performative, with every document, photograph, or digitised artifact serving as evidence of absence — a double absence: first of the original object or action being captured, and second, of the person who performs the act of capturing it. The #streetstories algorithm:

1. *Get out of the house.*
2. *Go where you are supposed to or just walk.*
3. *If you see something "worth capturing."*
4. *No adjustments, no filters.*
5. *Upload to Instagram Stories.*
6. *Add #streetstories.*
7. *Continue.*

This raises the question: *what does chance have to do with algorithms?* While recent technological advancements in AI and social media connect this idea to digital media and virtuality, it was not always the case. Historically, algorithmic or generative art was a way to integrate chance into the artistic process (Lejeune, 2012; Norrena, 2003), incorporating unpredictability and spontaneity into creation.

Figure 5
First Perspective of view (POV) trend examples. Photos from Pexels.com by Alex Garcia [44] (on the left and Taryn Eliot[45] ton the right.



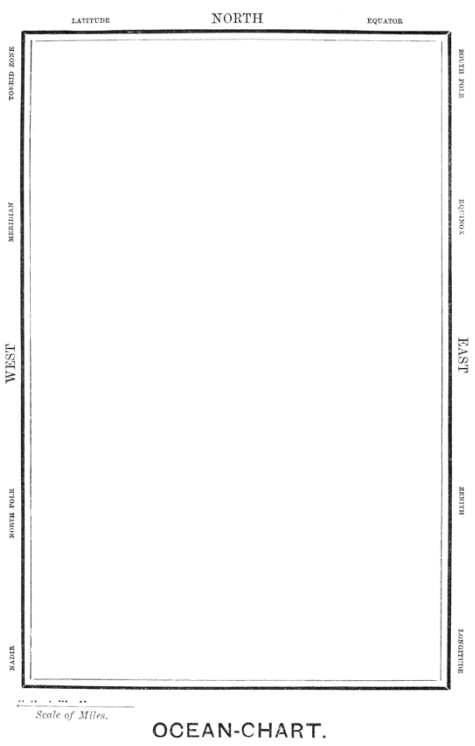
In resonance with rethinking — or, in fact, remembering — the connection between algorithms and embodied or ritualistic practices (Pasguinelli 2019), *Streetstories* pose a question about what embodiment means in relation to digital media. While the sense of embodiment in computer science is often achieved by repressing the body or part of it through a virtual avatar in different POVs (points of view) to convey immersion (Figure 5). *Streetstories* states that the act of photographing and posting is already an embodied, performative activity implied through the frame. Every frame is a first-person perspective of the one who takes the photo; we see through their eyes.

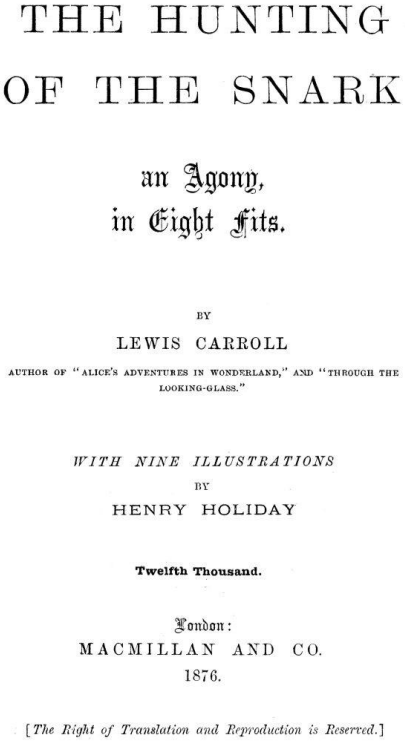
As the author, and a researcher with many years of serving the design and development of tools for archiving intangible practices and dance (El Raheb 2019 & 2021) with *Streetstories* a take a chance to articulate an everlasting question: *What is worth capturing, what is worth sharing and archiving?* Every digital medium opens new opportunities for capturing aspects of embodied experiences such as dancing or simply drifting in the city, but there are always elements left undocumented or completely altered by the rules of the medium and the capabilities of the capturing technologies. Perhaps, what the body senses or perceives is equally important from what is the length of the step, the place or the specific locomotion.

Figure 6

[44] *https://www.pexels.com/photo/person-wearing-pair-of-sneakers-2089774/*
[45] *https://www.pexels.com/photo/selective-focus-photo-of-a-person-s-hand-holding-a-mojito-drink-6790339/*

The Ocean Map illustration as described by The Hunting of The Snark.




THE HUNTING
OF THE SNARK

an Agony,
in Eight Fits.

BY
LEWIS CARROLL
AUTHOR OF "ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND," AND "THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS."

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The Significance of the Insignificant

“Contrary to the buildings which almost always belong to someone, the streets in principle belong to no one (…) Only frequently are trees in the streets” (Perec,1997, p. 47).

Perec’s *Species of Spaces* (1974) explores two key ideas: redefining our understanding of space and place and recognising the meaning of absence and void. He opens with the “Map of Nothing” from Carrol″s *The Hunting of the Snark* (1876), a perfect blank map (Figure 6). *What if we think of the Instagram frame — or any digital screen — as such a “map of nothing”?* Every small trace captured in *Streetstories* becomes a memory of something lost or found, a fragment of what was or could have been. It turns the digital image into a metaphor for potentiality rather than mere virtuality.

Streetstories challenges the very platform it inhabits. While Instagram is typically a tool for marketing and visibility, *Streetstories* instead captures and archives the unspectacular — the mundane, discarded, or once-cherished objects that unexpectedly reveal themselves.

These traces can be read the lens of Object-Oriented Ontology (Harman, 2018), which treats all objects — real or fictional, large or small — as equally significant. In this view, objects always withdraw; we never grasp their full essence, only fragments of their being. Yet *Streetstories* diverges from Harman's metaphysics. It aligns more with Perec′s interest in objects as traces of human presence and memory.

Figure 7
Streetstories *screenshots: Handwritten letters and photos found on the street of Athens. (2020-2025). Photo by the author.*

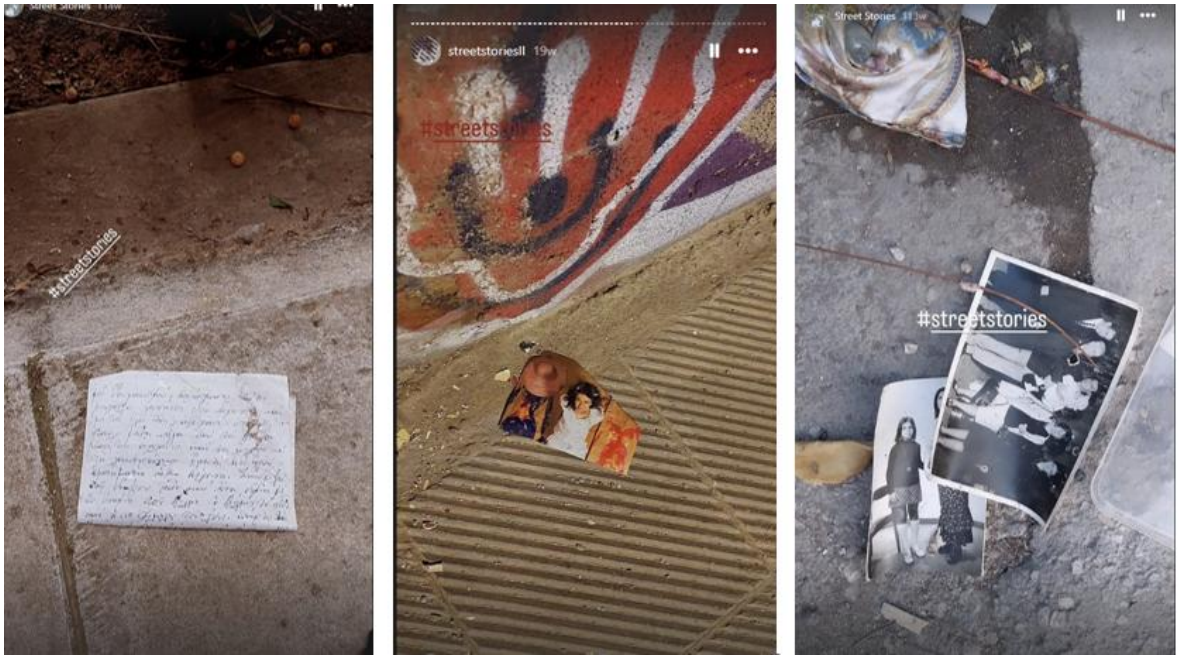
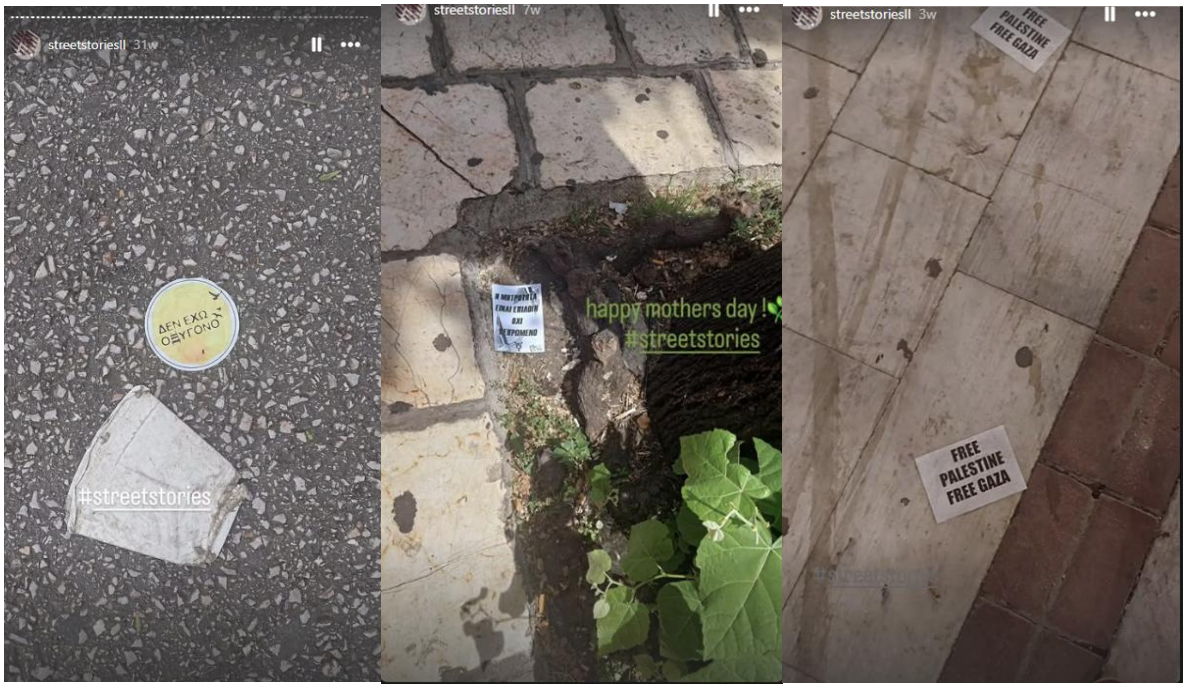


Figure 8
Streetstories *screenshots: (2020-2025) Photo by the author.*



Each *Streetstory* marks evidence of someone's existence — a forgotten card, a piece of paper, a small toy. Each post records my discovery at a particular moment and place, without the need for further context. Sometimes these traces express intimacy or playfulness, such as a note reading: "Hmm... For my whole life. I miss you. I love youuuuu.

Xxx. They look at me again!" (Figure 8). Others carry political and collective memory, like the examples in Figure 9: "I have no oxygen," linked to protests after the Tempi tragedy; "Motherhood is a choice, not a destiny," a feminist message on Mother's Day; and pro-Palestine slogans from Athens's demonstrations.

These fragments — insignificant yet meaningful — become both remnants of past actions and personal messages encountered while drifting through the city. By capturing and sharing them, *Streetstories* turns accidental encounters into quiet acts of remembrance.

Figure 9
Streetstories *screenshots: (2020-2025). Photo by the author.*



Conclusion

Streetstories has become a practice-based speculation on the ideas of framing, sharing, and archiving — questioning the social media aesthetics of perfection (Manovich, 2019), modification (Masdari & Hosseini Sarvari, 2021), and rethinking algorithms not as software implementations for digital recommendations according to our quantified profiles, but as embodied, ritualistic practices (Pasquinelli, 2019). At a time when machines can produce images through prompts and datasets to minimise cost and achieve visual perfection or hyperreal effects, *Streetstories* insists on photographing unimportant traces of text and things — found while drifting through the city — and posting them at the pace they are encountered. Celebrating the insignificant or infra-ordinary as Perec (Lévy, 2004) would maybe say, the messages sometimes become a realisation of a hidden relation to a much bigger local, global or personally story. Ultimately, *Streetstories* operates at the intersection of psychogeography, digital resistance, and the aesthetics of everyday life. It frames the incidental as significant, using walking to generate a slow archive of urban chance encounters — narratives not designed, but found.

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28

Portable Dramaturgies
Performing Globalisation's Un/Specific Ground

Philip Hager
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

Abstract

In this paper I consider portable dramaturgies that are specifically staged within the urban fabric and facilitated through the use of headphones. By portable dramaturgies I indicate performance practices that can be adapted for different cities around the globe without changing their core conceptual bases. Writing of Rimini Protokoll's *Remote X*, Konstantinos Thomaidis (2017) proposes that the voice in the headphones "serves to construct the urban space as the scenography of our *theatre*" (p. 5). Accordingly, each time this dramaturgy is repeated, a new scenography emerges; yet with each repetition the scenography of the global-urban fabric is extended: the city-streets emerge as elements in the globalised scenography of this site-un/specific theatre. Following Laura Levin (2014), I seek to think through portable dramaturgies as practices in which participants "perform ground." Performing ground, in Levin's conceptualisation denotes "performance strateg[ies] in which the human body commingles with or is presented as a direct extension of its setting" (p. 13). The argument I wish to pursue here suggests that in the context of portable dramaturgies, as spectators/participants commingle with their urban surroundings they are constructed as performing subjects in the scenography of the global city — performing subjects camouflaged in cityscapes, but also performing subjects that stand apart from the cityscapes. Against the above backdrop, I ask: *what kinds of performances might the global-urban fabric require from its dwellers and how might such dramaturgies both camouflage and emphasise neoliberal globalisation's quotidian scenographies? How might the voices in the headphones and the subjects performing their instructions negotiate the experience(s) of globalisation?*

Keywords: Rimini Protokoll, camouflage, surveillance capitalism, global-urban fabric

Portable Dramaturgies

A horde of pedestrians wearing headphones walks across a city. They stop, observe, applaud, race, dance, jump on and off the subway or a bus or a train; they emerge in public as a spontaneous and accidental community of individuals. Bodies move in unison or individually, together or against one another as they traverse the urban fabric; they "watch each other, make individual decisions and yet remain always part of a group" as they are guided by a "synthetic voice — as we know them from GPS navigators" (Rimini Protokoll, 2023). The above is an attempt to describe Rimini Protokoll's *Remote X* (2013-present), an audio walk designed and realised by Kaegi and Karrenbauer that has been staged in more than thirty-eight cities around the globe; a performance practice that can be adapted for different cities around the globe without changing its core conceptual basis — a portable dramaturgy.

In this essay I focus on *Remote X* in order to unpick the ways in which such portable dramaturgies might perform global cities as the scenographies of globalisation. The discussion that follows is organised around or within three notions that seek to "frame" it in different ways: the voice, camouflage and ground. Each frame offers a different conceptual lens through I think through the specific example as well as wider questions regarding how portable dramaturgies operate within — and perform — the global-urban fabric. *How might the voice raise questions about the place of the human in cities that are increasingly governed by predictive algorithms? How might such dramaturgies un/mask globalisation's quotidian scenographies and the role of individuals in them and in relation to them? How might the voice in the headphones and the subjects performing its instructions stage the experience of globalisation?*

The Voice

> Welcome to *Remote Berlin*. (…) You came to understand me. I'm programmed to understand you. You weigh between 50 and 120 kilos; you are between 1,5 and 2 meters tall; your IQ is between 70 and 130. (…) When you think of my voice, you probably want to think of a tongue. Or you want to think of lips? (…) But I have no lips. I have no mouth. I have no head. (…) Sorry, I am not human, but I will try to be your friend.[46]

[46] All quotations from the *Remote X*, come from the recorded version of *Remote Berlin 2015* (*Remote Berlin*).

This is how the voice introduces her(later-to-become-him)self to the participants. Or, this is how the voice introduces “users” or “players,” to use Kaegi's own terminology (Rimmele), to the augmented reality of the performance. Central in this encounter between the embodied presence of the players and the disembodied voice that guides them — between human intelligence and artificial intelligence —, the latter seems to suggest, is mutual understanding. According to Thomaidis “this voice is a problem,” in that it poses a series of “problems” to the players: it is in turns “personable, poetic, instructive, authoritarian, malleable, untrustworthy and uplifting” (2017, p. 7). It is a problem, furthermore, because it professes to understand humans by offering quantitative data, while “happily drawing attention” to the fact that it is not produced by a human body (Thomaidis, 2017, p. 7): “Sorry, I am not human,” it says and one cannot be sure if it is indeed sorry it is not human or if it apologises because, as it is not human, it cannot empathise with beings with throats, mouths, and bodies.

Despite (or perhaps because) of these warnings, for approximately ninety minutes a herd of fifty human bodies follows instructions issued by this artificially generated voice. Humans play along in this game that seems to replicate the ways we use or cling to technology when driving, walking, using infra-structures, consuming or generating digital footprints and feeding predictive algorithms; in short, when we conform to technologies that profess to make our lives easier and/or safer — technologies that, as per Zuboff's discussion on surveillance capitalism, rely on “an increasingly ubiquitous computational architecture of ‘smart’ networked devices, things, and spaces” (2019, p. 8). Surveillance capitalism, Zuboff argues, “unilaterally claims human experience as free raw material for translation into behavioral data” (2019, p. 8). As such, it constitutes and expresses a shift in capitalist economies that, by way of gathering our data, seems to shape behaviours:

> surveillance capitalists discovered that the most-predictive behavioral data come from intervening in the state of play in order to nudge, coax, tune, and herd behavior toward profitable outcomes. (…) With this reorientation from knowledge to power, it is no longer enough to automate information flows *about us*; the goal now it to *automate us* (Zuboff, 2019, p. 8).

By rendering technologies meaningful for its own profit, surveillance capitalism shapes and produces individuals by way of predicting algorithms: if the algorithm can predict my choices based on my digital footprint, then my choices and my behaviour appear as an extension of the control exerted by the algorithm.

The voice in *Remote X* often offers opportunities for decision-making to players: should I go left, or right? Nevertheless, in the end the voice will decide on the route by affirming or

correcting the human decision. Artificial intelligence here appears as a friendly companion on our journey through the cityscape; a companion that offers itself to explain the urban fabric to us users of the city. “While the artificial intelligence observes human behaviour from a distance,” Rimini Protokoll suggest, “the voice step by step sounds more familiar” (Rimini Protokoll, 2013). Further down the tour, the voice invites players to consider uploading all their “data” onto her and outlive the biological constraints of human nature. *Is this life camouflaged as artificial intelligence or artificial intelligence camouflaged as life?*

Camouflage

In *Performing Ground*, Levin makes a compelling argument “for reading camouflage as a *performative strategy*, as a theoretical frame for analysing contemporary performance practices and the performance of self in everyday life” (2014, p. 5). If camouflage becomes the frame through which we read performance practice, she suggests, what also becomes apparent is the negotiation between the performing body and the environment in which it acts or of which it is constituted. Camouflage “implies a process of performative correspondence: embedding oneself, or becoming embedded, in the surrounding environment through the physical and visual stylization of the body” (Levin, 2014, p. 4). In this sense, such a reading of performance practices involves an understanding of the performing body that is located not against its backdrop, but as part of it; it involves and implies “a re*mapping* of the possible terrain of subjectivity” (Levin, 2014, p. 6). By being, therefore, the art of disappearance, camouflage is also an act of recognition of what is invisible — what and who is made invisible and what and who makes themselves invisible.

Camouflage becomes apparent in *Remote X* on the level of the corporeality of the performance: assuming that the bodies of the players are the performing bodies, they blend in the urban environment — they do not present an image that stands out of the ordinary. Similarly, if we assume that the players are spectators of the city's spectacle, what they observe is the daily routine of the city — its daily rhythms, patterns and behaviours. It is the mediation of these layers of embodiment by the voice that makes both the players and the city apparent as performing bodies/entities. Precisely because neither the city nor the players seek to stand out, both the city and the players emerge as camouflaged performances. By “*reorganiz[ing]* the aural field available to us,” Thomaidis contends, “the voice serves to construct the urban space as the scenography of our *theatre*” (2017, p. 5). What this reorganised aural field reveals here is the very theatricality of the self and its (urban) environment; that is, the performative ways in which the subject is shaped in relation to the environment in which it acts — the ways it blends in or stands out of the picture.

Camouflage, moreover, works in *Remote X* also as a way of making the strategies of surveillance capitalism visible. Zuboff suggests that surveillance capitalism evades recognition as a "new actor in history" because "the existing categories (…) fall short in identifying and contesting the most crucial and unprecedented facts of this new regime" (2019, p. 14). By camouflaging itself as a theatrical convention — as a mere game — and evoking the theatricality of the quotidian, the voice makes visible the realities of surveillance capitalism and the ways they have indeed become the background — the quotidian environment in which individuals perform themselves; the ways, that is, in which artificial intelligence as employed by capitalism shapes processes of subjectivation and has thus been rendered invisible in daily life. This argument is further enhanced when the voice invites users to observe the city as if they were a security camera or to use their phone to take a picture of the herd's reflection on a glass surface. The city is revealed through the "eyes" of artificial intelligence and as a mere setting for generating online content; it is revealed as the scenography of surveillance capitalism's theatre.

Ground

In each of its iterations, *Remote X* takes users on a tour through sites that can be found on each and any city: a cemetery, a bank, a hospital, a park, some kind of transportation, a theatre, streets, a church or something equivalent. It is, essentially, a tour of globalisation's non-places that, according to Augé, are globalisation's privileged spaces (2008, pp. 77-86). In doing so, it invokes the global-urban fabric — "each new site-specific version builds upon the dramaturgy of the previous city," as per the company's admission (Rimini Protokoll, 2023). In this tour of globalisation's privileged grounds, *Remote X* does not seem to attempt to make places out of these non-places, it does not invite users to connect with these sites, even if that might happen in the process (cf. Yasur, 2022, p. 49); rather, it seems to emphasise the experience of/in the global-urban fabric.

But whose experience of globalisation does Remote X stage? Which subject is the ideal user of this augmented experience of the global-urban fabric? Massey considers the "power geometry of time-space compression":

> different social groups, and different individuals, are placed in very distinct ways in relation to the (…) flows and interconnections [implied in time-space compression]. This point concerns not merely the issue of who moves and who doesn't, although that is an important element of it; it is also about power in relation to the flows and the movement (1994, p. 149).

What matters, she argues, is who or what holds the privilege of mobility but also, and perhaps more significantly who holds power over mobility. As such, Massey seeks to acknowledge

those whose (geographical, ethnic, gendered, economic) position in globalisation's geographies excludes them from the flows of mobility and interconnectedness — or the flows of access implied in the concept of time-space compression, but also the ways in which one's privileges are the reason for another's exclusion.

The voice in *Remote X* does not seem to recognise difference — all humans are simply humans, there is no other principle of classification, no specific identity marker involved here. While in some ways seems to erase difference — an almost utopian sense of equality, we are all members of the herd —, this act of camouflage veils the fact that this is not a universal experience. Or, rather, it stages a specific kind of experience camouflaging it as the universal experience of the global city; an experience that is close to that of the civic transnational subject discussed by McKinnie — a largely white and privileged global-urban citizenry (2009, p. 124). In addition, this act of camouflage may provide another way of looking at the problem that is the voice: camouflaged as the synthetic voice of artificial intelligence, it reveals itself as yet another iteration of the European gaze and sketches a scenography that overlooks the complexities generating the specific social, economic, ethnic and gender inequalities and experiences within each city; inequalities that are in turn co-dependent on its position in the wider geographies of globalisation. In traversing this scenography, the users of *Remote X* walk on site-un/specific grounds.

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Redefining the Change in Democracy: A Site-specific Deambulatory Performance in *Sotiria* Hospital's Park

Antonia VASILAKOU
Movement director/physical theatre performer and scholar,
Specialised Teaching Staff, Department of Theatre Studies, University of the Peloponnese, Nafplio (Greece).

Abstract

The paper examines the site-specific performance *Redefining the Change in Democracy* in *Sotiria* Hospital's park (Athens Epidaurus Festival 2024). Conceived as an artwork within an academic setting, the composition interrogates the intersection of care, health, and democratic structures within a historically charged institutional landscape. The argument is grounded in a theoretical framework that draws on ritual performance (van Gennep, 1960), spatial theory (Lefebvre, 1991; Foucault, 1986), and S.Bloch's psychosomatic approach to affect. Positioned as practice-as-research (PaR), the project treats embodied methodologies as instruments of critical inquiry and pedagogy. It argues that such site-responsive compositions can reimagine public space and creative technique as liminal, affective, socially engaged encounters that exceed conventional performance boundaries, modelling a hybrid paradigm at once aesthetic, interdisciplinary, and civically oriented.

The article is structured into the following sections: the background and context of the performance, the methodological and theoretical framework of the creative work, and the conclusions that illuminate the outcomes of the research.

Keywords: site-specific performance, embodied devised methodology, practice as research, liminality, health narratives.

Analytical Creative Process of the Performance *Redefining the Change in Democracy*

Background and Context

Redefining the Change in Democracy emerged as a critical inquiry into healthcare and civic responsibility within an era characterised by intensifying pressures on democratic societies, notably fiscal austerity and the systematic disinvestment in public care infrastructures. Conceived as a course-based, practice-as-research project, the project aimed to catalyse in-class discourse that could extend into the public domain. The work was performed at the park of *Sotiria* Hospital as a part of the *What We Owe Democracy* event for the Athens Epidaurus Festival 2024[47] co-produced with the Municipal Theatre of Piraeus and the Department of Theatre Studies of the University of Peloponnese.[48] This paper aims to elucidate the creative development of the performance, detailing its theoretical foundations, dramaturgical choices, and the specific physical methodologies employed.

Sotiria Hospital's Park: A lived space

Sotiria Hospital, established in 1902 as Greece's inaugural public tuberculosis sanatorium, has been associated with historical traumas. In the wake of the 1922 Asia Minor Catastrophe, the park served as an improvised shelter for displaced families, whereas during the Greek Civil War, parts of the grounds reportedly functioned as an execution site for political dissidents. With the post-war advent of streptomycin and related therapies, the hospital shifted from a locus of mortality to a centre of treatment, and it has since remained a key facility for major respiratory disease, including COVID-19 and lung cancer. The historical and affective sedimentations have constituted *Sotiria* as an *espace vécu* (*lived space*) laden with emotional and political affect. Exceeding both its intended medical functions (*conceived space*), its routines (*perceived space*) (Lefebvre, 1991) and scarred by trauma, the site is perceived with functional indeterminacy between the organisational order and the contingencies of social practices across time.

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[47] Athens Epidaurus Festival. (2024). *What we owe democracy* [Programme brochure]. https://aefestival.gr/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/DEMOCRACY_final_logos-1.pdf

[48] The performance emerged from the practice-based university course *Physical Theatre Technique: The performer into the Open Space*, led by movement director and theatrologist Antonia Vasilakou in collaboration with dramaturg Anna Tsichli. The student-performers were integral to the project's creative process throughout.

Methodological Process: Embodied Devising Tools, Dramaturgy and Theoretical Framework

Grounded in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception (2012/1945) and Bourdieu's notion of *embodied practice* (Bourdieu, 1977), setting aside the Cartesian split between mind and body, the methodological protocol adopted an embodied practice-as-research framework to facilitate a fluid negotiation between educational objectives and creative outcomes. Prioritising a shared, resonant collective voice rather than an individual authorial perspective, a devising method was employed. Without a pre-existing script, the process deployed a research-based devised dramaturgy, mobilising participants'[49] personal narratives into iterative studio praxis across successive cycles of experimentation and critical reflection.

An interview-based method was implemented. Drawing from documentary-devised principles or of ethno-dramatic strategies, in which personal testimonies operate not merely as a display but as a potent mode of inquiry and meaning-making (Saldaña, 2011), the students-performers engaged in dialogic improvisation that activated an interplay of memory, text, and embodied response. Employing rotating roles among the interviewer, interviewee, and two observers tasked with documenting verbal and physical responses, the protocol ensured balanced participation and fostered a multiplicity of perspectives.

A corpus of twenty-seven (27) first-person, present-tense prompts was developed, from which each participant was invited to select ten for reflection and response.[50]

Critical reflections emerged regarding perceived lacunae in the support and guidance provided by the Greek public health system during exigent periods for individuals and their families. A pivotal unanswered question emerged: *how a democratic society can credibly assert its values, when essential health and social care provisions remain inaccessible due to educational disparities, employment inequities, or geographical remoteness?* This context becomes even more relevant when considering the ongoing reforms and systemic restructuring initiated after the Greek financial crisis, which continue to impact healthcare provision significantly.

[49] The student-performers involved in the project were Konstantina Bournia, Niki Damaskinou, Vasiliki Konstantaki, Katerina Kouni, Alexandra Stergianni, Konstantina Papapolymerou.

[50] Example prompts included: “What do I remember?”, “What do I believe?”, “What do I respect?”, “What do I want?”, “What do I hate?”, “What do I forget?”, “What do I hold on to?”, and “What do I let go of?”

The Body as Archive

Performers' personal testimonies provided a shared archive for later compositional decisions. The interview protocol operated as a conduit of *habitus* manifestation (Bourdieu, 1977). It mobilised the dispositions that contour narration such as somatic bearing and affect, into shareable content. In practice, it functioned as a generative apparatus, as a matrix from which actions, emotions, and textual material derived.

Such a devising dramaturgy consequently facilitated the student-performers in cultivating an ‘'somatic mode of attention’’ (Csordas, 1993, pp. 135-156). Within this state, the act of questioning and responding became a mediated form of attunement to and perception of language, text, and the corporeal presence of the self and others. This ultimately enabled the systematic integration of “language-plus-gesture” codes into a specific score, providing a platform for responses, perspectives, and emotions tested in a safe environment.

The systematic notation of gesture and speech resulted in an inventory of phrasal sequences consisting of the foundational material for each performer's movement score, expanded and reconstructed through various performative techniques for movement, voice, and rhythm.

Specifically, Rudolf Laban's movement theory (Laban, 1988) was applied to spatial levels to amplify the range of the gestures. Further refinement involved the application of *dynamo-rhythms*, defining the qualitative aspects of bodily movements, encompassing their design, speed, and strength (Leabhart, 2007). Analogous to Laban's conceptualization of *efforts*, *dynamo-rhythms* integrate rhythmic elements with a dynamic component of force.

The emotional exploration was deepened through the integration of *Alba emoting*. The psychophysical technique, invented by the neurologist S.Bloch, utilises precise configurations of breath, posture, and facial expression to induce emotion through somatic patterns based on the six primary emotions[51] (Deonna and Teroni, 2012).

The implication of the aforementioned techniques allowed each gesture and state to be articulated and then recontextualised, layered, and inhabited. The process transformed the initial informal material into a codified, personal language constituting the performers' physical and textual score.

[51] Bloch's proposed basic emotions consist of joy, sadness, fear, anger, sexuality, and tenderness.

Figure 1
Redefining the Change in Democracy. Performer: Konstantina Bournia. (*Photo © Maria Toultsa).*



Site-specific Applications: Space as Civic Intervention.

The performance was organised in two parts, reflecting the bipartite character of the site: the entrance woodland and the road leading to the former execution site for political dissidents. The spatial separation between these areas, together with their different historical and social meanings, determined the structure and guided the dramaturgical choices. Such conditions informed a compositional approach that combined spoken testimony, somatic techniques, and processional movement -activating the site's public significance while articulating the performance's civic address, as follows:

In the first phase, the performers dispersed in the woodland applied a deliberately slow ambulatory process, creating an appearance of near-immobility and detachment. The slow dynamo-rhythmic tempo (Leabhart, 2007) and breath-posture patterns for tenderness (Bloch, 1994) established a steady, reduced cadence of effort. The body acted as a metronome, recalibrating the performers' internal “polyrhythms” (Lefebvre, 2013, p.25). The interoceptive focus suspended everyday awareness, inducing a liminal state - a threshold between private self and public testimony.

Aligning with the “separation phase” in *The rites of passage*, in which participants are symbolically detached from prior social and temporal orders (van Gennep, 1960, pp. 11–13) the processional movement functioned as a spatial enactment of rupture, enabling the

performers to unfold the emotional state. Spoken fragments, recollections infused with grief, but also with shared joy and care, drew memories of the dead into immediacy (Figure 1). The layering of temporalities - past affection and present absence - infused the performance with emotional complexity, transmuting personal memory into collective resonance.

The second phase of the work comprised a one-kilometre uphill procession towards a former execution site for communist resistors during World War II. Structured through a series of deliberate pauses, performers communally shared intimate, fractured narratives that addressed critical contemporary issues, concerning mental health, ageing, caregiving, and the impossibility of projecting into the future with self-care.

The physical score incorporated modulated dynamo-rhythms through tensions, brief accelerations so as to evoke states of anger, fear, and sadness. The patterned changes in body state and effort–tempo modulations were converted into compositional cues, transforming solo testimony into collective enactment. Recurring textual and gestural refrains served as affective anchors that stabilized intensity and oriented it toward urgent public address.

Figure 2
Redefining the change in democracy, *Performers' final ensemble.(Photo © Vaskokri).*



Adopting a socially oriented approach to site-specific practice rather than a purely geometric conception of the site, the work positioned itself in political discourse rather than as art "in" a place (Kwon, 2002). The two performative zones - the entrance woodland and the road leading to the execution site - became an agora, questioning healthcare and memory *in situ*: performers voiced testimonies on mental health and caregiving failures, asking how a democratic society can assert its values when essential care remains

inaccessible. In this context, the park became a vibrant landscape operating as a Foucauldian “heterotopia of crisis” (Foucault, 1986, p. 24), a counter-site marked by diachronic accumulation, where past traumas refracted present social crises.

Conclusions

The project *Redefining the Change of Care in Democracy* navigated the complex terrain between artistic practice and pedagogical objectives, functioning as a potent medium for articulating critical narratives of health through blended methods. A hybrid, interdisciplinary artistic methodology was necessary for the practice-based research that operated in a zone between embodied training, pedagogy, and *in situ* performance.

A central finding concerns the liminality of the performer's status, poised between learning and presenting, privacy and exposure, and process and enactment. Initially positioned as learners within a pedagogical setting, the ensemble inhabited a *backstage* register (Goffman, 1956). However, through the establishment of the interview-based protocol, the boundary between *backstage* and *frontstage* gradually dissolved. Across repeated cycles of interaction, prompting, and observation, the process instantiated “metaxis”, a dual awareness of being simultaneously inside and outside the dramatic frame (O’Toole, 1992). In this processual and contingent condition, course participants inhabited a self permanently “performing” in Goffman's sense, continuously shaped across past, present, and anticipated futures by cultural, sensory, and affective experience. The project’s public presentation *re-staged* this vulnerability, enabling a reflective embodiment of lived experience without compromising performer agency. This doubled, outward and inward attentional regime, operated as a liminal threshold, mediating between testimony and composition, experience and representation, and research and performance.

Finally, the ensemble involved inhabited an intermediate *lieu* that recalibrated and organised their perception (Fischer-Lichte, 2021). In the case of *Sotiria* Hospital's park, as narratives were shared communally, the site was re-appropriated, moving beyond individual testimony, towards mutual recognition and empathetic witnessing. Performers and the public collectively entered a state of new “communitas” (Turner, 1969; Turner, 1982, pp. 96-97), “transitioning” (Van Gennep, 1960, p.21) to a reconstituted collective oriented towards care and memory upon re-entry. The site became a medium of outcry against the erosion of healthcare, a *space socially produced* (Lefebvre, 1991, p.26) reflecting individual pain alongside broader conditions of marginalization and societal collapse. Each step operated as a mode of lived protest against the historical amnesia of health crises and socio-political issues.

As the assembly gradually dispersed, what persisted was a calibrated tenderness, evidence that, for a time, the city had listened.

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Staging Resistance: The Girl of Enghelab Street and the Theatricality of Public Space in Iran

Sara Gholami
Goldsmiths, University of London

Sara Boroumandi Barati
University of Manchester

Abstract

On 27 December 2017, during mass demonstrations against Iran's economic crisis, a video of a young woman standing silently on a utility box while waving a white headscarf on a stick captured widespread attention. Among the crowd of chanting protesters and passersby on Tehran's Enghelab (Revolution) Street, her motionless figure and unspoken resistance ignited national and international discourse. Over time, she became known as the "Girl of Enghelab Street," and her act came to symbolise a turning point in Iran's women's movement and broader anti-government resistance.

This seemingly simple gesture was politically and performatively complicated. Its significance lies not only in the visual power of the act but also in how it changed the spatial, social, and symbolic dynamics of Iranian public life. Through this act, the protester transformed a corner of Tehran into a theatrical space of resistance by using the very medium that the state wanted to regulate: her body. This article analyses the gesture through the lens of spatial politics, spectatorship, theatricality, and feminist/queer theory, highlighting its legacy from 2017 to the Women, Life, Freedom movement of 2022.

Keywords: performance, protest, theatricality, space, Iran

The Significance of Space: Enghelab Street as Stage

The fact that this act occurred on Enghelab Street was not incidental. “Enghelab,” meaning revolution, is both a name and a historical archive. Located in the heart of Tehran, this five-kilometre-long street is home to universities, bookstores, performance venues and, historically, sites of political protest. It has become a powerful symbol of protest, particularly for women. Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iranian women have gathered there at several key moments to resist gender-based laws, including compulsory wearing of the hijab.

By performing on this street, the protester engaged with a space already charged with historical memory and political meaning. She mounted a utility box that is an everyday urban object, and transformed it into a stage. By doing so, she altered the space’s function from ordinary to theatrical, and from neutral to symbolic. The scarf, the stick, her elevated position, and most importantly, her body all became symbols. And in theatre, as in protest, everything visible becomes a signifier.

Gesture and Theatricality: Transforming the Everyday

Although her act was improvised, it had all the features of a political performance. Following Sholette’s (2022) and Khademi’s (2023) framework, we can understand this gesture as an improvised performance by a “non-artist” — in other words, a civilian engaging in symbolic action without professional artistic training. These performances do not aim to represent life but disrupt it. They introduce an element of estrangement into everyday life, enabling spectators to view ordinary actions, such as removing a headscarf, as political gestures.

The protester's silence and isolation enhanced this effect. She kept her hands raised and away from her ears to intentionally separate herself from the surrounding chaos. Her posture suggested deliberate non-participation in the ongoing protest chants by creating a powerful visual contrast. For a moment, the public demonstration got a second dimension: an internal critique of gendered spatial control within the broader anti-regime discourse.

This is where theatricality becomes essential. Unlike theatre, where performance spaces are pre-arranged, protest performances often occur spontaneously and must create their own stages. Therefore, the act of staging resistance in a non-theatrical, high-traffic space like Enghelab Street relies on the transformation of that space into something extraordinary. As Dolan (2001) has suggested, theatricality is not bound to institutions but emerges from the friction between performance and spectatorship, between presence and reception. Without this spatial shift, the act would risk blending into the everyday. It is the “spatial” rupture that gives it a political dimension.

The Role of Spectatorship: Completing the Act

It is crucial to note that the protester had reportedly enacted the gesture at least three times before, but it was only on this specific occasion that the image circulated widely and entered the public discourse. Why? Because the transformation of space into theatrical, political space is not complete without spectatorship. The spectators — whether co-present on the street or virtual via social media — performed the essential function of reception. They activated the gesture as political meaning.

Spectatorship was multi-layered in this case. We can categorize spectators into three groups: the protester the passers-by, and the oppressive forces. The protesters were those marching against economic injustice that was the initial catalyst of the December–January uprising, often referred to as the "DeyMah" uprising. They represented a movement not initially concerned with gender, but through this act, the "Girl of Enghelab Street" linked gender justice to economic and political demands. She created a space within the uprising for women's rights, which had otherwise been absent in its discourse.

The passers-by — students, workers, commuters — represented the everyday public of Tehran. Although they were not politically engaged in the protest, their physical presence helped stage the contrast between everyday life and protest. Their gaze, even if momentary or accidental, allowed the gesture to exist within the public sphere. They were the unintentional audience without which the act would remain unseen and untheatrical.

The third group, the repressive forces, included police and military agents, could be regarded as antagonists in the theatrical frame. Although they were not the intended audience, they played a fundamental role as the object of resistance. Their reaction — arresting Vida Movahed and later other women who repeated the act — reinforced the gesture's meaning by supplying it with visible consequences. The presence of an antagonistic gaze made the performance dangerous, and in doing so, made it effective and powerful.

Feminist and Queer Implications: Blurring the Public/Private Divide

At the core of the Girl of Enghelab Street's act is a feminist and potentially queer intervention into spatial politics. The Islamic Republic's socio-spatial logic is deeply gendered, relying on a sharp division between public (male) and private (female) spaces. Women are depicted "private" even when physically present in public; the hijab functions as a spatial marker, and an ideological veil that allows their passage into male-coded zones while keeping them symbolically restricted.

By removing the hijab, Mohaved disrupted this restriction. She collapsed the boundary between public and private, not only through physical exposure, but also through symbolic

resistance. Her unveiled presence declared her right to public space as a full, visible citizen. In this sense, the act was feminist in content and queer in form. Following feminist psychoanalytic theory and object-relations theory, binary thinking is often a function of male-dominated systems of socialisation. Mohaved's act blurred the following binaries: male/female, public/private, obedience/defiance. Importantly, her act was not rooted in identity but in method: it queered space by challenging the norms of presence. Rather than asserting a new identity, her act created a rupture in the masculine logic of public space by disrupting the very conditions that make identities visible and recognisable.

Legacy and Repetition: From 2017 to the Women, Life, Freedom Movement

The gesture did not remain isolated. In the months following Mohaved's arrest, at least twenty-nine women across Iranian cities re-enacted her act by climbing utility boxes and waving white scarves, despite the risk of arrest, imprisonment, and violence. These repetitions transformed a singular act into a collective gesture. Over time, the "Girls of Enghelab Street" became a recognised symbol of resistance, foreshadowing the mass uprisings of 2022 under the slogan of "Women, Life, Freedom."

In these later protests, the body continued to serve as the central site of protest: women cut their hair, burned their hijabs, and challenged the state's control over space and visibility. These were more confrontational acts, but they kept the symbolic core of the original gesture. What was once a solitary performance became a widespread language of resistance that affirmed the significance of bodily and spatial protest in authoritarian contexts.

Conclusion: The Politics of Space, Theatricality, and Embodied Resistance

In Iran's tightly controlled public sphere, the Girl of Enghelab Street's act marked a radical intervention. Through her silent, non-verbal performance, she transformed a corner of Tehran into a site of resistance, disrupting the spatial and ideological structures that govern gendered life. Her act was not only political in content but theatrical in form: it relied on space, gesture, and spectatorship to produce meaning. It challenged the hegemony of public space, disrupted binary thinking, and gestured towards a politics of embodiment that exceeds the boundaries of both art and activism.

In its feminist and queer refusal to accept spatial confinement, the act continues to resonate not just as a protest, but as a blueprint for how bodies can challenge power, how space can be reclaimed, and how spectatorship can help transform the ordinary into the extraordinary.

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Lipstick Liberation
A feminist performance mapping the femicides in the public performing space

Marianna Koukoulekidou & Angeliki Maria Ntoufa
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Department of Theatre Studies

Abstract

This paper explores the role of the performer's body as a critical and expressive tool in contemporary performance art, focusing on site-specific interventions in public space. It examines *Lipstick Liberation*, a performance executed by the authors of the paper, which addresses gender-based violence and the rise of femicides during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this work, the two performers walk through various Athenian neighbourhoods, using personal red lipsticks to trace their paths and denounce both violence against femininities and women and institutional indifference. The lipstick, reappropriated as a political device, functions as a medium of resistance and embodied expression. The analysis emphasises the performance' s mobility and adaptability (encouraging everybody to partake), which expose the failures of public structures to protect feminised identities. A site-specific iteration in Glyka Nera brings into focus the spatial politics of gender and memory, contrasting the urban density of Exarchia with the suburban emptiness of Glyka Nera. Through ephemeral, immaterial mapping and symbolic action at the intersection of public private spheres, *Lipstick Liberation* challenges spatial and social inequalities. The paper argues that such performances activate urban space as a site of resistance and remembrance, highlighting the transformative potential of art to provoke awareness and foster coexistence.

Keywords: intervention, public space, red lipstick, mapping, femicides

Lipstick Liberation: A Feminist Performance Mapping the Femicides in the Public Performing Space

In the performing arts, the human body functions as the primary medium of expression and representation. What is more, within the framework of contemporary performance, contemporary art allows artists to highlight issues of social and artistic freedom. Within the framework of contemporary performance, artists increasingly use this medium to foreground issues of social and artistic freedom. Contemporary art practices, in this sense, enable the artistic act to move beyond institutionalised cultural spaces and into the public sphere (Chondros, 2021), making the public an active witness to the creative process. From complete artistic introversion, as well as confinement within strictly indoor spaces, there has been a turn toward the liberation of art on both an artistic and a social level.

At the same time, in periods of social crisis, art often takes on a character of protest, functioning as a means of denouncing phenomena of violence and transgression. The issue of femicides constitute a characteristic example, a phenomenon which became particularly visible during the COVID-19 pandemic, with 115 recorded murders of women from 2020 until today (femicides.gr, 2025), incidents mainly linked to gender-based violence and misogyny. Despite the evident inertia of the state apparatus and the responsible institutions, social and artistic collectives attempt to resist through creative interventions in public discourse and space.

The performance *Lipstick Liberation*[52], which was carried out in Athens in 2024 as part of the postgraduate course “History and Theory of Performance,” taught by Maria Konomi and curated and supervised by performance artist Mary Zygouri, constitutes an example of an artistic intervention in the public space. Its score is simple: the performer holds a red lipstick, preferably a personal item rather than one purchased specifically for the performance, and in a bent-over position, as “imposed” by the small “writing” object, traces her path on the street from her home to the local police station. If/when she manages to reach the station before the lipstick runs out, she will stand at the entrance and recite/report a short text of her choice. In the case of Koukoulekidou and Ntoufa that text was the following:

> It is the ordinary and rather undramatic practice of standing, rather than a miraculously extraordinary disruption, that actualizes here the living register of the event. The very practice of stasis creates both a space of reflection and a space for revolt, but also an affective component of standing and standpoint. It is such a corporeal and affective disposition of stasis that derails, if only temporarily,

[52] Koukoulekidou, M. & Ntoufa, A. (2024) Lipstick Liberation. [Athens, Greece]. The full performance is available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5WRsbRt-M1c&t=2s.

> normative presuppositions about what may come into being as publicly intelligible and sensible in existing polities (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, pp. 150-151).

However, it becomes clear from the outset that, due to its soft texture, the lipstick will most likely be used up before she arrives at her final destination. Furthermore, the two performers chose two very different starting locations: the first, the home of a domestic violence victim, located two kilometres from the local police station; the second, a friend's home, situated only 500 meters from the respective station. Equally important was the stark contrast between the urban fabrics of the two areas. A vast and remote urban landscape in Glyka Nera, marked by rough asphalt roads and the tall fences of lower-middle-class single-family homes, stood in opposition to the densely populated public space of Exarchia, with apartment buildings pressed tightly against one another. A performance that may seem like a failure at first glance could, in fact, be the most powerful affirmation of reality.

The action focuses on denouncing systemic indifference toward violence against women. The two performers traverse the urban landscape, leaving behind red traces made with lipstick, here used as a symbol of femininity and empowerment, but also of a victim's mark, while at the same time projecting messages of protest and demand. The aim of the action is to mobilise the urban population and to make visible the negligence of the state, demonstrating that lipstick, beyond being a symbol of beauty, can function as a political tool of resistance and a means of reappropriation by women themselves, as well as by anyone who expresses femininity.

The case of Glyka Nera serves as a tribute to Caroline Crouch, who was murdered by her husband in May 2021, during the COVID-19 lockdown. The performance begins at the victim's former home and symbolically, as well as functionally, highlights Caroline's inability to escape an abusive relationship. This inability is not confined to the private sphere but is exacerbated by urban planning, the lack of public protection structures, and the inadequate response of the responsible institutions. Through her spatial intervention, the performer sheds light on the systemic conditions that reinforce gender-based violence and makes institutional accountability visible. As a result, the performer soon found herself pausing alone in the middle of a poorly maintained road, far from the Police Department in the neighbouring area, and without a single spectator.

The case of Exarchia clearly highlights the ongoing precarity of femininities in public space. Although the performance took place in broad daylight on a busy street, with spectators and a cameraman present, a police officer interrupted it without any substantiated reason, even after the performer presented her academic ID. The action was disturbing no one and was occurring near the police station. The failure of this second attempt at completion revealed that public safety structures often act as deterrents to freedom of

expression. Two months later Kyriaki Griva was murdered outside the Agioi Anargyroi Police Station, despite her repeated pleas for protection.

This problematic situation raises the question of whether performance, as both an artistic and political act, can be considered successful or unsuccessful in relation to its ability to bring about meaningful social change. It is this very question that we will now attempt to address. The performance is grounded in two fundamental principles: the blurring of boundaries between art and everyday life, and the redefinition of the limits of visual arts, with the aim of making a political statement through art in public space. The use of everyday materials and the relocation of the work outside the studio underscore the performers' intention to engage with social and gender-related issues (Gerogianni, 2019). Gender and public space are approached as interconnected and fluid fields that shape identities and communities. The boundaries between these concepts remain fluid and constantly negotiable. Through performance, it is possible to address issues such as gender, memory, body, and identity in a multilayered and interdisciplinary way, as the complex conditions of contemporary reality dictate (Tsiara, 2021).

In the case of *Lipstick Liberation* in Glyka Nera, a charged location was deliberately chosen in order to activate the memory of the place, functioning both as a tribute to victims of gender-based violence and as a political act (Tsiara, 2021). Through writing with lipstick, an "intangible" map is created — one that records lived experiences and emotions rather than objective features. This “analytical and perceptual mapping” (Tsakiri, 2021, pp.43-44) constitutes yet another claim to the presence of women in public space. As Stavridis notes, “society itself is projected onto its space … space is also produced through interpretation, through the selection of focal points….” (1990, p.18). Thus, in the attempt to pay tribute to this unfortunate woman and to emphasise the broader denunciation expressed by the performers, particular attention was given to the choice of this specific location. This choice was transformed into a political stance, while at the same time the performers' intention equally reflects “their subjective disposition to embody the outside world”, because of their emotional connection with this place (Stavridis, 1990, pp. 70). The red line emphasises the “intangible” and personal characteristics of the urban fabric (qualitative elements, lived but in some sense invisible), thus defining the place from a different perspective. As Konomi stresses, such artistic practices constitute yet another attempt by women to claim their place in the public sphere (2021).

As she continues, performance art, due to its relative youth and radical nature, creates space for gendered expressions, free from patriarchal burdens (2021). According to Amelia Jones, performance art embodies a belief in the power of art to transform human life and bring about social change (2021). Although it belongs to the field of art, performance art incorporates elements of social protest and contributes to the creation of “new spaces”,

shifting the site of the political from the urban environment to the body itself. This specific action, with the bent-over body and the red line, intervenes momentarily in the city's flow, highlighting the social exclusion of women from public space (Avgitidou, 2020).

If we consider space as “relational” (De Certeau, 2010)[53], such interventions propose alternative ways of coexistence and expression, outside the dominant models of capitalist urban planning. The human body becomes a bearer of meaning, while public space gains its value not from centres of power or consumption, but from the people who experience it. *Lipstick Liberation* highlights this dynamic by proposing a multipolar and heterogeneous way of meaning-making within urban space. Although such actions often go unnoticed, in the case of Exarchia, the performer's unusual posture managed to capture the attention of passersby, showing that even amidst the noise of consumption, there is space for attention, questioning, and social rewriting of the space (Tzirtzilaki – Sinopoulou, 2018). It activated the public's gaze, while in the case of Glyka Nera, the performer stood exactly where the perpetrator first made his false statements to the media. With lipstick, symbol of voice and speech, she silently inscribed, through bodily action, the words left unspoken or unheard. This gesture turned the performance into an “equalizing experience” (Stavridis, 2018, p. 21), reflecting the sharing of space in everyday life. Both streets were temporarily transformed into a site of shared memory and collective reference.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the need for a critical re-examination of the reliability of state protection mechanisms becomes clear. Official data show increased incidents of gender-based and domestic violence after 2020, peaking during 2021–2022, with a new rise in 2024 (European Training Platform on Domestic Violence, n.d. et al.). Despite the positive increase in reports, especially from underage girls, the act of reporting itself does not guarantee safety or survival. The phenomenon of gender-based violence remains without substantial, systemic intervention. The state must abandon its punitive, reactive approach and invest in prevention, education, and the strengthening of support structures such as medical care, shelters, and sanctions against sexist coverage in the media. At the same time, it is critical to recognise the term “femicide” and to consider gender-based murder as an aggravating circumstance. Furthermore, according to the European Observatory, there is no official body in Greece that collects data on femicides, while fragmented media reporting hinders a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Only feminist volunteer groups work on

[53] De Certeau defines space as an ‘act of the present,’ that is, as the result of the practices that activate it and render it a dynamic unity. Space is not a static container, but a relational experience in constant evolution, differentiated — as Harvey also points out — from mechanistic conceptions of absolute or relative space (Harvey, 2005).

collecting data specifically on femicides. Simultaneously, the newly established Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family face serious organisational challenges, limiting the effectiveness of its actions (olympia.gr, 2024 et al.). Art can raise awareness but does not replace the state's responsibility to protect its citizens. Their safety must be a state priority above all else, beyond artistic critique and contribution. Preventing gender-based violence, not a private matter but rather a sociopolitical one, requires ongoing effort. Help lines are available, such as the 24-hour line 197 and SOS 15900. Gender equality is an achievement that requires continuous advocacy.

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Changing Spaces, Changing Music Ecosystems: What We've Learned so far in Greece

Vasiliki Sirakouli
Athena Research Centre

Abstract

Georgina Born has emphasised music is always mediated by space — whether physical, social, or virtual — and understanding music requires attention to these spatial dimensions. She also highlights the relative underdevelopment of analytical approaches to the social dimensions of the interweaving of music, sound, and space. During the last two decades many changes have taken place in the spaces used for music performance in Athens and other cities, especially through festivals. Even though "space" and "performance" are two quite popular terms that have risen in Greece — after decades the same had happened at the States —, there is surprisingly little research focused on how different music genres engage with and utilise space in the country. While ethnomusicological studies have explored traditional musics within specific regional or ritual contexts, there is a notable gap when it comes to examining how urban jazz and classical music genres interact with physical and social spaces. Issues like spatial politics and genre-specific uses of public, private or alternative spaces remain underexplored, leaving a significant area of cultural practice undocumented and analytically neglected. This paper, by examining different music genres, investigates how music performance and space navigate urban and rural environments, venue infrastructures, and informal or alternative performance spaces. Through personal fieldwork, discussions, spatial analysis, and reflexive theoretical approaches, I intend to uncover the ways in which space shapes musical genres and vice versa, filling a critical gap in the understanding of Greece's diverse and evolving musical landscapes.

Keywords: space, classical music, jazz music, festivalisation, Greece

Changing Spaces, Changing Music Ecosystems

Georgina Born has argued that music “is never free-floating but takes place: it takes place in and across heterogeneous spaces that are both social and temporal” (Born, 2013, p. 10). In doing so, she shifts the analytical focus from viewing music as an autonomous aesthetic form to understanding it as a practice fundamentally embedded in institutions, technologies, and publics. Her ethnography of IRCAM demonstrates how the architecture, bureaucracy, and technological systems of the institute actively shaped the kinds of avant-garde works it produced, highlighting music as “a field of power relations, professional hierarchies, and cultural capital” (Born, 1995, p. 7). From this perspective, space does not simply host music but participates in its very constitution, making spatiality integral to musical production and reception.

Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1991) provides a strong theoretical foundation for examining these interconnections. Lefebvre famously claimed that “social space is a social product” (p. 26), generated through the dialectical interplay of spatial practices — the material routines and uses of space — representations of space, the conceptual and institutional orderings of space, and representational spaces, the lived and symbolic dimensions of space (pp. 38–39). This triadic framework clarifies how music contributes to the continual production of space. As practice, it occupies and organises environments; as representation, it is codified in institutions and genres; and as representational space, it evokes symbolic and lived meanings for audiences. As Lefebvre notes, “Every society — and hence every mode of production — produces a space, its own space” (1991, p. 31), and musical genres are no exception.

Space: The Active Agent of Music

Bringing Born and Lefebvre into conversation makes clear how closely their ideas resonate, both emphasise that music can sustain existing spatial orders while also opening the possibility of challenging them. Genres, in this sense, operate as spatial practices that articulate relations of power and belonging. Hip-hop, for instance, emerged from marginalised neighbourhoods, transforming neglected urban landscapes into dynamic cultural zones. The opera house, by contrast, demonstrates how architecture and acoustics can stabilise social hierarchies and reaffirm elite authority. As Lefebvre (1991, p. 88) notes, space is always a “contradictory unity” — shaped by structures of power yet also a site of contestation and reinvention. Music, then, is never just situated in space; it participates in producing and reshaping it.

At the same time, the relationship between music and space can be seen from the opposite direction. Space itself can be understood as an active agent - almost a “manager”

— in shaping what kinds of music are possible. The resonant acoustics of a cathedral, for example, produce liturgical soundscapes that could not exist in drier environments. In contrast, urban zoning laws and noise restrictions limit where popular music can circulate, while the algorithmic structures of digital platforms govern how audiences discover and engage with sound. As Lefebvre notes in *Rhythmanalysis*, rhythms “always imply a relation of space and time” (2004, p. 15), reminding us that spatial conditions inevitably leave their mark on musical form. Born echoes this insight in arguing that “music is a medium of sociality and temporality” (2013, p. 12).

Looking through the lens of genre makes these dynamics particularly visible. As Born points out, genres are “social formations” that “mediate and transform relations between publics, institutions and technologies” (2013, p. 25). They carry with them not only sonic conventions but also spatial and institutional ones. In Greece, for example, jazz and classical music are frequently perceived as foreign or elite, distinguished from vernacular and popular musics by the kinds of venues they occupy, the audiences they attract, and the symbolic value they carry. This pattern reflects Lefebvre's observation in *The Urban Revolution* that cultural practices are unevenly distributed across urban space, reinforcing and reproducing social hierarchies (2003, p. 17).

The interplay of genre and space has been explored in various contexts, though less so in Greece. Scholars have examined hip-hop's territorial claims in urban neighbourhoods (Forman, 2002), the opera house as a locus of elite cultural authority (McAuley, 2000), and the role of festivals in reshaping cultural geographies (Gibson & Connell, 2011). Yet in Greece, despite a rich tradition of ethnomusicology, urban genres such as jazz and classical remain underexplored in terms of their spatial politics. This gap is particularly striking given the recent proliferation of festivals and alternative venues, which highlight the dynamic interaction between genre and space.

Musics, Genres and Space in Greece

In recent years, both jazz and classical music in Greece have found their way into non-traditional venues such as cafés, clubs, bookshops, improvised galleries, factories, ports, archaeological sites, and public squares. Performing in these settings unsettles long-standing associations between genre and space, opening up unexpected encounters between musical traditions and new audiences. To borrow Lefebvre's phrase, such events illustrate space as “a network of relations continually in the process of being made and remade” (1991, p. 86). What is at stake here is not simply the relocation of genres to different sites, but a deeper transformation of the socio-symbolic landscape of Greek musical life, where space itself plays an active role in reshaping how these traditions are received and reimagined.

Classical music in Greece has long been associated with elite institutions and venues such as the Athens Concert Hall (Megaron Mousikis). The architecture and acoustics of the Megaron exemplify Lefebvre's category of representations of space: designed to embody cultural prestige, the building imposes a spatial order that frames classical music as a high-cultural practice. Audiences are socially stratified, often reflecting middle and upper-class demographics. However, in recent years, classical performances have increasingly appeared in alternative spaces: public squares, community centres, and even industrial sites repurposed as cultural venues. Initiatives like the *Athens Epidaurus Festival* have staged open-air performances — like the one where the famous cellist Yo Yo Ma appeared at Kipseli Square — disrupting traditional associations of classical music with elite spaces. These shifts illustrate Born's claim that music is mediated by changing institutional and social contexts, while also demonstrating Lefebvre's notion that representational spaces can destabilize established orders.

The *Athens Epidaurus Festival* has long been a central part of Greece's cultural life, best known for its unforgettable evenings in the ancient theatres of Epidaurus and the Odeon of Herodes Atticus. In recent decades, though, the festival has taken an important new turn with the addition of Pireos 260, a former warehouse complex on Pireos Street. Once part of Athens' industrial backbone, the site has been reinvented as a lively cultural hub where theatre, dance, and music all find a home. Today, its vast halls regularly host jazz ensembles and chamber groups, offering audiences a fresh way of experiencing these genres — one that carries with it the raw textures and urban memory of the city's industrial past.

Performances here illustrate Born's concept of “heterogeneous spaces,” where institutional, symbolic, and lived dimensions intersect (2013). The cavernous halls and industrial architecture shape the acoustic and aesthetic experience of concerts, contrasting starkly with the controlled acoustics of the Megaron Moussikis. At the same time, the site carries connotations of labour, modernisation, and urban memory. When jazz or classical music resonates within these walls, the genre acquires new associations: cosmopolitan, experimental, and intertwined with Athens' shifting urban fabric. In Lefebvre's terms, Pireos 260 is not just a backdrop but an active force in producing new spatial practices and representational spaces that alter the meaning of the music itself.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Greek Ministry of Culture and Sports launched the *All Greece One Culture* initiative, an ambitious project designed to disperse performances across archaeological sites, castles, monasteries, and town squares throughout the country. Classical ensembles and jazz trios featured prominently in the program, staged against backdrops ranging from Byzantine monuments to ancient ruins.

This initiative democratised access to genres that are often perceived as distant or unknown. By moving beyond Athens and Thessaloniki into rural and regional locations, the

project created opportunities for audiences who might never attend a concert hall to experience jazz and classical music in familiar, symbolically rich settings. A quartet performing in a medieval fortress or a jazz trio at an archaeological site recontextualises both the music and the space. The music highlights the cultural depth of the site, while the site imbues the performance with historical resonance. As Lefebvre insists, “every society produces a space, its own space” (1991, p. 31), and here the Greek state explicitly mobilised heritage sites as stages for re-producing space through music.

The symbolic effect is double: these concerts frame jazz and classical as part of Greece’s contemporary cultural identity, not as external imports, while also re-inscribing heritage sites as living spaces of artistic creation rather than static monuments. In this sense, the project exemplifies how music and space co-produce cultural meaning, reinforcing Born's call to examine the mediations between genres, institutions, and publics.

Moving to the island of Lesvos, we meet the Molyvos International Music Festival situating classical performance within the dramatic setting of a medieval castle overlooking the Aegean. Since its establishment, the festival has brought international soloists and chamber ensembles to the small town of Molyvos, combining cosmopolitan artistic practice with local cultural life. This festival exemplifies how rural and peripheral spaces can transform the reception of genre. Classical music, usually tied to metropolitan centres, here becomes part of the rhythms of island life. For local audiences, the festival offers access to high-level international performance without requiring travel to Athens or abroad. For visiting musicians and listeners, it provides a unique encounter with Greece's cultural and natural landscapes.

The festival popularises the genre by embedding it in familiar surroundings, while for visitors it creates a unique cultural experience that blends cosmopolitan artistry with local identity. Here, festivalisation democratises and spectacularises at the same time: it makes classical music accessible in a rural context while also framing it as a special, almost exclusive event. This tension reflects Lefebvre’s idea of space as inherently paradoxical — structured by power relations, yet continually open to challenge and redefinition.

Taken together, these examples show how festivalisation and popularisation are central to understanding the spatial politics of music in Greece. Festivals reshape how spaces are used and remembered, while popularisation unsettles traditional hierarchies by bringing classical and jazz to new audiences and new places. Both processes highlight the double role of space: it functions not as a passive backdrop but as an active force that helps decide how genres circulate, who has access to them, and how they are valued in the broader cultural landscape.

The cases of Pireos 260, *All Greece One Culture*, and the Molyvos International Music Festival showcase not only how music interacts with space, but also how cultural life

in Greece has been reshaped by festivalisation. Over the last two decades, festivals have multiplied across Europe and Greece, becoming key organisers of how music is programmed, circulated, and experienced. Alongside festivalisation, popularisation plays a crucial role in how classical, and jazz have been repositioned in Greece. These genres gain new audiences when performed in public squares, archaeological sites, or small-town castles. The Ministry of Culture's *All Greece One Culture* initiative, for example, deliberately placed performances in symbolic locations where people might not otherwise encounter jazz or classical music. When a jazz trio plays in a monastery courtyard or a string quartet in a fortress, the setting itself reframes the music: it becomes not only accessible, but also tied to a shared cultural heritage. In Lefebvre's terms, these are representational spaces — places charged with lived and symbolic meaning — where music and space together produce new experiences of belonging.

Festivalisation also reinforces Born's reminder that music is always embedded in institutions, publics, and technologies. Festivals act as powerful institutions in their own right: they decide who performs, how genres are represented, and which spaces are activated. By presenting jazz and classical music within large-scale cultural projects, festivals boost the visibility of these genres, but also subject them to the logic of festival culture - branding, spectacle, and the creation of temporary cultural "moments." Popularisation broadens the audience base, making these musics part of everyday cultural life, but the reliance on festivals raises questions: *does this openness last beyond the event, or does it remain tied to the exceptional atmosphere of the festival?*

Conclusion

In conclusion, looking at jazz and classical music in Greece through Born and Lefebvre shows how closely space and music are tied together. Music does not just happen in space; it helps to create it, shaping meanings, hierarchies, and experiences of belonging. At the same time, spaces — whether concert halls, factories, squares, or castles — shape what kinds of music are possible and how they are received. The examples of Pireos 260, *All Greece One Culture*, and the Molivos International Music Festival show how festivalisation and popularisation have reshaped these genres, by challenging established connections and extending them to new audiences. They remind us that in contemporary Greece, the politics of space are at the core of how music is made, shared, and valued.

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The Architectural *Performative* on the Threshold between the Domestic and the Extreme

Višnja Žugić
Department of Architecture and Urban Planning, Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad, Novi Sad, Serbia

Abstract

Drawing on Lambert's (2012) classification of architectural realms as the "Extreme" and the "Domestic," this paper explores the performativity of conventional architecture in everyday life and examines how its narratives, qualities, meanings, and functions shift in response to political and social extremes. The central question emerges from the premise that emergency conditions radically transform architectural spaces themselves (e.g., a flat, a university building, or a beachfront villa), giving rise to new spatial typologies.

If architecture is understood as textual, and architectural texts are always structured in relation to their context, then political extremes inevitably reshape the semiotic framework of existing architecture. Under such conditions, certain spaces enter an altered operational state in which their dominant functions are displaced or transformed, producing a distinct effect on lived reality. This phenomenon resonates with Austin's (1975) theory of language, particularly his concept of "performatives" — utterances that are neither true nor false but actively shape the reality in which they operate.

The "architectural performative" is therefore defined here as a text that is produced by architecture that has been transformed by political or social crises. Situated at the threshold between the Domestic and the Extreme, this mode of architecture is characterised by intentional misuse. This paper demonstrates how, in such circumstances, architecture adopts or produces diverse performative roles, ranging from a weapon to a symbolic catalyst for social change.

Keywords: architectural performative; domestic and extreme architecture; social crisis

Architecture between Violence and Care

Extensively examining the weaponised conditions of architecture, Lambert (2012) proposes a provocative yet systematic and overarching argument concerning the impossibility of innocence in any architecture, regardless of its programme or original purpose. Rather than locating architectural violence solely in explicit typologies such as concentration camps, prisons, or enclosed spaces, Lambert identifies violence within everyday, seemingly benign architectural structures. He therefore distinguishes between two spatial categories: the Domestic and the Extreme (p.12), arguing that the violence embedded in the Domestic must be approached with equal seriousness and caution, as it fundamentally structures everyday life.

This idea resonates with Weizman's writings on the relationship between architecture and weaponisation. Describing the primary spatial condition of Palestine as an "elastic geography" (Weizman, 2007, p.6), Weizman demonstrates how the constantly shifting architecture of the frontier operates not as a static backdrop to action, but as an active medium that its inhabitants continually challenge, transform, and appropriate. In doing so, he emphasises the transformative and active character of space, as well as its inherent impossibility of remaining neutral.

At the opposite pole to weaponised architecture lie theoretical approaches that examine the notion of care within spatial practices. A key framework for understanding care in relation to architecture is provided by Tronto (2013), who situates care within the realm of political practice rather than treating it as an emotion or moral sentiment. From this perspective, architecture is understood as infrastructure of care — not as neutral entity, but as contingent, relational, and ethical phenomenon.

Adopting Jeremy Till's (2009, p. 173) approach to ethics in architecture as a "responsibility for the Other," allows us to examine architecture as an enabling or disabling system — an infrastructure endowed with its own political agency, as articulated by Easterling (2014). In this way, architectures of care can be conceptualised as operational rather than merely symbolic. This understanding returns us to architecture as a dynamic phenomenon with tangible effects on reality, resonating with the core principles of performative architecture and space.

Performativity as Method: Reading Architecture in Extreme Contexts

One of the most influential formulations of performative architecture, cutting across its multiple lines of enquiry — from technological to cultural and phenomenological — appears in Leatherbarrow's (2005) assertion that "it is not about what architecture is, but what it does" (p. 7). The doing of architecture can be examined through the lens of the

production (rather than representation) of meanings, shifting the focus towards the textuality of architecture, its modes of production, and the impact of these texts on the reality in which they operate. This performative capacity becomes particularly legible in extreme contexts such as war and social upheaval, where architecture actively generates meanings, effects, and lived experiences. While these performative qualities are often explored within artistic and creative practices, this study investigates how they are reconfigured when architecture operates under conditions of political or social crisis, resulting in radically different effects on reality.

Methodologically, the analysis maps the dominant narratives and meanings that architecture reflects or generates across varying contexts, tracing how both these narratives and the contexts themselves are radically reconfigured under conditions of emergency and turmoil.

Architecture as Weaponised Apparatus

The first example in the analysis of architecture and its distinct roles within social and political extremes relates to the context of military activities conducted in Gaza after 7 October 2023. Several months after the escalation of warfare, an Israeli real estate company posted on social media an image advertising the pre-sale of settlements on the territory of destroyed Gaza, accompanied by the caption: “Wake up, a house on the beach is not a dream.”[54]

The post presented an image composed of two layers: the background depicts a low-opacity photograph of a destroyed city, overlaid with a three-dimensional simulation (a quickly exported image from 3D modelling software) of five beachfront villas in the foreground. The photographed city is emptied of people, with the sea and coastline visible in the background. The urban matrix of the photographed city resists an orthogonal grid, while the newly designed urban structure that overlays it appears as a straight line directed toward the coast. The following analysis focuses particularly on the new architecture depicted in this image and on the meanings it embeds, transforms, and produces within its visual, semiotic, and social context.

Observed independently from the photograph that provides the dominant contextual layer, the newly designed architecture refers to a generic type of contemporary beachfront villa: with its flat roofs, cubic orthogonal structure, lack of ornamentation, and serial repetition reflected in the multiplication of a single design. Through these formal characteristics, the depicted architecture embeds meanings of repetition, standardisation, typological genericity, rapid visualisation, and a capitalist-driven mode of architectural

[54] Harey Zahav real estate Company on their Instagram profile [@hareyzahav]. (2023, December 13).

production. Yet these meanings do not remain autonomous: as architecture appears within a context already loaded with meaning, which inevitably intervenes in what architectural form initially conveys, its signification can be radically and very precisely augmented, reshaped, or transformed. In the case of the Instagram post analysed here, the surrounding image of a destroyed city dialogically structures the meanings produced by the five villas: neglect of spatial memory, rewriting and replacement, erasure, disregard for *genius loci*, and an approach to land as a *tabula rasa*. Additionally, when read alongside the caption's call for awakening, the new architecture may be interpreted as "a dream come true." Most radically, however, the political, temporal, and social context in which the image was posted reveals the depth of the semiotic charge carried by this newly designed architecture. Knowing that the photograph does not depict an unknown ruined city, but Gaza - and that the causes of its destruction are widely understood - the architecture of the five villas comes to signify erasure, oppression, and, ultimately, architecture being used as a weapon[55].

This architecture was deliberately placed within its context and represented by it. Therefore, the effects it produces become an integral and intentionally constructed part of its reality. This example does not merely demonstrate how architecture inevitably acquires new meanings through changing social circumstances and contextual relations. Rather, it illustrates a condition in which the intertextual relationship between architecture and its surrounding texts emerges from the designer's intention: the resulting meanings themselves become the architecture's programming task.

Thus, a seemingly innocent architectural type of a beachfront villa demonstrates how its primary role, ostensibly dedicated to improving human life, can transform from dwelling into an instrument of oppression. This radical transformation occurs through architecture's capacity to generate meanings with profound effects on reality — a power inherent in the performative potential of architectural space.

Architecture as Emancipatory Infrastructure

The second example relevant to this analysis occupies the opposite end of the spectrum from weaponised architecture, demonstrating how architecture can operate as an emancipatory infrastructure, rather than as an instrument of harm. In December 2024, higher education institutions in Serbia became the sites of a nationwide wave of student blockades following the collapse of a canopy at the newly renovated railway station in Novi

[55] See more about this example in *Architecture's Weaponising Performance* (Žugić, 2025)

Sad[56]. What began as a response to a fatal architectural failure developed into an occupation of university buildings that lasted almost a year and evolved into a broader student-led movement advocating for social justice and corruption-free institutions.

If the collapse of a modernist architectural element from the 1960s exposed the violent consequences of neglect and corruption, the subsequent occupation of university buildings revealed the counter-potential of architecture when subjected to intentional misuse. Addressed here as a building type rather than as singular objects, university buildings became the primary spatial apparatus through which the movement was organised, sustained, and articulated.

Constructed largely during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s within former Yugoslavia, the University campus in Novi Sad originally embodied the ideological narratives of Yugoslav modernism, emphasising both education and architecture as vehicles for social emancipation and collective progress. When formal teaching activities ceased in December 2024, the buildings underwent their most radical transformation since construction — one that was not physical, but programmatic and semiotic. Through occupation, the dominant educational functions of university buildings were replaced by new modes of inhabitation and governance. Dormitories, kitchens, workshops, cinemas, self-organised classrooms, and logistics centres were established, transforming spaces of higher education into spaces of shelter, care, and operational centres of the movement.

This deliberate “dis-programming,” in Tschumi’s (1994) terms, unified universities across the country into a coordinated movement grounded in direct democratic practice. Although the movement expanded beyond campus boundaries, into streets, squares, highways, media spaces, domestic interiors, rural peripheries, and international contexts, the occupied university buildings remained its spatial anchor. As students succinctly articulated, “School became our Home, and Streets became our School.” (Architecture Students, Novi Sad, 2025).

As the movement unfolded, the meanings attached to university architecture shifted from those of institutional education and inherited ideology to protection, hospitality, and collective empowerment. In contrast to weaponised architecture, which produces harm through spatial control and destruction, these buildings operated as fortresses of safety and as symbolic condensers of hope, justice, and solidarity.

Through this process, university architecture functioned performatively, not by enforcing power but by enabling care, cohabitation, and political agency. This transformation primarily occurred at the level of meaning and effect, demonstrating that

[56] The tragedy resulted in sixteen deaths and one severe injury. A year after the event, no one has been held accountable.

architecture, which is never innocent nor neutral, can nonetheless operate as an emancipatory force. Situated at the threshold between the Domestic and the Extreme, these buildings reveal architecture's capacity to actively reshape political and social reality, not through violence, but through care.

Figure 1

Faculty of Technical Sciences, Novi Sad, Serbia, 11:52 a.m., December 6, 2024. A gathering for 15 minutes of silence, three days before the start of a year-long blockade of the university building by its students. Photo: Stefan Simić.



Towards the Architectural Performative

The analysed examples, although situated at opposite ends of the spectrum, are connected through the emergence of a new spatial condition shaped by extreme social and political contexts. Through the intentional misuse of architecture, whether the transformation of a residential building from a space of dwelling into an apparatus of oppression, or the dis-programming of a university from a site of education into an agent of social metamorphosis, this condition becomes particularly productive at the level of meaning and in its direct effects on reality.

Drawing on Austin's (1975) theory of language, and his concept of "performatives" as acts that do things rather than merely describe them, I define the "architectural performative" as a productive architectural text: a spatial gesture that shifts the focus of enquiry from the verbal to the spatial domain. Through its materiality, such a gesture produces the illusion of a speech act, incorporating meaning and entering the domain of enunciation — non-verbal, yet nonetheless eloquent. In this way, the architectural performative emerges as a spatial gesture operating within a broader spatio-temporal context, functioning as a productive and effective built act.

Conclusion: Architecture In-Between

The transformed state of architecture, brought about through a radical questioning of its fundamental purposes and functions, appears as a dynamic and often temporary condition. In this state, architecture shifts from one mode of operation to another, mirroring the in-betweenness of the social and political contexts from which it emerges. These transformations are most clearly visible in the changing quality and hierarchy of functions that architecture fulfils or generates.

Through such shifts, existing buildings oscillate between the Domestic and the Extreme, operating either as violent or as hospitable infrastructures. In doing so, they remain essentially liminal: suspended between established typologies and unstable contemporary modes of operation. Architecture thus occupies an in-between condition, neither innocent nor neutral, in which its performative capacity actively reshapes political, social, and spatial realities.

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Urban Vampire: A Rite of Passage
A threshold experience of a performative paper

Arianna Chatzigalanou
Independent researcher & performance artist

Abstract

The *Urban Vampire* project emerged just before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in Athens and it has since engaged with the fragmented yet persistently undead urban space. Performative fragments focused specifically on transitional spaces within the urban landscape — the arcades [στοές] of downtown Athens — were assembled into the experimental short film *Urban Vampire: A Rite of Passage,* presented within the context of performative presentations at the *Performing Space Conference 2025*. The film's core inquiry lies in revealing the bridging and connecting qualities of the arcades, both physically and metaphorically – the latter being the internal processes of initiation that unfold during the liminal passage from one point of public space to another — through the mystical quality that an arcade can hold. Drawing on psychogeography, autoethnography, performance writing and performance practice as its methodological framework, this article could have served as a written presentation of the theoretical background of the performative piece if a performative presentation itself had not already *taken space* at the conference. However, having performed the presentation, it is only fitting that this article continues that process and stands as another step within the research methodology — from a performance to performative presentation to performative paper.

Keywords: autoethnographic, liminal, urban, performance, video

Performative Paper: A Liminal Place to Be

Describing a performative piece in terms of its methodological framework, theoretical and philosophical background, its implementation and the discourse that follows is the conventional mode within the academic field for the performative arts. Yet, as Laura Cull (2012) discusses in relation to the problem of application, performers often find themselves justifying creative choices and seeking support from philosophical frameworks to legitimize their creativity. But what if within this very interstice, the space between creativity and academic performance, there lies a liminal zone of transformational creativity — a kind of alchemical process that holds the tension of the opposites (Jung, 1992)?

In *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance,* Peggy Phelan (1993) suggests that the undocumentable nature of performance necessitates new rules of writing if it is to preserve its ephemeral ontology. When performers are asked to write a paper about their performative work, they encounter a deeply alienating loneliness. During the creative process, they have creative impulses; during performance, they have an audience; and during a conference, they have fellow participants. But when they are asked to write about their performance, even the company of their creation fades. Alone and in a passage, the performer's body echoes Victor Turner's (1969) understanding of liminality — the state of being betwixt and between, suspended in transformation.

Figure 1
Urban Vampire: A Rite of Passage, photo from the film (Arianna Chatzigalanou & Aspa Siokou)



A performative paper, thus, attempts to perform an artistic work in words, a close to impossible attempt, not only because of the performer-researcher's human limitations (linguistic, academic, physical, emotional) but because the main performative experience itself may transcend the world of words. In most cases, it was not stimulated by the world of words but rather by unconscious impulses that are explored through the making and words can often be only part of this exploration. A great example of this is poetry, which, although it consists of words, tends to feel as if words are only a constituent of the poem. How is someone to bring the body entity of the performer from the space of performance to 'on paper'? This process — navigating through loneliness, transformation and poetry, whether met with compassion or mockery, with lack of understanding or with ontological respect — cannot be shared with anyone else.

As a liminal entity undergoing initiation, the performer-researcher experiences multiple dissolutions of their identity, reaching a point where they hold neither the security of their former identity nor the liberating relief of their new identity. This cycle of consecutive dis-solution and re-solution renders discourse on a performance mostly precarious, meaningless (in the sense that it has yet no assigned meaning and it is in the process of finding it) and, thus, alive, pulsing with the vitality of emergence.

Why begin a paper by talking about the impossibility of the paper? Why dwell on absence? Does absence mean non-existence when absence can more often than not intensify presence (Heidegger, 1962)? What would be the opposite of presence? Could omission perform a severance of presence? The reason why this paper begins by discussing its absence does not take from its willingness to become present and it thereby chooses to literally not omit anything and perform everything, even its own nothingness.

As Trinh Minh-ha (1989) proposes: "*Let's not express ourselves in sentences but think sentences"* (p.17).

Performative Presentation: Performing the Performance's Framework per se

The experimental short film 'Urban Vampire: A Rite of Passage' premiered at the *Performing Space Conference 2025* under the category of performative presentations. Applying for this category seemed so intriguing but after being accepted the great question emerged: well, what is a performative presentation? Not being a performance nor a traditional presentation, the initial joy for a plethoric combination of both subsided. It was no longer a performance and a presentation. Quite the contrary, I could do neither a performance nor a presentation. That was a real challenge.

I arrived at the conference with a film and my notes referencing the great minds of performance theory. The days in the conference were passing and I was nowhere close to

what could be considered as a performative presentation. Not that I really knew what that was at that point. However, I could intuit what it was not. And there I was, having shot myself in the foot. Or so I thought.

On the day of my performative presentation, I carried both my notes and my film. The paper remained in my bag; the film was projected on the wall. I wore my Urban Vampire's costume and I stood between the bag and the wall. During, the preceding coffee break, I served coffee to attendees as the urban vampire. Some smiled in surprise, while others approached hesitantly. They seemed unsure whether they should ask for coffee or talk to me. Should they comment or just observe? Some acknowledged my presence, others did not. The break was over and they all entered the conference room. The chairs had already been randomly rearranged while we were all out. I needed the rearrangement to surprise both the people attending and me. I entered last.

Figure 2

Performative presentation of 'Urban Vampire: A Rite of Passage', Performing Space 2025 Conference (photo by Alberto De Felipe Montero)



They were sitting, I was standing. I turned off the lights. The film started playing and I just had to make a choice. To find a chair in the whole chaos and just be. My body melted on the chair and, as my head tilted backwards, I could see myself on the screen upside

down. I had never watched the film upside down. What an amazing opportunity that had never even crossed my mind before, my creature hanging from the floor hovering above the arcades' skylights. I knew the words of my voice-over by heart, I could hear them through the speakers and I could feel their vibration within, like having two sources of sound crashing into each other in the space in-between. I did not talk. But in a way I spoke. The NASA sounds in the sound design were in harmony with the sound of my breath. I did not breathe. But in a way I respired. 'Is this your idea of performative presentation?' I wondered and Judith Butler (2006) echoed from far away: Are you saying "your inner world does (not) designate a topos"? (p. 171).

Figure 3
Performative Presentation of 'Urban Vampire: A Rite of Passage', Performing Space 2025 Conference (photo by Alberto de Felipe Montero)



When the film ended, I stood up, opened the exit door and went out to the garden, into the sunlight. There I was, alone outside, having passed through every spatial layer of the conference. Not really knowing what I was doing in each one of them and then again, with a strange uncertainty, knowing very well. I crossed the garden walking. The exit behind me. I thought maybe I should run. But my feet said no, you walk. And then the entrance in front of me again. When I reentered the conference room, I found the people still looking out of the door I exited clapping, clapping who I was a little while ago. So strange to be experiencing my past and my present at the same time, as if the past and present self

merged for a moment in that conference space. Leaving my notes and the film fading into the background, immersing into the moment of not-knowing, my lonely walk and entering a-new felt like a complete rite of passage (van Gennep, 1960).

The Urban Vampire: A Rite of Passage

Since we began from nothingness, perhaps it is time to begin near the end, thus, “nullifying endings and beginnings” (Deleuze&Guattari, 1987, p.153). This filmic performance, part of the ongoing Urban Vampire project, originated in 2019 during a conference at the University of Thessaly. Invited by Dr. Neoklis Mantas to contribute a performance about the city, I presented a performative piece of a vampire performing lonely Christmas rituals in a world that was collapsing.

When the Covid-19 pandemic struck, the project acquired uncanny resonance and the urban vampire’s weird suggestion of *modus operandi* came to life. One of the first forbidden acts was flânerie — aimless wandering. But, as art venues closed, there was no other place for a performer than the street. Like a vampire, I wandered through the city’s void. Lefebvre (2004) would have seen in this a subversive act, a rhythmanalysis of resistance. Clad in costume, I tried to embody Wolff’s (1985) vision of the invisible flâneuse by becoming most visible. The urban vampire did not go on a traditional bloodthirsty quest to feed on life but on a quest to feed on the absence of life or, even more accurately, the imprint of life. Just like the vampire stands for neither life nor death but the imprint of both. And this could be juxtaposed with Glazier's (2022) reminiscences of the Baudelaire's “ego a-thirst for a non-ego” (p. 226).

Urban Vampire: A Rite of Passage focuses specifically on spaces of transition within the urban landscape and explores such charged thresholds encompassing old print shops, contemporary retail stores, offices, service providers, the Varvakeios market and a photography darkroom. It was filmed in the arcades that stretch between the commercial heart of the city of Athens and its historical sites — hence forming its shadowed, transitional zones. Passing through a arcade is rendered an initiation process for the body entity and, as such, what it seeks to reveal is the variety of experiences the body goes through, the implications of such liminal public spaces and the psychogeographical narrative of this urban element. A arcade looks like an urban exile and as Carter (1979) writes in her short vampiric story *The Lady of the House of Love,* “the end of exile is the end of being” (p.106). According to Berardi’s (2015) etymological analysis of experience, this experience of the arcade includes the going through, perishing and trying out.

The urban vampire moves through the arcades with their reflective glass, the steel surfaces and the distorting skylights that become vessels of loss, memory and

metamorphosis. Through every passage, the arcade becomes a rite, a negotiation between presence and absence, the living and the dead, the self and the city. The inflated body entity of the urban vampire absorbs the residue of lives, histories and psychic transformations of the arcade's life. And, in reverse, what is left behind, even in the most minor transition is never truly lost. It lingers like a trace or offering in the architecture, thus adding another bit, or maybe beat, to the psychic archive of the arcade.

Through this embodied journey, the urban vampire becomes the witness and experiment of the city's alchemical processes, undergoing this transformative experience in its own form. As Benjamin (1999) would have more eloquently expressed this, "All this was the arcade in our eyes. And it was nothing of all of this (…) It was not decline but transformation" (p.874).

Figure 4
Urban Vampire: A Rite of Passage, photo from the film (Arianna Chatzigalanou & Aspa Siokou)



Conclusion

What was supposed to be a paper of documentation took a weird turn into a performative writing experiment. The experimental short film, centered on Athens' transitional spaces, stimulated new questions about artistic research on transition leading to a process of continual passage. From performance to presentation to paper, writing can become another form of performance, another arcade to cross — instead of writing about the performance actually writing the performance. This experimental writing ritual, resonating with the core principles of performance writing, suggests that, in artistic research, the methodology itself immerses into the research question which, in turn, permeates every step to mold new forms

of research practice on paper. It can feel like a non-sense or extremely exposing way to face the academy but why should artistic immersion be allowed in certain contexts and in some others not? How could we be speaking about artistic research severing the artist's tools and processes from the moment their performative piece has finished? And lastly, how could I be presenting and talking about my artistic research on transitional urban space evoking the process of psychic fragmentation, metataxis and transformation, if I do not embody them in every research step I take?

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An Archipelago of Floating Islands
Memory, Transmission, Transformation

Daniela Dispoto
Sapienza Università di Roma

Abstract

In October 2023, Eugenio Barba donated his personal library to the Bibliographic and Museum Hub of the Puglia Region, along with his memorabilia, books and the Odin Teatret archive.

This paper presents the LAFLIS: Living Archive Floating Islands project, conceived by Barba and realised at the Bernardini Library in Lecce.

This ambitious initiative, the first phase of which was inaugurated on 4 October, 2023, aims to create a living archive based on Barba's poetics, the Odin Teatret and the Third Theatre movement. As Barba (2023) states:

> How can we bring the knowledge, emotions, and experiences in these documents into the present, translating them into forms that resonate with today's concerns? How can documents build a bridge to cross over? Building this bridge is what makes an archive come alive. In essence, we are speaking of transmission in other forms, expressions, methods, and techniques. A different way of thinking and acting. An active process of intensification and metamorphosis, not merely preservation. (pp. 158-159)

LAFLIS goes beyond the traditional functions of an archive (memory) and transmission, embracing a third crucial role: transformation.

The challenge is to restore a sense of wonder and imagination to historical materials through a mise-en-scène bridging the gap between the past and the present and translating the archive into an artistic, sensory and kinaesthetic language.

This transformative experience was co-designed by Eugenio Barba and a team of "fellow travellers," turning the archive into a sensory and visual journey for visitors. The library's rooms, where the narrative unfolds, become themselves a performative space, animated by installations and immersive environments. At the heart of the project lies an exploration of memory — not merely as the preservation of archival materials, but as the very life of memory and theatre itself.

Keywords: living archive / Odin Teatret / third theatre / memory / performing space

Living Archive Floating Islands

“I am fascinated by the problem of memory, though not merely in terms of preserving archival materials” (Barba, 2023, p. 155).

This contribution presents LAFLIS — Living Archive Floating Islands, a living museum-archive conceived by Eugenio Barba and hosted at the Bernardini Library-Museum Hub in Lecce, Salento, the director’s homeland. Inaugurated on 4 October 2023, the project creates a living archive narrating Odin Teatret’s history, its founder, and the Third Theatre.

LAFLIS weaves multiple stories: a collective adventure of diverse voices; a repository of objects and traces evoking past journeys and performances; and a challenge to preserve, transmit, and transform memory. The archive bridges past and future, turning documents into active processes of preservation and metamorphosis — “a passage or a sowing toward the future” (Barba, 2023, p. 159).

The Place

Since 2016, Apulia’s Poli biblio-museali integrate libraries, museums, and galleries for cultural heritage management. The Bernardini Library, home to Carmelo Bene’s archives, expanded in 2022 via a partnership with Fondazione Barba Varley ETS to support Odin Teatret research.

Barba himself recounts how he proposed to the Regional Councillor for Culture the donation of part of his library and materials related to his artistic activity — but under one specific condition: not a mere archive, but a living place, one capable of transmitting and transforming memory.

The Archive as a Bridge

It is necessary to find a way to transport into the present the cognitive, emotional and technical wealth contained in documents, so that they may continue to speak and resonate today. As Barba (2023) observes, the moment a performance ends, it already seems to belong to the past. The challenge is not to let what has been accomplished slip away and become nothing more than history. Thus arises the question: “How can documents construct a bridge on which to pass?” (p. 158). The living archive is precisely such a bridge: between memory and the future, between testimony and transformation. It offers a new way of transmitting expressions, processes and techniques in alternative forms. It is an active process, composed of both preservation and metamorphosis, “a passage or a sowing toward the future” (p. 159). The LAFLIS project was conceived to move beyond the concept of the

traditional archive and beyond the simple transmission of knowledge, by adding a third essential task: transformation. At its foundation, three interwoven dimensions emerge:

Memory, understood as the traditional archive that collects, catalogues and preserves historical materials, making them available for consultation.

Transmission, which transforms the archive into an active space for training, re-elaboration and sharing, through publications, meetings and courses.

Transformation, which breathes new life into documents by translating them into artistic, sensory and kinaesthetic languages.

Figure 1
October 4–6, 2023. Inauguration of LAFLIS, performance in the square in front of the Bernardini Library (photo by the author).



In this context, “transformation” means abandoning traditional exhibition hierarchies in order to create an immersive and disorientating experience, allowing the visitor to enter another world. Documents are no longer simply to be viewed or consulted, but traversed; they become living matter, capable of generating new perceptions. Bringing documents of the past into the present means integrating them into practice, making them converse with distant experiences and identifying connections and new uses. Barba (2023) further explains that to realise this vision, a team was required — one resembling a theatre ensemble — composed of individuals capable of working with different logics and attuned to the unexpected. The team needed to share affinities with the spirit of Odin Teatret: discipline and improvisation, the capacity to face the unforeseen, even hostility. What was required was a form of “unprogrammed interdisciplinarity” — not a method, but an affinity of vision —

through which a collective effort could generate new levels of organisation, capable of transferring the past into the present, making it accessible, engaging and able to speak to, intrigue and captivate even those unfamiliar with the world of archives (p. 159).

The mise en scène of Memory

The archive was inaugurated at the end of 2023 and constitutes the backbone of this ever-evolving organism, one that breathes and continuously changes form. It is a project in progress: while the cataloguing of books and materials is underway, the rooms are not definitively arranged; they shift, something is always being rethought, added, or moved. Contrary to what might be expected of an institutional archive, here everything continues to live. The alliance — as Barba defines it — with architect and set designer Luca Ruzza (a longtime friend and Odin's scenographer) has led to the mise en scène or, more aptly, the mise en espace of memory. Thus, the dimension of transformation was among the first steps: at its core, the desire to present materials, data and documents through a dramaturgy of space capable of evoking "the same sense of disorientation and displacement experienced by spectators in Odin's performances: an experience shaped by discontinuous, rhythmic, associative, and emotional logics" (Barba, p. 160). Within the Bernardini Library, a space has been created akin to a journey into the mind — a mind dense with memories, yet also with associations, images and sounds. It is a collective mind, where Barba's is not the only voice, but joined by those of his actors, collaborators and the groups of the Third Theatre.

The installation does not follow a linear or hierarchical order. Objects emerge from a design that is at once casual and intentional, allowing the visitor to trace their own path. As Ruzza (2024) emphasises, conserving and presenting theatrical memory through an archival installation offers a unique opportunity to render concrete and perceptible what might otherwise remain invisible. The space unfolds across three rooms — the Black Room, the White Room and the Red Room — echoing the colors of Odin Teatret's working spaces in Holstebro. These rooms are connected by an atrium corridor, yet visitors are encouraged to explore freely and construct their own narrative path. At the end of the corridor lies a floating glass floor, beneath which bones, shells, small objects and books personally chosen by Barba are displayed: his mental roots, his hidden foundations. Visitors may observe them as if walking — or flying — over an underground carpet. From a small staircase, one ascends to a raised platform where the dressing rooms of Eugenio Barba and Julia Varley in Holstebro have been reconstructed at full scale, with the objects faithfully repositioned by the artists themselves. The Black Room serves as an archive of scenographies, an incoherent mosaic of fragments, costumes and scenic objects that function as symbols and metaphors. From the carved wooden hands of Mythos (1998),

crafted by Balinese artisans, to the benche rectangle of from Min Fars Hus (1973), to the white egg from Ferai (1981), visitors are immersed in Odin's universe through relics of both past and recent performances; fragments that "seem to be in disarray, yet still evoke memories" (Perrelli, 2024, p. 51).

Figure 2
Eugenio Barba during the setup of the Black Room (photo Luca Ruzza, courtesy of the author).



Figure 3-4
Details of the Black Room (photo Luca Ruzza, courtesy of the author).





Figure 5
Barong at the entrance of the White Room (photo Luca Ruzza, courtesy of the author).



The White Room, dedicated to Barba's biography, constantly evolves with additions. At the entrance, a Balinese Barong,[57] mask guards the threshold, symbolizing culture's fight against oblivion, flanked by ISTA[58] masks and posters. Shelves display books mingled

[57] In Odin's performances, the Barong — a Balinese entity of health and auspiciousness — is a costume that gains vitality only when animated by two performers acting in unison inside it.

[58] The ISTA (International School of Theatre Anthropology) is an international, itinerant laboratory for theatrical research and theatre anthropology, fostering long-term dialogue between Western and Eastern traditions.

with photos, souvenirs, posters, and objects — arranged for fractured, unpredictable views that compel detours and estrangement. This sensory habitat, disorienting yet integrative, mirrors reading books blindly through their twists (Barba, 2023). A central chest-table invites visitors to unearth personal fragments: childhood at Nunziatella military school, sailor life on the Talabot, migrations to Poland, Norway, and Denmark — where Odin Teatret was born amid family roots.

Figure 6-7
Details of the White Room (photo Luca Ruzza, courtesy of the author).

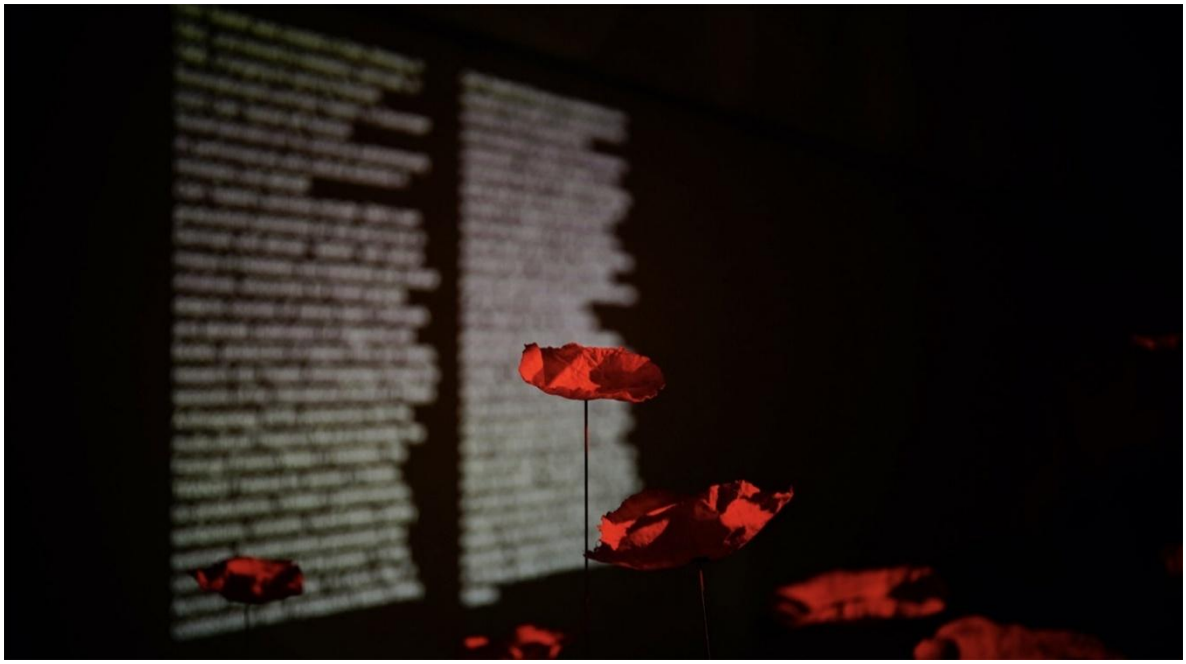




The Red Room will serve as the memorial of the Third Theatre, a transcultural “archipelago of floating islands,” as Barba describes it: autonomous, creative and interconnected groups, each with their own identity yet bound together through exchange and relationships.

> I did not want an archive solely about myself or Odin. The LAFLIS in Lecce is an opportunity to create something that also embraces the multifaceted constellation of theatre groups — the composite tradition of the Third Theatre that is so dear to me, scattered and dispersed, not always visible, yet fundamental for regenerating the meaning theatre held in the twentieth century and can still hold for future generations (…) It is time that this new and autonomous tradition be recognized: the specificity and originality of how actors conceive and realize their relationship with the city, with different social, cultural and human contexts (Barba, 2023, p. 162).

Figure 8
The Red Room (photo Luca Ruzza, courtesy of the author).



This metaphor inspired the image of a field of poppies — some large, others smaller — that now partially occupies the room and will continue to grow over time, constructing an immersive and multimedia narrative path to guide visitors through the history of the Third Theatre. Each poppy represents a theatre group. By selecting a group’s name, visitors can activate images, stories, sounds and even contact details for those who wish to learn about or collaborate with the groups. Interactive connections among the poppy islands, together with sound and lighting dedicated to each element, help to weave a visible network of relations, revealing the living, synaptic interconnections of group theatre on both local and

global scales. Entirely handmade by Francesca Carallo, a Salentine artist specialised in papier-mâché, the poppies lend a poetic yet profoundly material quality to this immersive and interactive environment.

Figure 9-10
Details of the handcrafted poppies in the Red Room (photo Luca Ruzza, courtesy of the author).





Conclusion

The creation of this living archive coincided with the year Barba stepped down as director of the Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium, severing Odin Teatret from its historic Holstebro headquarters and relocating it to Salento after a long journey. The goal was not to establish a new theater or preserve past memories in formaldehyde, but to forge bridges through a dialectical engagement with the present. Theater practitioners find little fascination in the past; they channel their thoughts and efforts into the now. Bringing past documents into today involves embedding them in practice, confronting them with remote experiences, uncovering connections, and revealing potential uses and contacts (Barba, 2023, p. 160).

Nora (1989) sharply distinguishes memory from history, which stand in radical opposition rather than synonymy. Memory pulses with life as a ceaselessly evolving, ever-present force binding us to an eternal now, while history reconstructs the absent past in flawed, partial terms (p. 8). Memory anchors in the tangible — traces, spaces, gestures, images, objects — whereas history clings to temporal sequences, progressions, and causal links (Giannachi, 2021, p. 125).

The project aligns with this through "seeing, acting, and interacting" (Amoruso, 2024, p. 61), transcending mere recollection via narrative transmission to safeguard cultural heritage. This reproduces it in varied expressive modes, sustains its vitality for future generations, and fosters inclusivity by honoring diverse voices and communal experiences. The archive incarnates collective memory — choral in voice and creative process alike. Translating memory into sensory, dynamic forms amplified by imagination converts knowledge into lived experience: a cascade of perceptual cues engaging visitors multisensorially to spark participatory comprehension (Amoruso, 2024).

Over the last fifty years, archiving has gained prominence. Echoing Agamben (2006), Giannachi (2021) portrays the archive as a transformative device that disseminates by nature (p. 136), hybridizing with collections, exhibitions, displays, and transmissions to encompass installations, Wunderkammern, databases, interfaces, and immersive environments (p. 14).

This initiative rejects historical linearity for a web of correspondences. In the Black Room, performance reconstructions from scene fragments and symbolic objects channel tensions and emotional charge from clashing assemblages, eschewing replication: these "transformations thus become equivalent to the performances themselves: new works of art born from their remnants" (Barba, 2023, p. 165). The White Room evokes a mental voyage, mirroring the Wunderkammer through juxtapositions of naturalia and artificialia in osmotic interplay, grouping objects by shared resonance; Barba prioritized energy-laden items to

evoke empathy and emotional stirrings (p. 166). The Red Room's interactivity and scenography render it performative, with narrative emerging from bodily motion.

Its core innovation transforms documents via narrative access, granting them independent artistic life through a process mirroring Odin Teatret's ethos from inception — far beyond static display. Barba (2023) fittingly closes: "The threads with which I begin to weave a new performance are always many, parallel, seemingly divergent, without points of contact. Then, slowly, they intersect, uncovering hidden logics, associative affinities, and rhythmic echoes. The same is happening with the living archive project: for now, the threads and desires multiply, and a moment for synthesis will come" (p. 167).

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Devising Experiments with Interactive Environments

Pavlos Panagiotidis
School of Computer Science, University of Nottingham
Jocelyn Spence
School of Computer Science, University of Nottingham
Nils Jäger
Department of Architecture and Built Environment, Faculty of Engineering, University of Nottingham

Abstract

This paper reports a practice-based investigation into authoring responsive light and sound in immersive performance without writing code. A modular system couples live gesture, position, and speech inputs to scenographic outputs through a visual logic layer that performers can operate in rehearsal. Across six workshops with eight professional performance-makers, we staged a progression from parallel ensemble and technical training to integrated dramaturgy, culminating in a single-spectator scratch immersive performance with interactive elements. This paper details the system's building blocks and the workshop arc. A reflexive reading of workshop video logs, post-workshop focus groups, and facilitator notes surfaced three ensemble-level strategies that made the technology workable in a hybrid devising/design practice: rotating roles between operator, performer, and mediator; embracing controlled imperfection as a creative resource; and using technology-describing metaphors to support creative practice.

Keywords: Interactive architecture; Immersive theatre; Ensemble interaction design; Practice-based research

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Devising Experiments with Interactive Environments

In J.G. Ballard's short sci-fi story *The Thousand Dreams of Stellavista*, houses absorb the emotional residues of their occupants and respond in kind — sometimes violently — offering not only a critique of technological progress but also a provocation to treat architecture as a character shaped by and reactive to human behaviour (Ballard, 1962). This is a useful lens for contemporary immersive performance-making that aims to treat interactive architecture not as static backdrop, but as dramaturgical material in creative processes. In immersive theatrical contexts, the environment itself frames and guides experience in a form of theatrical performance where the world of the event surrounds the audience (Machon, 2013). Warren (2017) further distinguishes between different immersive theatre forms, including *Exploration Theatre*, where audiences may roam freely through space, and *Guided Experiences*, where spatial design channels audience trajectories and choices. In both cases, the built environment can become an active participant in dramaturgy. This aligns with Leatherbarrow's proposition that architecture can be considered less in terms of *what it is* than *what it does* (Leatherbarrow, 2005).

Recent sensing and actuation tools make technologically enhanced, dynamic architectures more accessible than ever. Digital systems using cameras, microphones, and environmental sensors can capture positions, gestures, and voice, while rule-based or AI-driven systems can adapt light, sound, object positions, and other scenographic elements in real time. Yet, utilising this potential requires hybrid processes and methodologies that can bridge design, dramaturgy, and spatial composition in order to align technical responsiveness with embodied creative practice.

This paper reports a practice-based investigation, building on earlier exploratory work that identified the need for rehearsal-friendly, ensemble-accessible approaches to integrating emerging technologies into performance-making. Approaches such as Viewpoints — a compositional and training method that develops ensemble awareness, spatial listening, and improvisational responsiveness (Bogart & Landau, 2005) and Soma Design — an interaction design methodology that grounds technology development in first-person, felt, embodied experience (Höök, 2018) — offered useful scaffolds, foregrounding ensemble awareness, perception-in-action, and embodied experience as bases for performance-making and interaction design. The challenge is not only the choice and configuration of tools, but the framing of space itself as performing agent, with a distinct role and presence.

Through a series of workshops, a group of eight professional performance-makers integrated a custom-made, modular, no-code interaction authoring workflow, combining computer vision, speech analysis, and visual programming into Viewpoints-based composition

making. The workflow (that will be described in detail below) enabled theatre-makers to map embodied inputs (positions, gestures, vocal cues) to scenographic outputs (light and sound) during rehearsal, without writing code or relying on technicians. Our claim is that this combination supports rehearsal-friendly prototyping of responsive environments that treat space as an interactive scenographic layer, while keeping authorship legible to the ensemble.

System Design Logic

Accepting that complexity, robustness, and flexibility cannot always be sustained simultaneously, the design of the interaction authoring system adopts a modular design that prioritises rapid, adaptable prototyping to match the tempo and openness of early-stage theatrical devising. Discrete “ingredients”, such as gesture recognition, position tracking, speech analysis, sound, and light adaptation, can be swapped or recombined using a visual programming tool. An iterative development cycle followed a hybrid design sprint/devising process: multiple performance prototypes are tested in each workshop, process feedback is gathered immediately, and refinements of the system are rolled out in the following session. Complexity scales with experience, starting from simple interactions (e.g., triggering a single light from a gesture) and building towards compositions, where interactive elements were embedded within short, devised scenes and carried specific dramaturgical purposes (e.g., marking an entrance, supporting a revelation, or framing a character interaction). The process culminates in a one-day design/devise sprint producing a scratch interactive performance.

Figure 1

Node-RED interaction flows: gesture→light, position→light, phrase→sound, emotion→sound. Each row in the Node-RED patch represents a simple interaction flow read from left to right: the grey/blue boxes manage OSC communication with the system, the first coloured box defines the trigger condition (e.g., gesture, position, spoken phrase, or emotion), and the second coloured box specifies the resulting action (e.g., activating a light memory or triggering a sound).



The system prioritises tracking and adapting features directly relevant to Viewpoints-oriented performance and architectural adaptation. It leverages open-source libraries such as MediaPipe (Lugaresi et al., 2019) for gesture and body tracking, YOLOv8 (Jocher et al., 2023) for human detection, and Vosk (Alpha Cephei, n.d.) for live speech analysis, all integrated through the Node-RED visual programming environment (Node-RED, n.d.). Outputs include light and sound control using consumer-grade hardware, such as Philips Hue smart bulbs (Signify, n.d.). Inputs and outputs communicate via the Open Sound Control (OSC) protocol (Wright & Freed, 1997), enabling users to coordinate conditional interaction flows in real-time to create simple conditional flows: *If [input condition], then [output response]* (Figures 1-5).

Figure 2

Application of the position tracking script on AI generated image for illustration purposes. YOLOv8 detects human positions from a live feed, calculates pairwise distances, normalises coordinates to a 0–100 scale, and sends both position and distance data via OSC. It logs positions to JSON and generates real-time matplotlib plots for feedback.

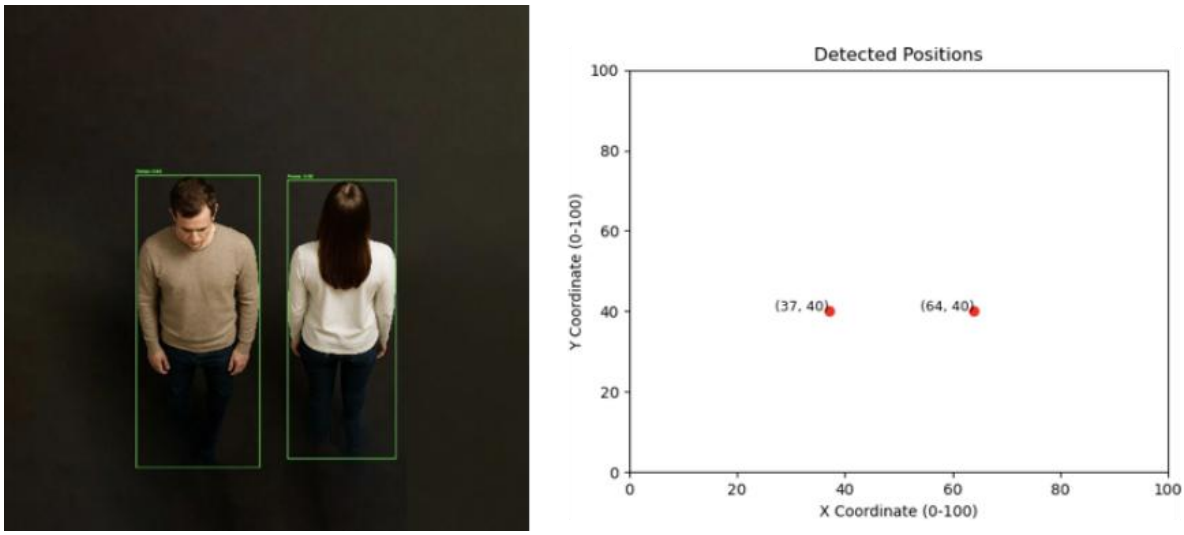


Figure 3

MediaPipe Gesture recognition, gestures are recognised by tracking three points and their angle (left) and Vosk-based speech analysis output (right).

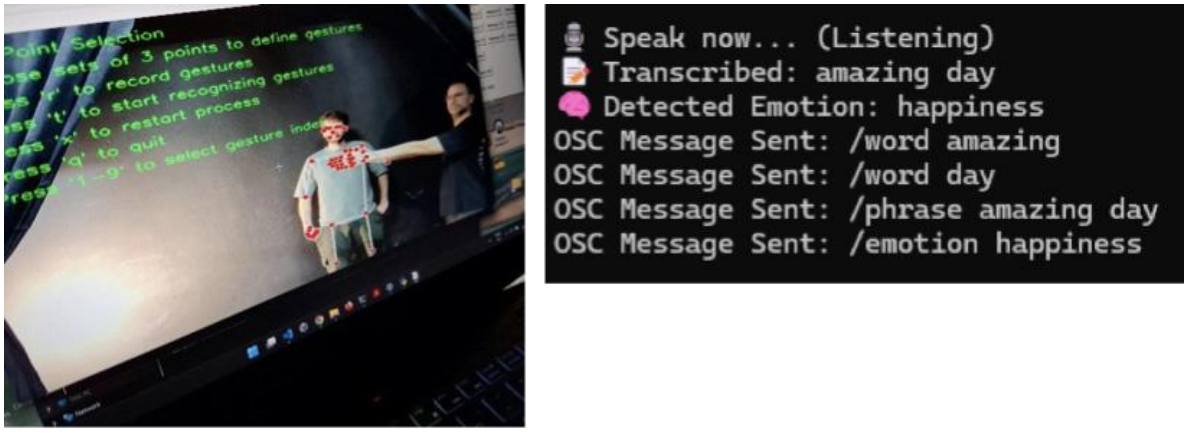


Figure 4

Light control system interface. A custom GUI adjusts brightness, hue, and saturation for Philips Hue lights. Users can create and save/recall up to 20 light configurations ("memories") while they devise the scenes.

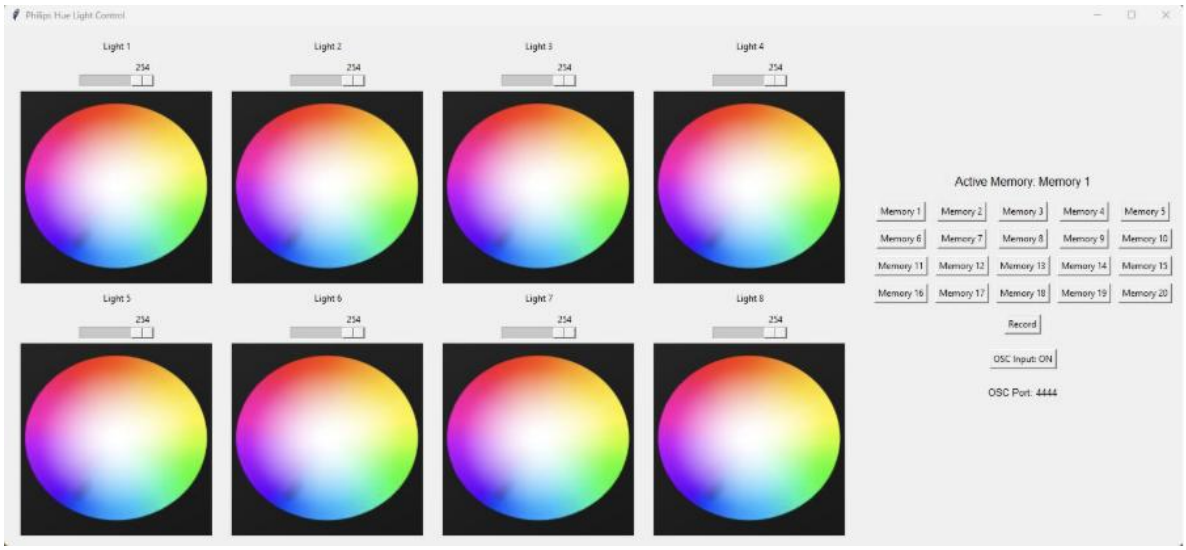
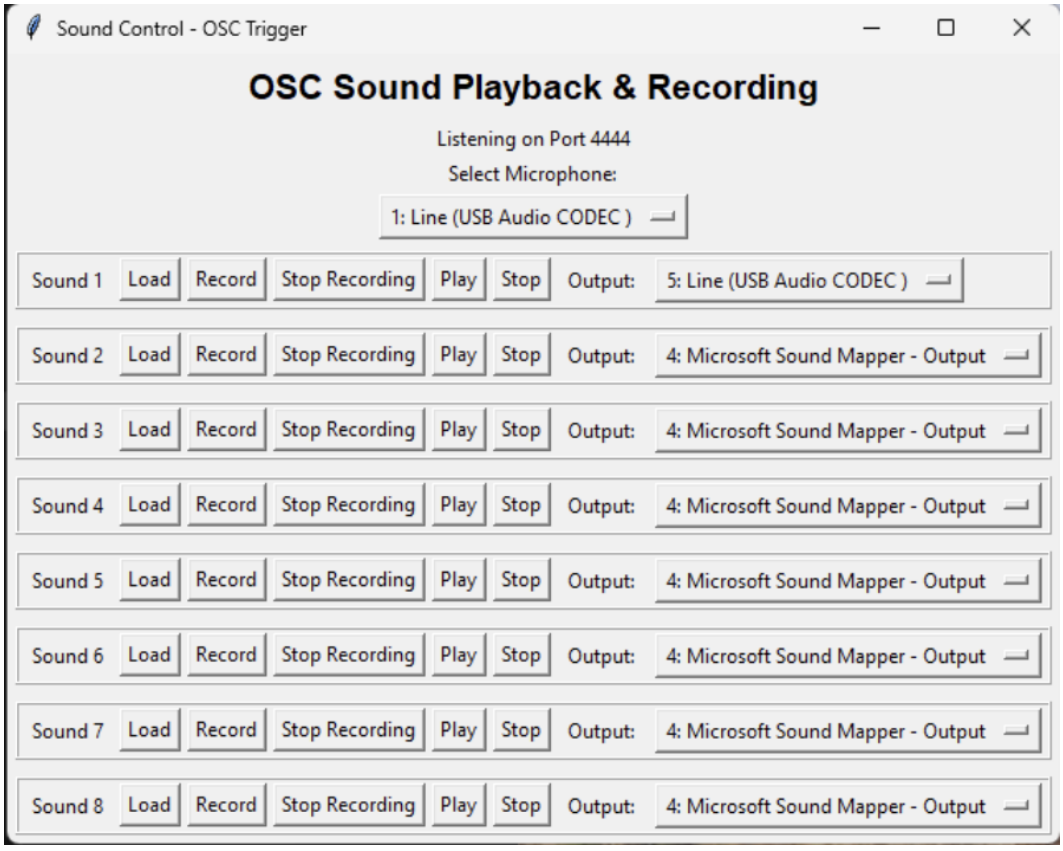


Figure 5

Sound control system interface. A GUI records, loads, and plays up to eight audio clips, assignable to different output devices. Features include a noise gate, device selection, and OSC-triggered playback



To create a scene, a user can connect these modules through Node-RED. For example: in the Lighting module, define Light Memory 1 so that Lamp A turns red. In the Gesture module, record a gesture such as a raised hand. Then, in Node-RED, link the gesture (input) to Light Memory 1 (output) so that raising the hand turns the lamp red. Similarly, in the Sound module, either record a sound or load a specific audio clip. In the Position module, set the trigger as person detected close to the coordinates (x, y) of the chair. Linking these means that when someone occupies that position, the chosen sound is played. A scene can contain any number of such flows, combining different inputs and outputs as needed (see also Figure 1). In this study architectural adaptations referred mainly to light and sound, but the same no-code system can also drive physical actuators such as motors or linear actuators. This would allow, for example, the opening of doors or movement of panels. Such modules were tested during the system design process, though they were not used in the workshops in order to keep prototyping practical for rapid devising sessions.

Workshop Implementation: Situated Experiments in Interactivity

Building on this system logic, the study advanced through six structured workshops. Each was designed as a situated experiment, layering creative and technical complexity step by step while developing familiarity with the responsive authoring tool in real performance contexts. The system designer was also the facilitator that led the workshops, guiding Viewpoints training and technical exercises, while also providing hands-on technical support as needed. The facilitator–designer deliberately refrained from acting as a director during the workshops, only stepping into that role in the final session to link the micro-scenes into a single event. At the outset, the process was deliberately split into two parallel strands: (1) Viewpoints-based ensemble training, which established a shared physical vocabulary, and (2) introductory sessions with the responsive architecture system in which participants experimented with gradually more complex light and sound interactions. This separation aimed to help performers build embodied sensitivity and group cohesion before engaging with the demands of system operation (see Diagram 1).

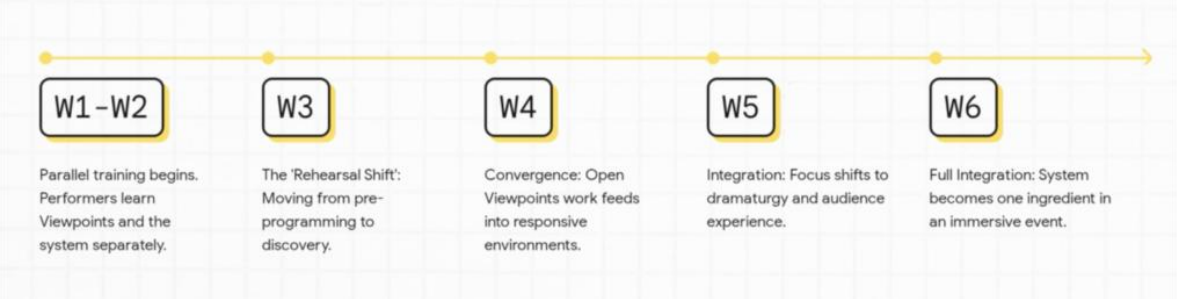
In Workshop 1, participants undertook Viewpoints warm-ups and introductory exercises, followed by basic light control exercises in small groups. This seeded early conversations about automation and distributed control. Workshop 2 bridged into the system's three input modes — gesture, speech, and position — culminating in one-minute scenes per group. A learning curve emerged, with specific design challenges ('pain points' of the system) such as the need for a more unified interface, occasional tracking inaccuracy and inconsistency, alongside playful 'happy accidents' from unintended interactions.

Figure 6
Left: Improvisation using Viewpoints; Right: Designing Adaptive Spaces.



A key shift occurred during Workshop 3, whose focus lay in the groups increasing their collaborative familiarity with the system. This workshop introduced rotation between operator, performer, and mediator roles and a set of supporting documents (cheat sheets, instruction manuals). Additionally, participants moved from attempting to pre-program and execute precise behaviours to discovering architectural responses. This session marked a turning point towards treating the technological activities more as rehearsal rather than technical testing.

Diagram 1
Timeline showing the shift from separate training (W1–W2) to discovery (W3), convergence (W4), and integration into dramaturgy and immersive performance (W5–W6).



In Workshop 4, the two strands converged further. Open Viewpoints work without technology fed directly into improvisations within pre-constructed responsive environments, and then into group-designed setups. Strategic simplification replaced over-complex — and often failed — designs and semi-opaque trigger logic invited participants to experience moments not just of responsiveness but of heightened liveness. As one participant described during the focus group, when lights shifted unexpectedly mid-improvisation, “it was as if you were dealing with something alive… it was very alive in that moment.”

By Workshop 5, the emphasis had rebalanced toward dramaturgy and audience experience. The session began with non-technological Viewpoints to recenter group

connection, before devising short participatory micro-performances presented to the rest of the group as audience. Workshop 6 adopted a fast-track scratch performance devising frame — resembling a design sprint — leading to the creation of an immersive event for one audience member. Here, the system was employed selectively and purposefully, with the responsive architecture functioning as one of several performance “ingredients”.

Figure 7
Gesture Responsive Lights.



Figure 8
W4, Designing Responsive Built Environments.



Across the series, the trajectory moved from separation to integration: Workshops 1–3 focused on parallel ensemble and technical training; Workshop 4 moved towards convergence; Workshop 5 embedded responsive design into dramaturgical practice and audience engagement; and Workshop 6 integrated the system fully as one of multiple compositional elements. Each day concluded with a devising session - ranging from one-minute pieces in W1, to participatory micro-performances in W5, and the single-spectator event in W6 — fulfilling the aim that, within a single day, the ensemble could create an immersive scratch composition where interactivity in the built environment was not treated as an external layer managed by a technologist outside the devising group, but was conceived and implemented collectively by the performers themselves within the generative process.

Figure 9

W5, Performers Engaged in Responsive Composition.



Figure 10

W6, Excerpts from an Immersive Scratch Performance within a Responsive Environment.



Emergent Patterns and Design Implications

This preliminary synthesis draws on reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2019) of three primary data sources: (1) video logs coded for learning curves and emergent behaviours; (2) post-workshop focus groups, transcribed and thematically coded; and (3) facilitator field notes capturing design rationale, adjustments, and meta-observations. While full coding tables and longitudinal maps will appear in the extended study, some early tendencies are visible.

Participants engaged with Soma Design concerns by cultivating embodiment and felt experience in interaction with the space. A wake-up stretch, performed as part of a scene, shifted the lights from warm orange to white, evoking sunrise. In this moment the light played the role of the sun, but it was the actor's bodily action that made the sun rise, rather than the other way around. Rotating roles between performer, operator, and mediator distributed technical responsibility and fostered collective ownership. Imperfections in system behaviour were often reframed as generative, with glitches and breakdowns treated as prompts for improvisation. Shared metaphors supported this process, giving the ensemble a vocabulary to negotiate dramaturgy, most notably casting the system as "another performer," a "co-designer," or an "automatic lighting designer."

Together, these tendencies foreground uncertainty in interaction, designing, and engaging with the performing space not as a barrier but as material for collective exploration. They resonate with seamful design in HCI, which treats system imperfections as resources (Chalmers, MacColl & Bell, 2003), and with work on uncomfortable interactions, where disruption can heighten intensity and memorability (Benford et al., 2012). What emerges more distinctly here is how the compositional logic of Viewpoints enables ensembles to absorb such disruptions collectively, shifting emphasis from individual mastery to ensemble adaptability, and positioning responsive systems as potential members of the ensemble.

A preliminary takeaway is that even when interactions are opaque, whether through system glitches, rushed design, or uncertainty about which event triggered a response, they can fuel improvisation and creative exploration. The next step is to examine how such responsive spaces might evolve into full-fledged performance ecologies, and how AI-driven decision engines could further support the role of the environment as an active member of the ensemble.

Limitations and Conclusions

This was the first time that the responsive architecture system was used in practice, meaning that technical refinement, process design, and creative exploration unfolded in parallel. The workshops were time-compressed, and despite running six sessions, this was not a

dedicated user study series but a hybrid of ensemble building, system teaching, iterative system development, and exploratory composition. While the closing sessions demonstrated that participants could create a complete piece mostly independently, some modules — particularly sound and speech — were underused. Certain functions may not have been explained or rehearsed as deeply as they could have been. More time spent solely on system familiarisation might have increased technical fluency, though integrating it with Viewpoints likely helped embed the tool into the ensemble's creative vocabulary, rather than as a separate "tech block". The dual role of system designer as workshop designer/facilitator added significant workload and potential biases in shaping activities and interpreting outcomes.

Ethics Statement

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Nottingham School of Computer Science (Reference: CS-2023-R72), and all participants provided informed consent.

Acknowledgments

This work would not have been possible without the commitment and creativity of the eight participating performance-makers — Kornelia Prokopiou, Stylianos Dokouz, Thanos Poumakis, Aspasia Dimou, Pavlina Papadopoulou, Vicky Dalamitra, Orestis Konstantinidis, and Dimitris Koidis — whose openness to experimentation and critical reflection shaped both the process and the outcomes described in this paper. The first author would also like to thank Paul Tennent for his guidance and support throughout this research. This work was supported by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council [Grant number EP/T022493/1], by Lakeside Arts, and by Makers of Imaginary Worlds, as well as by the Horizon Centre for Doctoral Training at the University of Nottingham.

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My Space-Power of Weakness

Greig Burgoyne
Subject lead BA Fine Art -academic, artist and professional researcher
UCA (University for the Creative Arts) Canterbury UK

Abstract

The 21st century proliferates that desire to compose, manage and maintain a reality we do not live, whilst conceal or deny the one we do. Where daily performativity is that manifestation of those hegemonic systems of imposed societal synchronicities and unseen forces that demand our excessive expressiveness, incessant subjectivity that results paradoxically in our invisibility and objectivity. This paper will ask: have we become unconscious to consciousness? As Žižek has muted, are zombies more alive than we are, because they know they are dead? while we vegetate in the symbolic (2008, p. 221). Are the hegemonies of the seen symptomatic of our estrangement from what constitutes experience? What form can that emancipation through performance take to reclaim that actuality of place and self, if we are not to endlessly reiterate what we were, instead of make manifest our being and liveness of who we are?

Keywords: Concealment, Paradox, Emergence, New Embodiment

Concealment

This paper proposes alternate considerations of a corporeal if paradoxical potentiality beyond those hegemonic conventions of status, machismo, and competence, and instead expand upon an actuality of appearing and emergence as one demonstrative of a powerful weakness, defiant vulnerability and as a result a liberatory pedagogy. This powerful weakness is that meeting of an expansive virtual and an implosive actual. This is to say that vulnerability and precarity may be a means of emancipation through a performative appearing of our *unseenness*. In Edouard Glissant's Poetics of relation he discusses the notion of camouflage language and Gramsci's concept of the subaltern, whereby this imposed representation is clearly not to our advantage. In contrast, unseenness does not constitute being invisible but instead proposes to make claim to a form of event space akin to a coming into appearance. As Deleuze and Gauttari make clear, the actual is not what we are but what we are continually in a process of becoming (2009, p. 112), as such representation is what has been and not what is or will be. This is in place of what is missing or concealed through those sedimentary actions and behaviours which instead of liberating our actions enslave us in them further as that separation of our thinking and doing is upheld.

Figure 1
Still from performance My space *by Greig Burgoyne.*

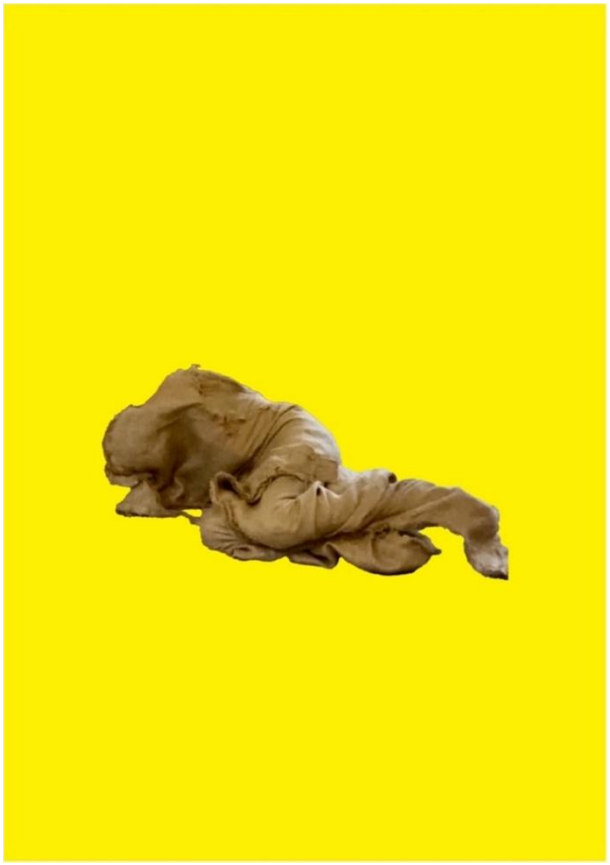


Figure 2
Still from performance My space *by Greig Burgoyne.*



Paradox

Our excessive exposure and endless duplication in ever accelerating quantities of pointless stereotypical content and ‘performativity’ result in our absence and non-visibility. In consequence, it is a depleted consciousness not an extended one, leading to an impoverishment of experience and indeed living. We are submerged in that enclosed circuit of re-presentation and the incessant demands of endless re-distribution. In opposition, *My Space* enacts new contingencies of weakness, play and incompetence as veritable actualities as the means for us to emerge, instead of objects for widespread commodification and indeed exploitation in the name of wellbeing. Our complete exposure to world is our complete withdrawal from it. To contest this will be to discuss the performance *My-Space* from 2024, this will be to highlight the potential of that visual withdrawal. In doing so, make manifest a more pertinent actuality we will call our power of weakness, as such an event space of our coming into appearance. To discuss *My space*, it will help to put these concepts of coming into appearance, power of weakness and emancipatory practices into context.

Figure 3
Still from performance Classic workout *by Greig Burgoyne*.



In 2022 Burgoyne presented the performance *Classic workout* at the Museo dell' Arte Classico, Rome (see fig 3). Its performers were contained within hand fabricated hessian sacks that neatly concealed if not constricted their body (and subsequently their means to move freely) from head to toe. Selecting poses from statues within the museum collection, the performers attempt in choreographed sequences to reiterate the chosen gestures or actions. The heroic, grand and hierarchical gestures of war, heroism, ego and power dissolve as limited movements and constricted actions ensue in their place. They sit between potential and futility. But this is a strong futility, not indicative of our weakness per se. The grand sweeping movements found in the statues the performers were directed by are not achievable within the tight sacking. The bodies that perform those micro-gestures were present but not seen. Instead, they seek perhaps to come into appearance. It could be said they are more visible because of their concealment, as a result more present. The use of hessian is deliberate. Its uniformity chosen by Burgoyne presents neither a front nor back. As such the body is removed from the confines of image, and instead is a total body of mutating form. The context of hessian is indicative of both its contingency and utilitarianism. It is a material found in the construction industry and processes associated with traditional sculpture. From wall building to statues, hessian is used to maintain the moisture needed for that workability of the material e.g. clay, cement. It does this by concealing the material, as such maintaining a potentiality. The object in the process of being constructed, therefore is beyond beginning whilst not concluded. What we experience through *classic workout is an evolving midst*. Its actuality an inventory of weak if not pathetic actualities but importantly

an assemblage indicative of the real. Real here is distinct from apparitions of the real which are evident in the Lacanian symbolic phase of our development and subsequent incorporation into the world through language. As a result, this incorporation is akin to a sedation from that which defines experience.

My Space (2024) was a performance given in October 2024 for the annual festival organised by Performance Art Bergen Norway. Burgoyne was the invited artist for that year. The artist is concealed inside hessian sacking. Its unconventional shape was determined by the mapped accumulation of spaces where he was present through navigating his studio. Collating together all the sections of space together he navigated, he gets inside the hessian and then enacts a 'work out'. This is less a meeting of Absurdity and logic and more a collision. It is a collision of the hegemonic concealment as maximum exposure and minimal presence, versus maximum presence and zero exposure. He is present but not seen, but what is appearing is not demonstrative of our means to get stronger and fitter, but a working *away* from those imposed synchronicities and actions that perhaps prevent our emergence. Edouard Glissant suggested that to represent that bodily immersion in the world is to limit by default what and who we are. As performing publics, in expressing ourselves we are dispensing with our authentic selves in that desire to fit the impose selves given to us. bell hooks in her book *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* has suggested that the marginal that hegemony has made vulnerable, fragile, non-conformist, but perhaps authentic and this is where being human is situated, if we are not to be its actors with a prepared script.

Emergence

In *They know not what they do: Enjoyment as a political factor* (2008) Žižek laments our distancing through our avoidance or negation of the real. One example he cites is through the removal of all those actualities we are told are not beneficial for us, as such symptomatic of an increasingly risk-averse experience of world. Examples he cites include sugar free drinks, alcohol free beer, caffeine free coffee, fat free cream, etc (Žižek 2008, p. 76). Keeping our distance, maintaining that disconnect from the world may indeed be our means to survive it or perhaps our demise from it. The very aspects that bring something to the thing, by their removal, give us that Lacanian stand-in for the real. This is a reality-lite with all the real stuff taken out, as such not real. In contrast, for our purposes in this text we will suggest that the real is indicative of that pre-reflective state in which the body is driven by its consciousness, not simply by its intellect. This is because whilst our actions are informed by a past, present, future trajectory, the body is also making those decisions instantaneously through its projected consciousness — which is to say a future, present, past trajectory, in such a way that our consciousness is ahead of us. As a result,

that contestation of agency versus force of will at work in *classic workout* is what subsequently informs *My space*. In its unseenness the body is beyond image and those limits of objecthood, as a consequence unbound in that state of becoming and ongoing presentness. It is from these conceptual frameworks and contexts that *my space* exists. In extending this unseen presence is to make manifest that which is beyond appearance, indicative of a more profound corporeal liveness and emerging authenticity.

Figure 4
Still from performance My space *by Greig Burgoyne.*



My Space explores the corporeality as elemental, not as our ongoing production as ‘things’ amongst things, whereby the reception of the body is absorbed in its realisation. Instead, *My space* discloses an ontology beyond exteriority and aesthetic appearance, in a co-created intersubjectivity whereupon “the visible is pregnant with the invisible” (Merleau-Ponty 1965, p. 163) as Merleau-Ponty would say. In contrast to the sedimentary and enclosed nature of mass performativity, its ungrounding is established through that reciprocity of two depths: the expressed world and beholder of that worlding, leading beyond an exhausted limbo and an outdated framing that is representation. In contrast to the sedimentary and enclosed nature of mass performativity, its Heideggerian ungrounding is established by that intentionality, as Husserl called it, between the object of sorts we see, and that diverse content that reality constitutes we are sensing through the experience as a

result. *My space* may therefore be indicating that clash, not the harmony of the seeing 'I' and the body that lives it. This implies an implosive and absent worlding indicated by its reflective gestures grating against an expansive pre-reflective striving for world. If "capital produces a banalising generalisation of the body" (Nancy 2008, p. 91) by all its imposed actions and aims, in contrast, *My space* exists between the aims of the subject and will of the object, whereby we encounter that reciprocity of two depths: the expressed world and beholder of that worlding, which in taking us beyond the exhausted realms of representation "appears to me as that which is beyond appearance, totally present but never totally known" (Dufrenne 1973, p. 221).

New Embodiment

In considering both these manifestations and potentialities, it might be beneficial to reflect upon performance and its regard for time that is non-linear. Phillip K Dick speaks of *multiverses* which generate numerous realities simultaneously. Our inability to perceive these numerous realities he called time slips, demonstrative of an infinite production of veils, assuring the coherence of a reality while all along hiding the ontological realities beneath that flow. Through our societal performativity it could be said we have become nothing but stations within a vast network where thinking and action never unite, and we exist as ghosts of ourselves in that world of programmed realties in which we project imaginary perceptions of real conditions of existence. *My space* reclaims the absent body from its slumber. In doing so, the body is made present by that process of resurfacing through performing those actions, gestures thus revealing a phenomenology of that power of absence as presence. Where the image always promises more than it is (2009, p. 97), the concealed image in *My space* sits between that threshold of both being in the world and being outside it, looking in. In this way, the outcomes envisage the performance as twofold. The intensification of those veiled realities as new ontological states of that performativity, and secondly but more significantly the advancement of a phenomenology of unseenness, whereby the interiority of the absent body, its power of weakness is unveiled in that agency of our ongoing, if precarious emancipation. This is to bring forth the distance that representation brings about. What is absent and unseen is now closer than its representation could ever be.

Performance is thus a paradox no less. Akin to a surface of inexhaustible depth, Levinas suggested this "non representability is the surplus of the lived body over the representation of it" (2015, p. 43). To elevate what that concealed surplus may now constitute, *My Space* is that rupture of the optical unconscious, whereby allowing those reactivated territorialisations of a previously hidden if not absent corporeality seen by a maximum concealed-ness. In doing so, reveal not our conformity and ongoing adaptation to those imposed conditions of body, site and space, but a precarity and play toward a social, corporeal and indeed political

emancipation that may be at its most profound when we are not seen but instead in that situation of endlessly coming into appearance. In a word, alive.

Figure 5
Performance still from My space *by Greig Burgoyne.*



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Deciphering Mechanisms and Narration Systems in the Natural Landscape: The Case of Keros

Valassia Barbouti, Myrto Andronidi
Architecture, National Technical University of Athens, Athens, Greece

Abstract

This research project explores the design methodology of a site-specific experience in Keros, an uninhabited island in the Cyclades, where access has been forbidden since 1992. Keros carries traces of dense historical layering: from early Cycladic ritual activity (c. 2750 BCE) to a classical acropolis, Byzantine ruins, and more recent structures. The island could be described as an abaton, a site known primarily through excavation reports, oral histories, and distant observation. The central research questions are: “How can a place be perceived, archived, and interpreted remotely? How can we design a site-specific experience for a place we cannot access?” To address these, we developed a four-layer documentation system that captures the island’s physical, narrative, and mythological dimensions. Layers include: the island’s geomorphology and human traces (Layer 0); buried stories through ruins and excavations (Layer -A); intangible oral histories and myths (Layer +A); and an attempt to reintegrate this liminal space into a collective geography (Layer +∞).

Following this remote archiving process, a single 8-hour visit allowed us to document a 3.5 km route using GPS, continuous video, photographs, and our embodied experience. We identified 42 spatial transitions, classified into six qualities: path, plateau, staircase, balcony, tiers, and forest, treating each as a scenographic element- structuring a sequence of moments in which the visitor becomes performer, and the site becomes stage. The resulting intervention acted as a guiding mechanism, framing the visual field and choreographing spatial, immersive experiences for the flâneur.

The central element of this project is the system itself: a methodology for remotely, documenting, and reimagining different landscapes. This system functions as a mirror between site and project, generating tools tied in the landscape’s unique characteristics. While the methodology is universal, its content and expression are always site-specific - as the mechanism is fed by the unique traits of each landscape.

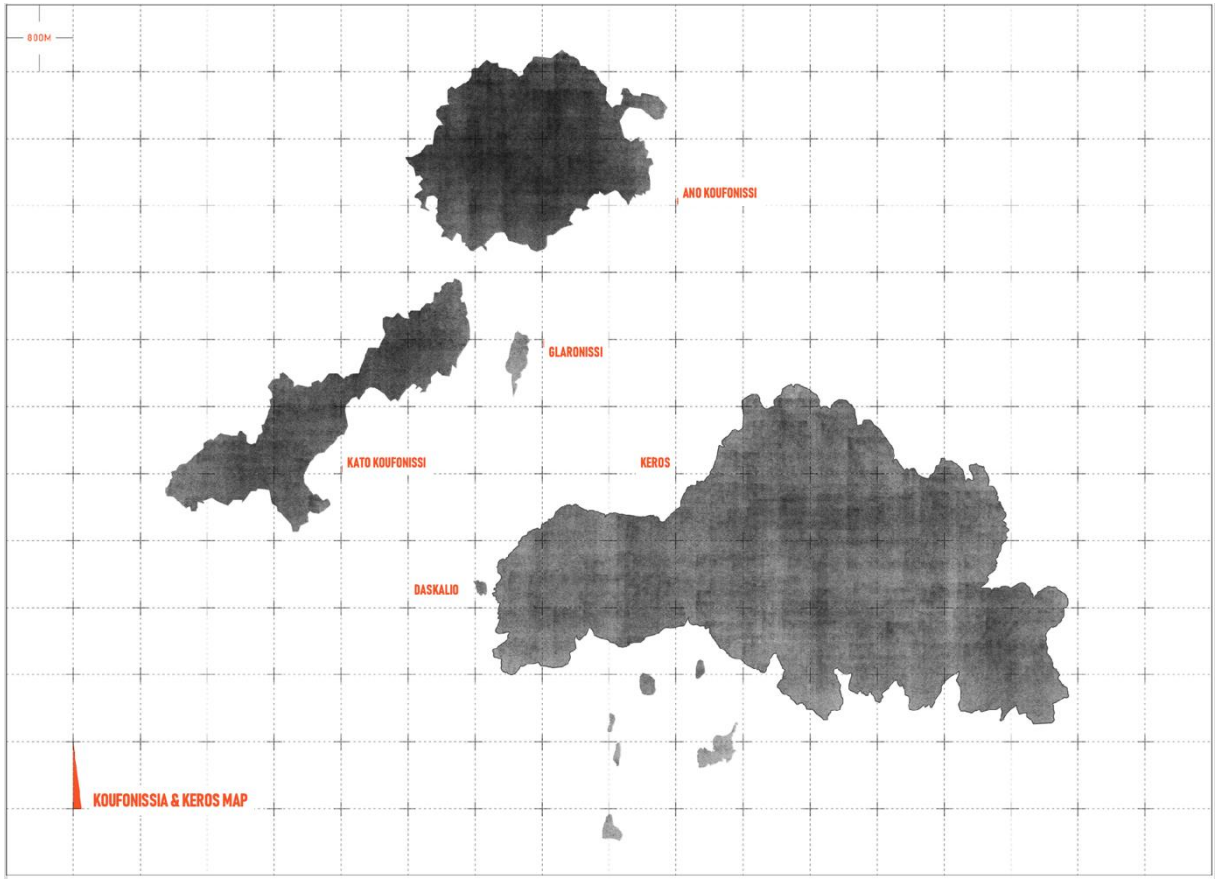
Keywords: Landscape, site-specific, documentation, narrative, route.

Deciphering Mechanisms and Narration Systems in the Natural Landscape

This project is a diploma thesis completed in 2021 for the Department of Architecture at the National Technical University of Athens. It explores the development of a methodology for documenting and designing natural landscapes using the uninhabited Cycladic Island of Keros, which has been restricted since 1992 when it was declared an archaeological site, as a case study.

The research focuses on two central questions: How can a place be perceived, archived and interpreted from a distance? How can a specific experience be designed for a place with limited access? Initially, these questions were addressed through remote research, combining narrative collection, cartographic analysis, and archival study. A visit to the site, carried out with special permission, enabled the physical characteristics of the island to be documented. The second phase of the study then focused on practical research into design tools. The study's central focus is the development of a four-layer conceptual framework that functions as an analytical and generative design mechanism. This framework was tested through the proposal of a scenographic tour of the island.

Figure 1
Koufonissia and Keros map. (personal archive)

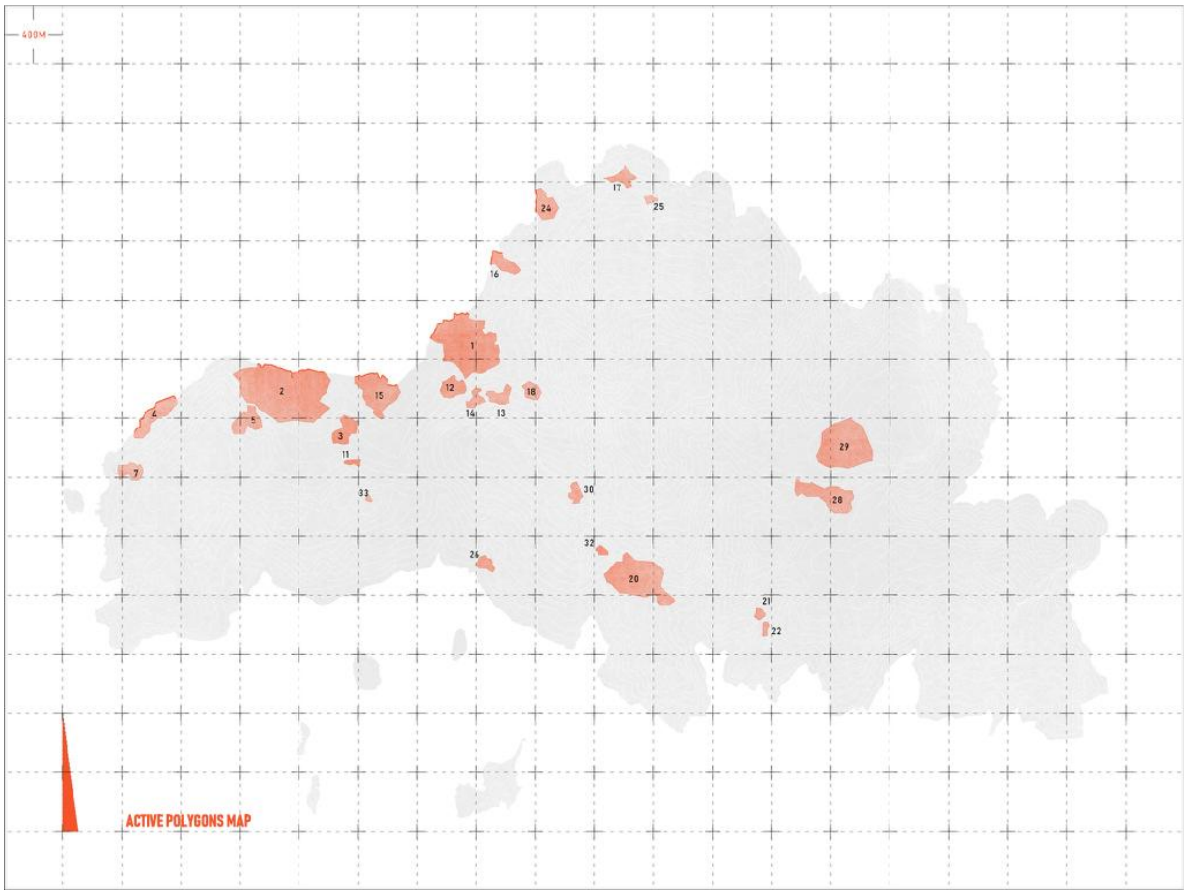


Keros and Daskalio

Keros is located in the southern Cyclades and forms part of the Koufonissia island group. The currently uninhabited island covers an area of 15 km² and has a 27 km coastline, with an altitude of up to 400 metres. It has been inhabited since ancient times, but people have gradually abandoned it since the 1960s. The first archaeological finds were discovered in Kavos Daskaliou in the 1960s, when the first signs of illegal excavations were detected (Renfrew et al., 2013). This marked the beginning of a series of systematic excavations, the final phase of which took place between 2015 and 2018 under the direction of Renfrew and Boyd. These excavations focused on the western part of Keros and a rocky islet called Daskalio. The initial findings included fragments of Cycladic figurines and ceramic vessels. Only a few figurines were found intact, and most of the fragments could not be reassembled. Through archaeological field research, the first theories emerged that attempted to explain the activity that took place on Keros in the third millennium BC.

Figure 2

Active polygons map. (University of Cambridge, Michael Boyd's archive).

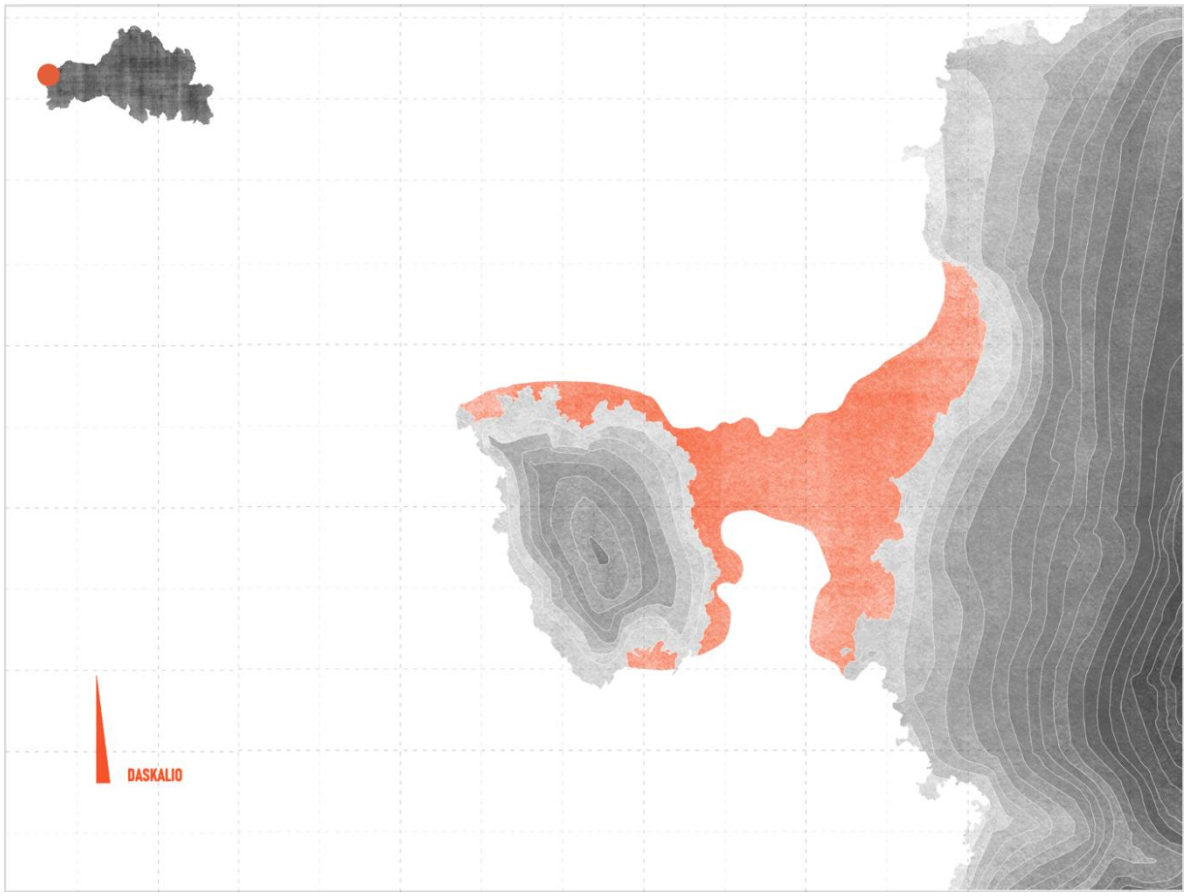


It has been proven that the pottery and the figurines found in Keros were broken before they were placed on the island, and that this was done in a purposeful and systematic way.

It has been proven that the pottery and figurines found on Keros were broken before they were placed there, in a purposeful and systematic way. This process was not vandalism, but a ritual practice that continued in the following centuries. The prevailing theory today is that Keros was a centre for religious ceremonies honouring the dead (Renfrew et al., 2013). During these ceremonies, people from the surrounding islands would bring broken figurines and vases to Keros. The Keros sanctuary is the first in the Aegean Sea to be known to have had inter-local power and influence extending to a radius of hundreds of kilometres (Sotirakopoulou, 2016).

Figure 3

Daskalio islet map. (University of Cambridge, Michael Boyd's archive).



The small island of Daskalio lies 90 metres offshore from the western end of Keros. Although it is now a rocky islet, cut off from Keros, in the Early Cycladic period it was connected to the main island by a strip of land which sank as the sea level rose. The islet was home to a religious centre and an advanced settlement, probably due to its natural, two-sided harbour (Sotirakopoulou, 2016). Most of Daskalio's population only lived there periodically to attend rituals (Renfrew et al., 2013). Important findings from the 19th century include the Head of a Female Figurine, housed in the Louvre Museum in Paris, and the Figurine of the Harpist and Figurine of the Piper, housed in the National Archaeological Museum of Athens.

Konakia, the last settlement on the island to be abandoned, is located on the northern side of the island (Renfrew et al., 2013). Traces of two three-aisled Byzantine churches can be found there, and some of Konakia's buildings were constructed based on these. Therefore, it seems that the island continued to be inhabited in phases even after the Daskalio era ended.

Figure 4
Konakia. (Personal archive)



Narratives

Keros could be described as an “abaton,” a place that is mainly known through excavation reports, oral histories, and observations from a distance. The first step in the research was to compile local accounts and our personal experiences at the site:

> The passage: Even if you’re not a sailor or a fisherman, there’s still a way to read the water when you’re out at sea. The tones of blue. The darker the blue, the deeper the sea. But when the blue thins out and turns pale and crystal-clear, it means the bottom is near. Shallow. Now, we’re crossing the passage between Keros and Daskalio. I lift my head from the edge of the boat and peer down. The water here is almost translucent. It’s clear. Shallow. Like a reef.
>
> “Daskalio used to be joined to the island,” the fisherman says, as if he has read my mind. “That’s why it’s so shallow here.”
>
> I follow the line where light blue vanishes into deep navy, where the sea suddenly swells into mystery. To the left, Keros rises. A great, sleeping mass of stone. Huge slabs of rock are stacked to shape the southern face of the island. They watch us pass.

For tourists like us, heading to Kato Koufonissi, the trip always unfolds in the same way.

The ferry from Piraeus arrives. We pick up a few essentials from the island's grocery store and then wait at the café by the port, passing the time before the little boat takes us to Kato Koufonissi. While we wait, we look out across the sea. Keros is there, framed by the wooden beams and stone walls of the terrace. It resembles a woman lying on her back, floating on the water. The locals are quick to point that out. It's one of the first things they'll proudly tell you about Keros.

Myths and Fantastical Stories

Who is Keros? Could it be a mythological figure?

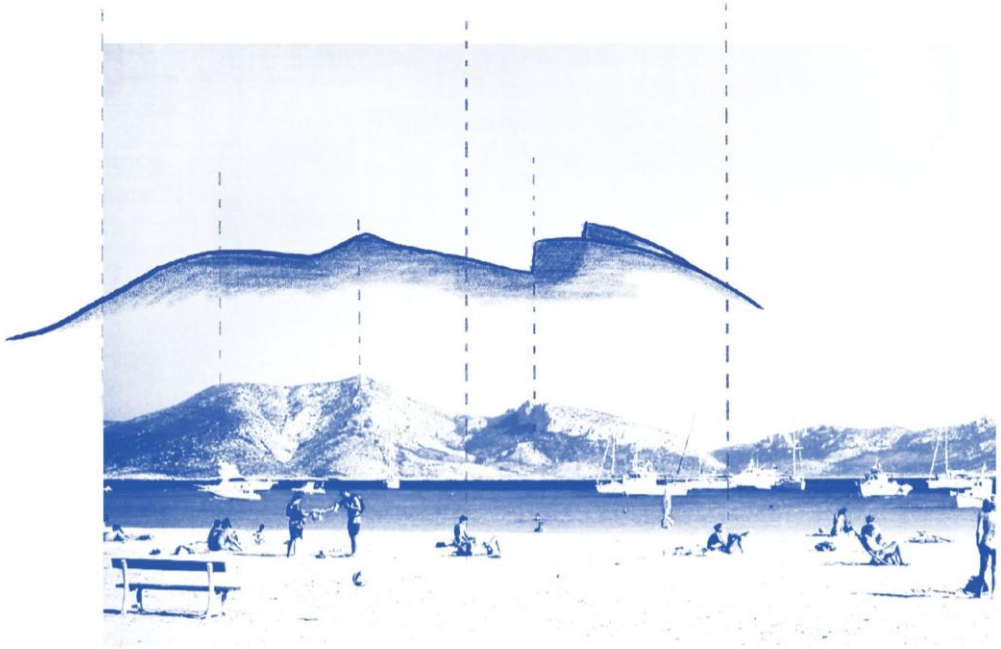
When we asked the inhabitants of Koufonisia, they told us that she is one of Zeus's daughters, whom he banished to the island to hide from Hera. We were also told that Keros is one of the gates to Hades in the Mediterranean Sea. One woman told us: "I remember playing with the figurines when we were children."

Other possible origins of the name "Keros:"

- *Κειράς, η, & κουράς - κουρά, η*, (shaved hair and beard)
- *Κερεία, η, ποιητ. Τύπος του Κειρία, η*, (1. Rope 2. Shroud, cloth with which the dead are wrapped)
- *Κείρω, κέρρω & κερέω* (the cutting or shaving of hair because of mourning, to mourn.
- *Εκείρατο η πόλις* (the city mourned)

Figure 5

Keros as a woman figure - collage. (Personal archive).



Archiving

Before visiting Keros, we interpreted and analysed the island's character on many different levels. The island's history of habitation, its enduring presence despite limited access, and local stories guided our remote research. To analyse and document this, we created a four-layer system that captures its physical, narrative and mythological aspects.

- Layer 0.0

  The site of reference, which contains all of its traits, natural and man-made traits. The mapping of the island and its topography.

- The narrative layers +A, -A.

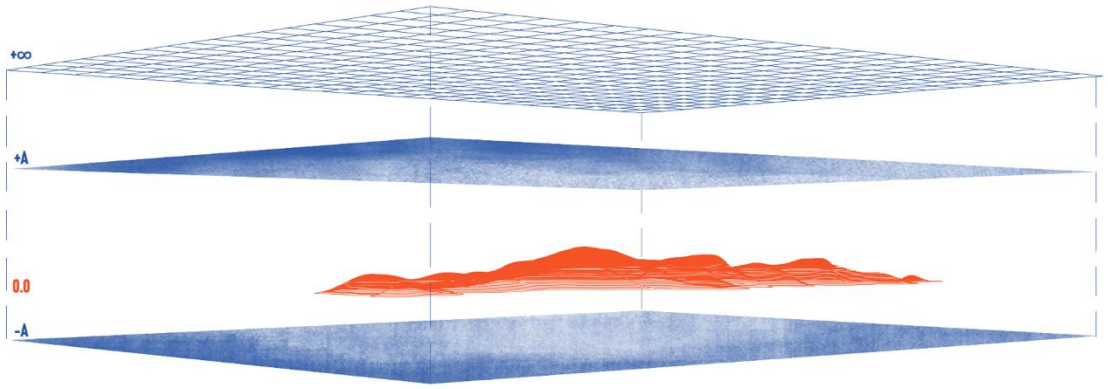
  Layer +A contains the human perception of the island, the intangible oral histories and myths.

  Layer -A concerns buried stories through ruins and excavations and the work of archaeologists in revealing them.

- The layer + ∞

  This layer addresses the relationship between the site and its surroundings, as well as the attempt to reintegrate this liminal space into a collective geography. Excavation grids, naval systems, access points, viewpoints and orientation systems, such as the coastline and relations with surrounding islands, are used during research.

Figure 6
The four-layer mechanism. (Personal archive).



Site Visit

Following our remote research, a special permit granted by the Ephorate of Antiquities of the Cyclades enabled us to conduct a 3.5 km GPS-based survey of the landscape, capturing continuous video footage and making notes based on our embodied experience. This completed our initial Layer 0.0 research. During the visit, we observed the landscape's

natural and human-made features, such as the terrain, vegetation, traces of excavations, dry stone walls and structures such as the Acropolis and Konakia. We recorded the different typologies encountered along the route, focusing on how the environment relates to the body, which led to the identification of 42 spatial transitions. Each of these transitions functions as a scenographic scene, transforming the visitor into a performer and the site into a stage. These qualities were grouped into six types:

- Path: Area of strict and limited movement.
- Staircase: Natural connections of height differences.
- Tiers: Freer movement comparing to the trails. Due to the steep slopes, rocks become natural furniture.
- Plateau: Free movement in low-slope areas.
- Balcony: Natural ground ledges with open views. Resting spaces.
- Forest: Dense vegetation obstructs the view of the coastline and surrounding islands, intensifying the sense of disorientation experienced by walkers.

The spatial qualities and section typologies encountered along the route, are interpreted into a plan view and compose the diagram of the route's layout. Therefore, the final intervention zone on which the design will take place is re-delimited and combined with the four conceptual layers mentioned above.

Figure 7
Keros - vegetation map. (Personal archive).

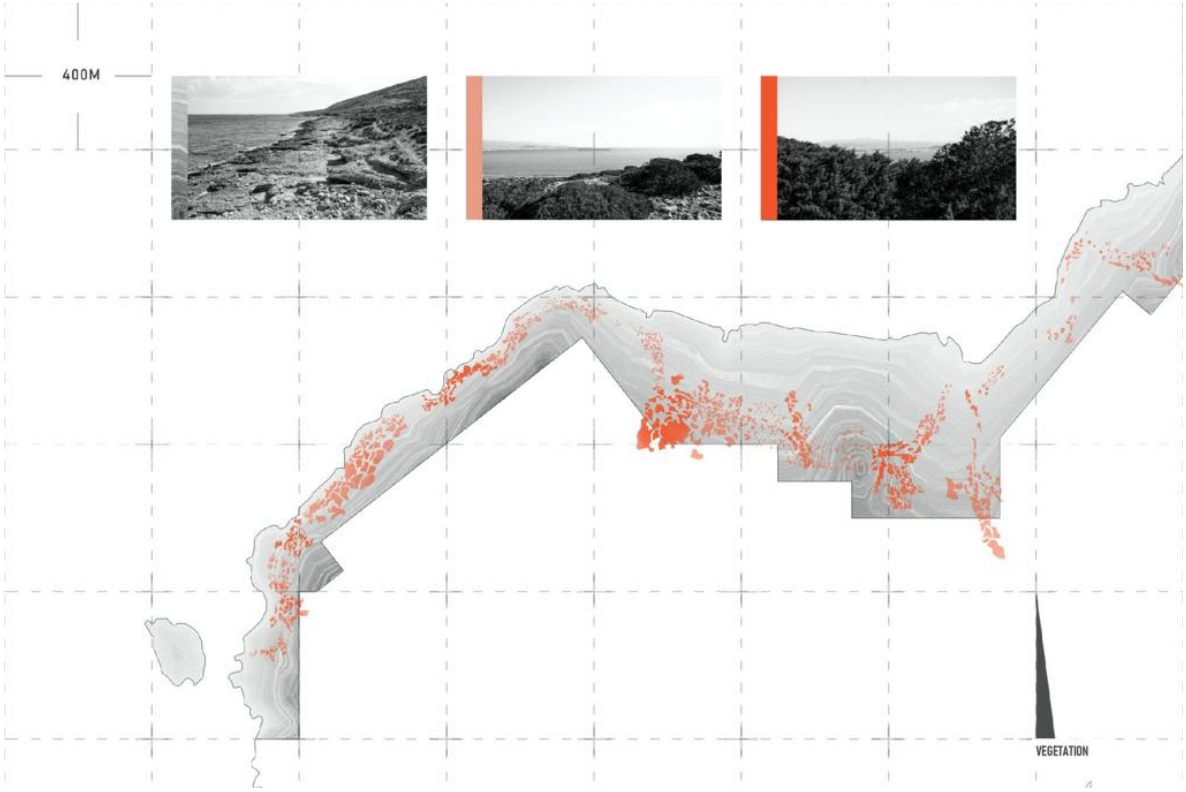


Figure 8

Keros – man-made landscape map. (Personal archive)

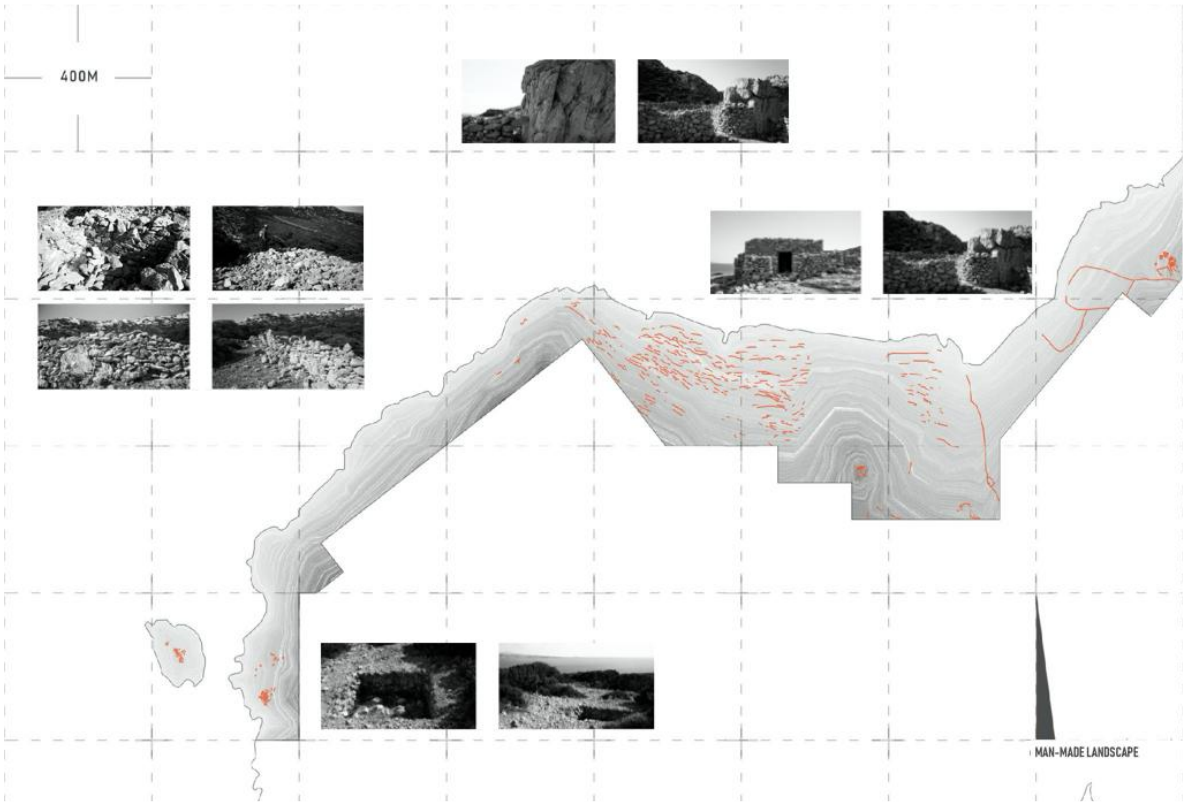
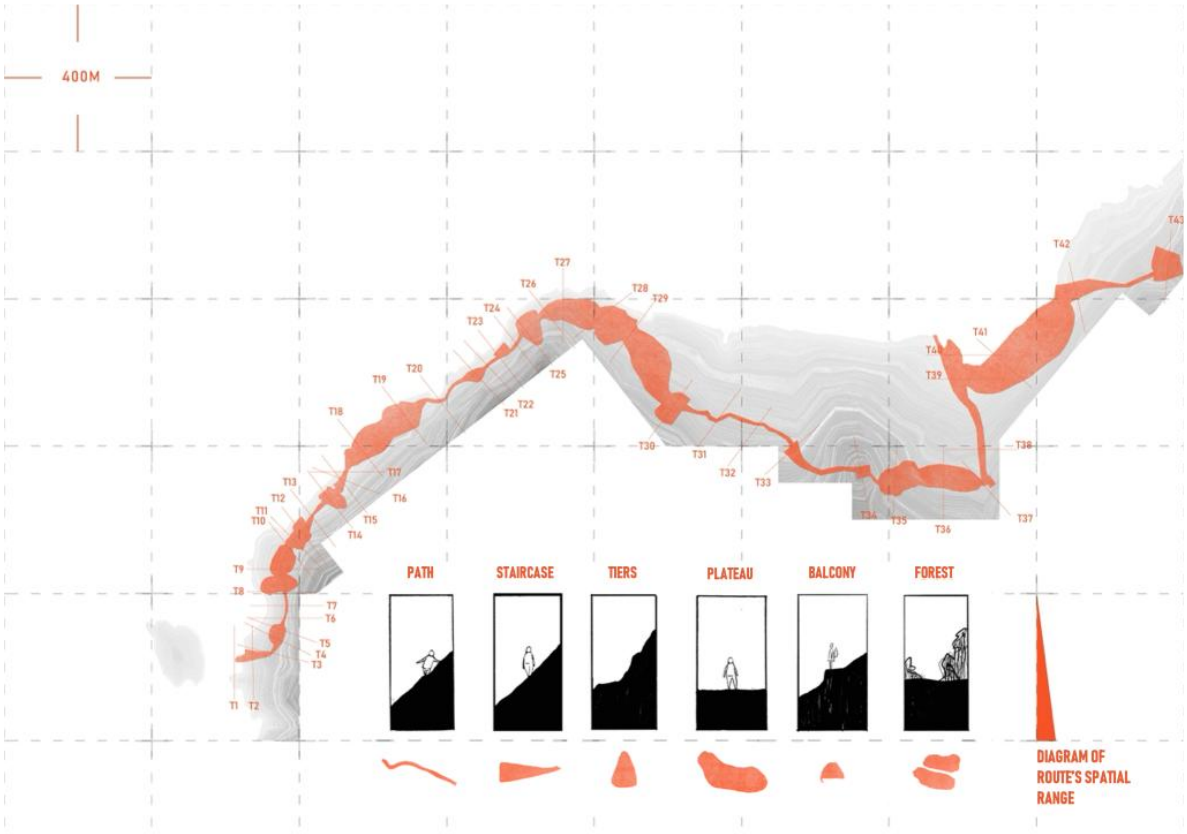


Figure 9

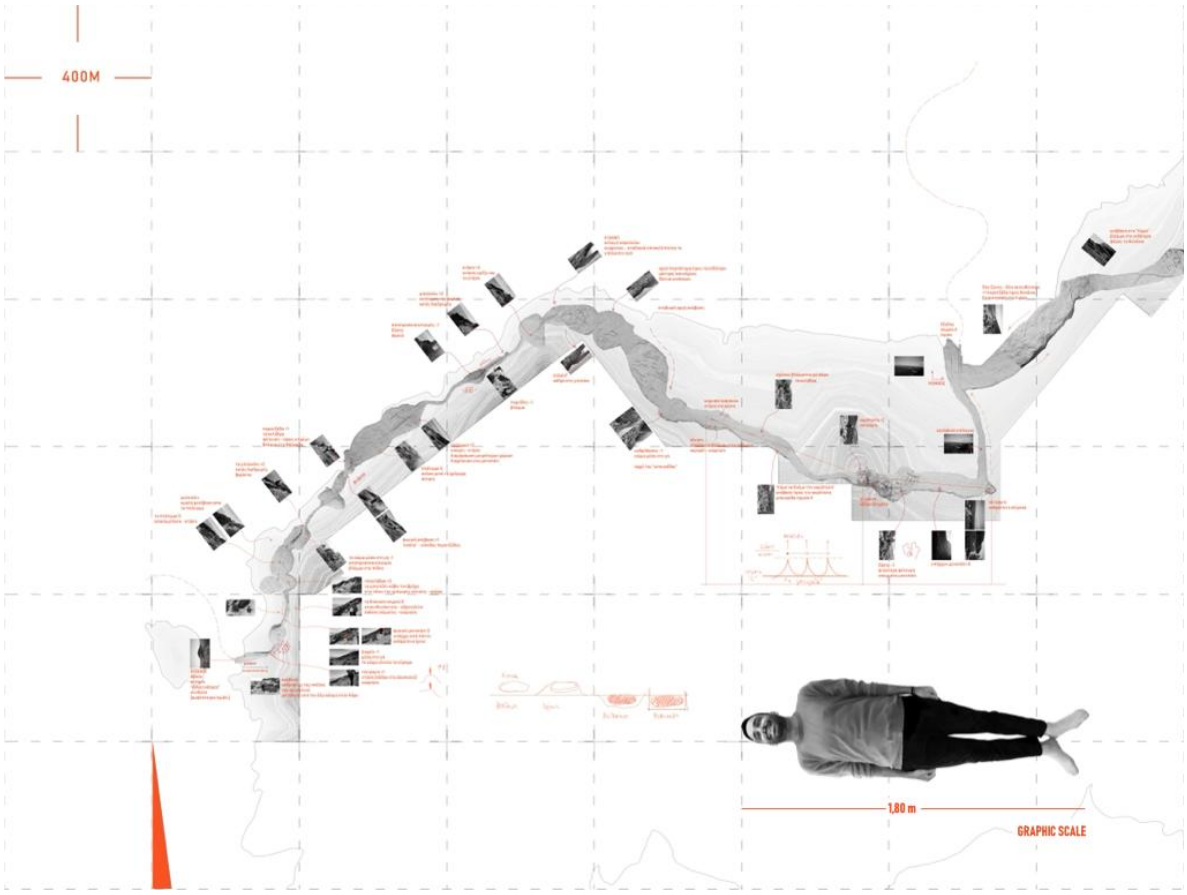
Diagram of route's spatial range. (Personal archive).



Remotely Visiting the Site

Due to our limited time on the island, we constructed a 7-metre-long collage model to revisit the route throughout the design process. This model incorporated the physical form of the landscape, as well as photographic frames, sketches and notes documenting our intentions. Each element was inscribed into the final model to create a map of our journey.

Figure 10
Model collage of Keros. (Personal archive).



The Four Layer Mechanism and its Design Tools

The synthetic tools are drawn from the data of our four conceptual layers and are integrated with the information recorded during analysis of Layer 0.0.

- Layer 0.0
  The points that we choose to maintain and do not require any intervention.
- Narrative layers +A, -A
  These are the points at which we create a spatial narrative to help form a relationship between the scale of the landscape and the human body.
  Regarding layer +A, we design sections that expose the body, creating a sense of suspension.

Regarding layer -A, we create cavities in the landscape to intensify feelings of disorientation and the physical experience of walking.

- Layer + ∞

  Initially, this functions as a tool for organising the plan view of the entire route. In the individual interventions on this layer, excavation grids are used to create visual escapes towards the surrounding islands and to establish relationships within the landscape.

Thus, the four conceptual layers coexist along the path. Each of the 42 points of interest (cinematic frames) is assigned a layer, from which specific design tools are derived that aim to guide the walker's movement. The design proposal comprises these 42 individual sections, each of which functions as a distinct system that guides both the gaze and the body. The existing landscape, in dialogue with the new interventions, shapes the reimagined narrative.

Figure 11

The four-layer mechanism and its design tools. (Personal archive).

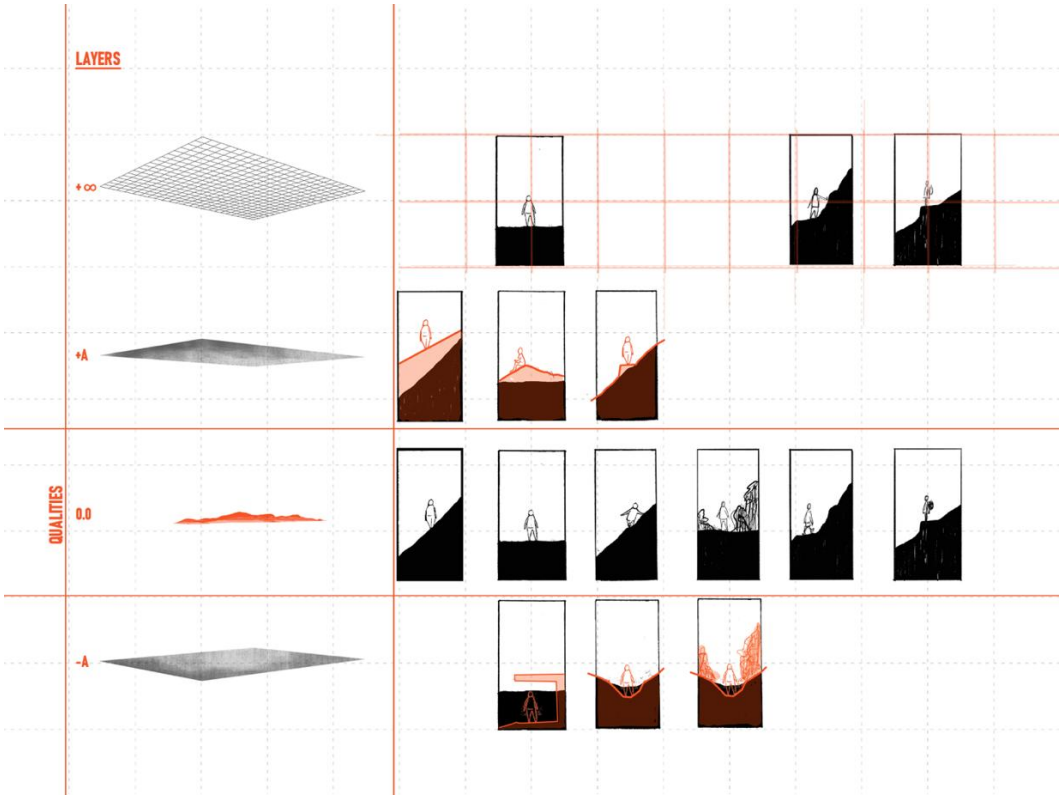
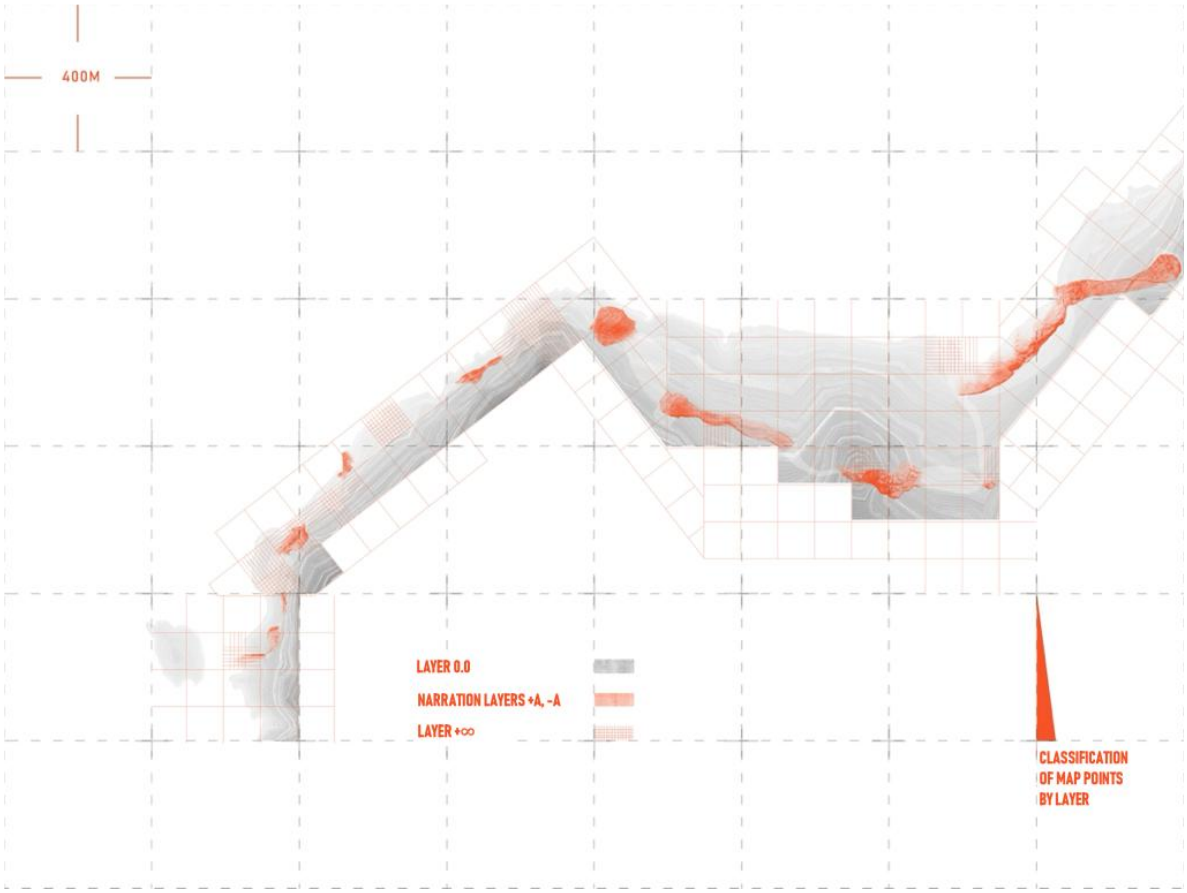


Figure 12
Classification of map points by layer. (Personal archive).



Conclusion

The study aimed to design a trail on Keros that reflects the island's history and memory. Due to the restricted access to the site, it soon became clear that the island's identity is shaped not only by its physical characteristics, but also by intangible elements such as narratives, mythology and everyday practices. This is a condition that could apply to any landscape.

The four-layer system addresses this issue by ensuring that all landscape features, both physical and intangible, are considered equally in the design process.

Returning to the initial research questions: How can a place be perceived, archived and interpreted remotely? How can a site-specific experience be designed for a place with restricted access? The answer lies in the system itself.

The proposed framework is a methodology for remotely interpreting, documenting and reimagining landscapes. It functions as a mirror between the site and the design process, generating tools that are tied to the landscape's unique qualities. Although the methodology is universal, its content and expression are always site-specific, as the mechanism is informed by the landscape's physical, historical and narrative characteristics.

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The Performative Character of Betrayal in Public Space[59]

Sofia Kyriakou
Visual Artist / Art Researcher

Areti Petropoulou
Theatre Researcher / Director

Abstract

This article examines the performance *Last Supper, Ioannis and Other Betrayals*, which was presented in the courtyard of the National Gallery of Nafplio, through the lens of the performative nature of betrayal in public space. The work presented betrayal as an ongoing social, political, and personal situation, starting with the assassination of Ioannis Kapodistrias in 1831 and ending with personal testimonies about the breach of trust. The analysis highlights the nature of performative texts as "textual landscapes," the use of bread as both a material and a metaphorical element, and the participatory structure that culminated in dialogue with the audience.

Keywords: Textual landscape, ritual topography, bread, companionship, Kapodistrias.

[59] Article based on the performance *Last Supper, Ioannis and Other Betrayals.*

The Performative Character of Betrayal in Public Space

A site-specific performance often encounters stories that are embedded in the place, causing the place to rediscover itself through experiential “everyday rituals” and collective imagination (Kaye, 2006, p. 110). Bearing this in mind, the performance *Last Supper, Ioannis and Other Betrayals*, presented at the Alexandros Soutsos National Gallery annexe in Nafplio, attempts to negotiate the issue of betrayal in both public and private life. During the research for the performance, multiple fragmented identities and socio-political dichotomies were investigated, beyond the stable and integrated self that is related to betrayal, such as: the womb, the social/individual self, Judas, Kapodistrias, Kolokotronis, the abstract image of authority, and the non-human subject. The performance can be interpreted as the transformation of an art gallery (or museum or an archaeological site) into what Hannah (2019, pp. 107-108 and p. 177) calls an “event-space”, a spatial condition mobilised through ritual, in which architecture becomes performative — and potentially a living body — while viewers engage in actions to create a collective meaning.

This essay examines the way in which betrayal was rendered, focusing on performative texts written as textual landscapes, bread as a material and as a metaphorical element, action seen as a ritual topography, and audience participation through discussion. In particular, the participatory practice, which is considered unique and idiosyncratic, is guided by the artists. The research question that emerged from the action concerns place and its connection to landmarks and human geography related to space and the concept of betrayal. More specifically, the research focused on the relationship between place and betrayal and how physical spaces, imbued with historical, symbolic, and/or emotional significance, function as carriers of memory and meaning and, ultimately, how they can highlight the affective relationship between humans and space. The concepts explored are: betrayal as a concept, historical betrayals, the concept of social trauma and its connection to place, and the concept of healing through performance (Rigopoulou, 2016, p. 100).

Space, History, and Public Space

The action took place in both the interior and exterior of the Alexandros Soutsos National Gallery annexe in Nafplio. This structure included: 1) the thirteen bronze masks of the 1821 fighters, presented in the *Memory of the War* section of the temporary exhibition of the annexe, with the theme *The Greek War of Independence – 1821* (indoor space), 2) the sculptural forms (sculpture titled: *Couple*, 1971) by the sculptor Memos Makris (1913-1993), 3) the square with the statue of Kapodistrias by the sculptor Michalis Tompros (1933), 4) the site of Kapodistrias' assassination, and 5) at the highest point of this map, 999 steps lead to the cell/prison of Theodoros Kolokotronis. The National Gallery and other important sites in

the city, which are static exhibition spaces for works of art or landmarks, were transformed into an “event space” (Hannah, 2019, pp. 173-174) through a performance on the theme of betrayal; the rooms of the National Gallery and the aforementioned landmarks in Nafplio echoed political references and conspiracies.

Performative Texts and the Textual Landscape

The “textual” landscape (Allsopp & Preston 2018, p. 2) emerged through dialogue with the place: every gesture and/or word heard by the performers was recorded and became part of the dramatic text. The question was raised as to whether the gestures and/or words we use are exclusively products of the nervous system (gestures) or of thought (words) or are they (gestures and words) imbued with the space and everything it contains? The performers chose to observe the words and gestures of the people of Nafplio as embodied functions that carry within them, as raw material, the history of the place. The textual landscapes created for the performance are a way of observing the city: they are an embodied negotiation between the place and its history. For example, Kapodistrias' monologue draws on elements from his historical biography but is also supplemented and completed by the observation and listening of the citizens of Nafplio and the performer's involvement in this process. In a similar way, the textual landscapes for the social/individual self, for the body (and its betrayal), and so on, were created.

However, there were also verbatim excerpts from documents, such as a newspaper excerpt about a femicide or a recorded piece of information about a story involving a non-human subject. All “textual” landscapes were treated as personal assumptions of betrayal, which were conveyed to the spectators through a mechanical sound medium, through whispers, through live commentary and/or vocal outbursts from the performers. These texts conveyed in the aforementioned ways, attempted to create a kind of “surrounding language”, as Foreman (2006) calls it, creating an environment with overlapping voices where "words become material forms rather than conveyors of plot" (Als, 2009). In addition, this dramaturgical process transformed the texts into “atmospheres” (Lehmann, 2016, p. 63) rather than linear representations of a text. The aim was for viewers to observe and engage with the concept of betrayal not as a two-dimensional concept, but as a three-dimensional landscape. In this light, the Gallery's character as an event space was enhanced by weaving together textual, material and architectural excerpts to create rituals. It was an attempt at a performative ritual of reading, speaking, listening, viewing, and acting through which viewers were encouraged to reflect on and/or confront betrayal as both a collective memory and a personal trauma.

Bread, Wine, and Ritual

In the right side of Gallery's courtyard, there was a long paper tablecloth on the floor, covered with loaves of bread and jugs of wine. The bread was cut and shared among the performers and spectators, invoking hospitality, transforming the gallery into a dining room where bodies (performers and spectators) were united through food. The courtyard was transformed into a living space which, when activated through ritual actions, reshaped the architecture into "a lived reality" with participatory encounters (Hannah, 2019, pp. 133–135). In *Last Supper, Ioannis and Other Betrayals* the catalysts for this transformation were bread and wine that formed a common ground for both performers and spectators. By sharing bread and wine, they all become witnesses to the core of the performance: the betrayal. The companions (companion = com + panis), jointly integrated into a performative context, are actively involved in the process, breaking down the distance between representation and life, "involving our guts" (Colebrook & Miele 2017, p. 102). The bread ceased to be symbolic and became physical: it was tasted, chewed, swallowed, or spat out. When the table was littered with breadcrumbs and wine stains, the ritual collapsed, revealing the fragility of solidarity. This collapse of the ritual dramatised betrayal as inevitable: even the act of sharing food is vulnerable.

Figure 1.
Screenshot from the perfomance Last Supper, Ioannis and Other Betrayals (S. Kyriakou-A. Petropoulou).



Social and Political Bipolarity and Historical Trauma

The assassination of Greece's first governor, Ioannis Kapodistrias, exemplifies the contradictions of the early Greek state, such as betrayal versus loyalty. Betrayal, in the performance, was developed through conceptual dichotomies such as the social / individual self, private / public space, personal / collective histories. Within this framework of dichotomies, certain historical paradoxes also developed. Such as those of the heroes of 1821 who had no luck in the newly formed free Greek state. These dichotomies were related to the different perceptions that fermented in civil conflicts that broke out in 1823–1824 and crystallized into general patterns such as "notables versus military leaders," "islanders versus notables." This social and political bipolarity was reflected in *The Last Supper, Ioannis and Other betrayals* with the confrontation between political and personal betrayals. The performance attempted to present betrayal as a repetition; Judas' kiss, the murder of Kapodistrias, and private stories of betrayal echoed each other.

Figure 2
Screenshot from the perfomance Last Supper, Ioannis and Other Betrayals. (*S. Kyriakou-A.Petropoulou.*



Betrayal as a Performative Condition

The performative imprint through the consumption of bread is an intermediate object with tangible and visible immediacy and triggers the examination of the self in relation to betrayal (e.g., Raúl Ortega Ayala, *The Last Supper*). According to Goffman (2006, pp. 57-59), the real self emerges only in relation with others, taking shape through ongoing social interaction. For Bourdieu, if acting subjects are socio-historically situated within a field of action, the terms of their engagement in the world are reconfigured (1990, pp. 52-53). This change was attempted in the performance with the table and the companions, where wine and bread were the occasion for the revelation and/or concealment of other betrayals among the diners, with the intention of encouraging participants to join in this context. The table and its complete dismantling at the end of the performance aimed to give betrayal a structural character. Gough observes that “collective meals in performances hover between “hospitality and hostility (2018, p.14). The *Last Supper, Ioannis and Other Betrayals*, substantiated this oscillation, aiming to confirm or refute betrayal as a constituent element of community life by highlighting -betrayal- as a performative environment.

Figure 3
Screenshot from the performance Last Supper, Ioannis and Other Betrayals (S. Kyriakou-A. Petropoulou)



Audience Participation and Dialogue

During the celebrations for various saints boxes are placed, Orthodox churches labelled "In Favor of Health" or "In Favor of Rest" (for the deceased). The faithful place pieces of paper in these boxes which are then read by the priest performing the religious service. Inspired by this religious custom, the performers placed a box labelled "In Favor of Betrayal" inside which there were white pieces of paper and pens for the spectators to write their own stories of betrayal (either as perpetrators or victims of betrayal). Although none of the spectators' members wrote anything, they were invited to sit at the table, eat bread, drink wine, and share any thoughts, arguments and deliberations on the subject. The lengthy discussion of the topic with the spectators confirms the idea that contemporary art redistributes "authorship" (Bishop, 2012, pp. 8–9), transforming viewers into co-creators.

The performance evolved into a dialogue in which the viewers who remained for the discussion shared their thoughts on betrayal, starting with political disappointment and ending with personal experiences. The discussion gradually transformed into a ritualistic topography: the courtyard of the National Gallery was turned into a forum of testimonies, where betrayal was confessed and discussed publicly and repeatedly. For example, a woman publicly read a love poem that drew on her personal experience and concerned a betrayal she herself had suffered, and as the discussion progressed, the spectator repeatedly brought the content of the poem back into the discussion. The National Gallery was transformed into a place of confession, activated within six hours through shared food and dialogue between performers and spectators.

Conclusion: Assessment of the Interaction

By assessing these dialogues, the action research led to the following findings: 1) Rejection of the concept of betrayal in favour of other concepts, replacing it with the idea of choices of roles, attitudes, and positions, 2) Investigation of the concept of betrayal through reflection and framing by digital investigation (in situ investigation of the concept on Google), 3) Narration of personal experiences, 4) Linking the concept to contemporary phenomena such as femicide, 5) Identifying the concept with the contemporary political scene, 6) Exploring emerging emotions, 7) Evaluating the action and theme as a cathartic process through the practical process of storytelling and food sharing. Ultimately, as discussed with the audience after the performance, spectators were left with the disturbing perception that betrayal is ever-present. Bread, as the central material, becomes more than just food: it is a symbol of companionship and, at the same time, its destruction. Sharing bread signifies the act of companionship and union, but living with others means living with the possibility of betrayal. We share our bread, wine, and stories, and yet we live in a state of disconnection and rupture.

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Embodied Sonic Narratives: Reconstructing Space and Agency in a Bacchic Performance

Anastasia Giamouzi, Stella Paschalidou
Hellenic Mediterranean University, Greece

Abstract

This paper shares reflections on performative space construction through embodied interaction with sound, an inquiry situated within an artistic research project based on Euripides' *Bacchae*. At its core is a solo performer whose gestures generate and manipulate sonic events in real time, creating a dynamic interplay of spatial boundaries between the performer and the audience. The paper investigates how gestural interaction with sound can function as a compositional tool for space, augmenting dramaturgical meaning and transforming the performer's relationship with the environment. Structured around four cyclical stages of the Bacchic state, as narrated by the messengers, the performance develops a spatial dramaturgy of presence, ecstasy, and aftermath. The interactive system serves a central dramaturgical idea that shapes the spatial logic of the performance, highlighting the tension between proximity and exposure of the performer to the audience. The paper asks*: In what ways can embodied interaction with sound reshape the spatial dynamics of the stage and respond to these dramaturgical prompts? And how might these interactions influence audience perception and agency in technologically mediated performance?* Methodologically, the project is grounded in improvisation and rehearsal-based exploration. The dancer engages in guided physical tasks, whereby gestures are mapped onto a responsive computational sound system integrating optical motion tracking, e-textiles, and contact microphones, chosen for their ability to capture nuance and resonate with the mythical world of *Bacchae*. To the best of our knowledge, interactive audio systems have rarely been integrated into performances of ancient Greek drama. This approach challenges preconceptions in reimagining such canonical works, dynamically shifting between (intimate) personal and (extroverted) global space of action in gesture-sound relationships while balancing between technological transparency and opacity.

Keywords: *Embodiment, Sonic interaction, Ancient drama, Space reshape*

Embodied Sonic Narratives

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the use of digital technologies in theatre performance. Ancient drama has also been reimagined through digital means, with early examples including both Castelluccis'[60] and Mitchell's[61] *Oresteia*, as well as Warlikowski's *Bacchae*[62] (Poulou, 2022). Yet, stagings of ancient Greek theatre plays that incorporate different kinds of digital technologies as a central dramaturgical element remain rare, and even fewer have experimented with interactive, embodied audio systems.

These observations highlight both the potential and the relative scarcity of interactive approaches in staging ancient Greek theatre tragedy. Building on this gap, the current paper presents work developed as part of the first author's MSc thesis under the supervision of the second author, examining the technological mediation of Euripides' *Bacchae* through two fundamental research questions. The first is *how embodied interaction with sound can reshape the spatial dynamics of the stage and redefine the boundaries of performative space*. The second is *how these interactions can influence the audience perception and agency*.

The first question is addressed by focusing on two perspectives that influenced the development of the performance: choreographic interpretations of spatial experience and sonic constructions of spatial perception. These were explored by experimenting with a wide range of technological tools and diverse modes of interaction between the performer and the sound. For the second question, the role of technological transparency versus opacity in performative environments is examined, considering whether technology should remain invisible and seamless, or become perceptible and mediating, affecting how the audience engages with the performance. These elements were integrated through embodied interaction with sound, serving as the central concept for spatial transformation.

Background

While these questions guide the present study, they also intersect with wider debates on dynamic spatial transformation in performance, explored through various disciplines and theoretical frameworks. In her article *On Choreographic Space* (2012), Rubidge argues that space is not merely a static container for movement but emerges through the relation between individuals' movement and material environment. She introduces the concept of "felt" space, and in this sense, choreographic space becomes in/extensive, reconfiguring the

[60] Premiered in April 6, 1995 at Teatro Fabbricone in Prato, Italy

[61] Premiered in September 24, 1999 at Cottesloe Theatre in London, UK

[62] Premiered in Febuary 9, 2001 at Rozmaitości Theatre in Warsaw, Poland

contours and textures of material space through the movement activities that constitute it, and highlighting how embodied action continuously reshapes spatial perception.

In the field of electroacoustic music, both research and practice over the past few decades have increasingly examined how acoustic space functions within musical composition. For example, in his influential book *On Sonic Art* (1996), Wishart explored how technologies like multi-channel systems for the projection of music to an audience in concert conditions can create virtual acoustic environments and alter listeners' spatial perception, giving composers the ability to shape the depth, width, and movement of sound within a composition. The rising number of works utilising multi-channel setups reflects an enhanced sensitivity to spatial design, immersive listening and the use of sound placement as a structural element in music (Stavropoulos, 2018; Kendal, 2010).

Another important concept concerns the balance between technological transparency and opacity in artistic performance, and how this balance shapes the audience's spatial experience. As Jäget and Kim (2008) argue, artistic experience is conditioned by the degree to which an interface is perceived as transparent or opaque. A transparent system feels intuitive or even invisible, enabling both performer and audience to concentrate on the artistic expression rather than on the mechanics of the technology. By contrast, an opaque system foregrounds the technological processes, drawing attention to the interface itself and making the presence of technology explicit. In this performance, these two characteristics were examined in relation to performative space: specifically, how the visibility of technological mediation influenced the audience's perception and construction of spatial experience.

In Euripides' *Bacchae*, Dionysus returns to Thebes to establish his cult, and after being denied his divinity, drives the women into a frenzy that leads to the tragic death of King Pentheus, torn apart by his own mother, Agave. The Bacchae are the women who worship Dionysus, those he led out of Asia to Thebes, as well as the women of Thebes whom he stung with frenzy and hounded up to the mountains. They also constitute the chorus of the play.

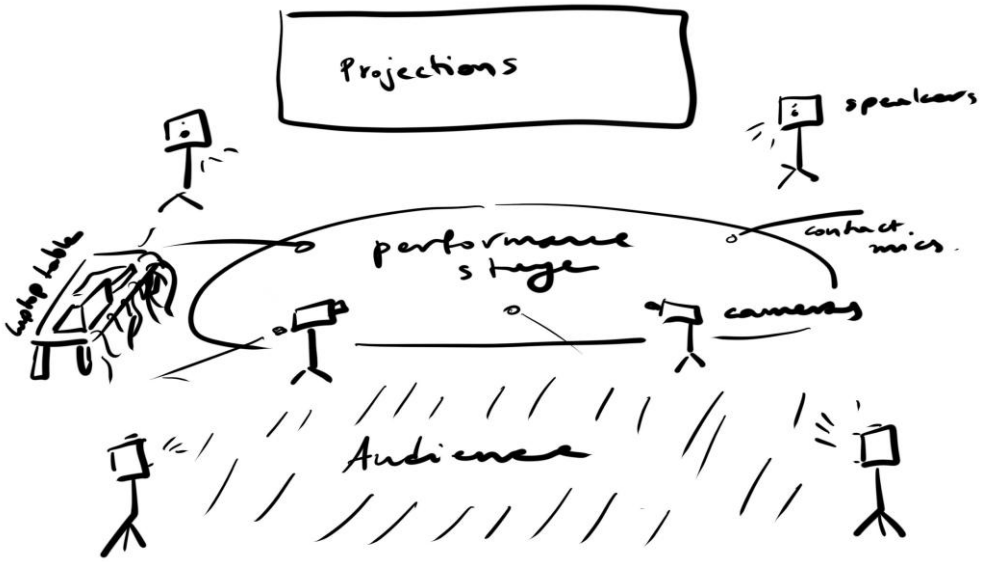
The two messengers' accounts provide information on what the Bacchae engage in in the mountains, and these narratives form the foundation for the dramaturgy and structure of the performance. The messengers secretly observe the Bacchae worshiping Dionysus and describe their serenity as they awaken from deep sleep, tend to animals, and witness how the land itself responds to their worship, producing water, wine, milk, and honey. Yet, once the Bacchae sense they are being watched, they become hostile and launch an attack.
This duality between peaceful devotion when their worship remains unseen and destructive fury when they become seen, constitutes the central dramaturgical prompt that guides the research questions of this project: *“Do you want to see them up close? Do you want to spy on them? Approach in secret. What will happen if they see you?”*. Accordingly, the interactive

system is designed to serve this dramaturgical axis and the audience is meant to become integral to this exploration.

Research Objectives and Methodology

Focus was given on three key elements to address the research questions: First, an interactive sound system was developed allowing the performer to control the sound in real time. In line with Rubidge (2012), the performer's gestures mould the sound environment, reshaping the perception of space through movement. The performer's embodied interaction transforms the interface into a dynamic, expressive layer, where movement and sound constantly redefine the spatial and sensory experience for both the performer and the audience. Second, quadraphonic spatialisation techniques were used, with four speakers placed at the corners of the room to create an immersive, dynamic sonic environment. Third, the physical distance between the stage and the audience was minimized, enhancing intimacy and involvement, and blurring the line between the two. As part of the research methodology, a theatre performance was staged, serving both as a site of investigation and a practical component. The performance was directed by Magda Dimou and performed by Aria Stamataki and it was presented on 12 and 13 April 2025 during the *Open Stage Festival of Thessaloniki* in Greece.

Figure 1
Stage and Technical Setup.



Stage and Technical Setup

The performative space was delineated by a dancer's mat, suggesting a boundary between the performer and the audience, yet the audience stood in immediate closeness to the

performer. The stage was surrounded by four speakers, placed at the corners, to envelop both the performer and the audience in sound. At the back wall, a projection surface displayed (non-interactive) imagery that served a scenographic role, enhancing the atmosphere and narrative.

Two cameras captured the dancer’s 3D body movements. Additionally, four contact microphones, three of which were placed at the corners of the stage and one positioned centre-front, were capturing ground’s vibrations. To manage the projection playback, monitor the interactive system, and ensure smooth operation, two technical assistants were positioned visibly at the side of the performance area. As each audience member entered, a door sensor paired with an ultrasonic ranger was activated, triggering a sound sample.

The dancer wore a custom costume incorporating multiple e-textile elements. The costume featured various embedded sensors and conductive embroidery, such as a microsensor with an accelerometer. Grape leaves were embroidered using conductive thread to create tactile interaction zones, allowing the dancer's touch to modulate the sound in real time.

At the rear of the stage, a separate accelerometer-embedded textile was worn by the performer as a veil, triggering sound samples.

Figure 2

E-textile: The embedded microsensor and accelerometer and the embroidered grape leaves.



Performance Structure

The creative process was guided by an idea developed early in the process, dividing the Bacchic experience into four distinct phases: Nirvana, Ecstasy, Killing and Lamentation, and return to Nirvana. This structure became the central framework for both the sonic interaction and the spatial organisation of the performance. In each section, an attempt was made to establish a distinct type of engagement with the audience. Using all the available tools, the performer's gestures, spatial movement, and interaction with sound, were orchestrated to modulate proximity, engagement, and the audience's perception of the performative space.

The first part of the performance featured the performer lying on the floor with closed eyes, gradually standing and engaging in movement constrained to her personal space. Her gestures were slow and self-contained, initially focusing on tactile engagement with the grape leaves to modulate sound, and later activating water-like sound textures by striking the contact microphones. The performative space was intimate and clearly delineated, occupied solely by the performer. The audience remained outside this space, positioned as observers. The technology was opaque, foregrounding its presence, and its role in controlling the sonic output was clearly perceived by the audience.

Figure 3
Photograph from the first part of the performance (Kostas Argyris).



In the second section, the performer became aware of the audience's presence and her movement extended beyond the intimate space of the first part. Utilising the two cameras, she navigated the space either to “catch” and de-activate specific sound samples or to spatially manipulate sound across the four-speaker setup. Through this interaction, the

performer assumed an active role in shaping both the auditory and spatial dimensions of the performance. The audience was drawn into the performative space as the performer “attacks” it by moving around and controlling the sound. The technology was transparent, aiming to enhance the sense of danger, as the audience did not perceive how the interaction was produced directly.

Figure 4
Photograph from the second part of the performance (Kostas Argyris).



In the third section, the performer dynamically reshaped the spatial relationship by moving back and forth within the performance area. As she approached the front, the contact microphone activated drum sound samples, creating a moment of heightened engagement with the audience. Moving backwards, she deliberately withdrew this connection, emphasising a shifting axis of presence and interaction within the performative space. In other words, forward movement aimed to tighten audience engagement, while backward movement loosened it. The technology was opaque, aiming to make the audience aware that the drum sounds would become denser the closer the performer approached the contact microphone at the front of the stage.

In the last section, the performer gradually returned to her initial position, slowly descending to the ground while shifting left and right, triggering discrete sound events through her movements. Through this, the performative space became increasingly intimate. The technology remained transparent, allowing the audience to perceive the transition to the opening stage without their attention being diverted by the technological mediation.

Figure 5
Photograph from the third part of the performance (Kostas Argyris).



Figure 6
Photograph from the fourth part of the performance (Kostas Argyris).



Conclusion

Observing the performance retrospectively, it appeared that the attempt to reshape space through embodied interaction was largely achieved. The venue was adapted to enable the space to transform dynamically, at times incorporating the audience into the performative area and at other times keeping them outside of it. The spatial sound design and the performer's movement, combined with the embodied interaction with sound through technological mediation, transformed the space in multiple ways, achieving each time a different sense of performative environment.

Feedback collected from the audience revealed different layers of perception regarding the role of technology. Several participants reported a sense of inclusion within the performative space, with many highlighting moments of intimacy. Isolated comments pointed to heighted tension when the performer's actions became more forceful and unpredictable.

While several participants recognised the link between movement and sound, the technological mediation was not always perceived with complete clarity as initially intended. This was deliberate: the system was designed to appear opaque at times, foregrounding the presence of technology, and transparent at other times, allowing ambiguity to shape the perception of how movement and sound interacted through technology. However, some participants noted that in their attempt to understand how the technology functioned, they occasionally missed the flow of the performance.

For further development, the performance could benefit from combining interaction parts together for greater cohesion and from exploring additional multimodal technologies, such as interactive video, to enrich both the spatial and narrative dimensions of the audience's experience.

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41
"Scenographic Architectures" (Re)Questioning the Relationship between Spectators and Actors

Dr Rafaël Magrou
Senior Lecturer / Associate Professor
Ecole nationale supérieure d'architecture Paris-Malaquais - Université PSL
Laboratory ACS

Abstract

The history of performing arts venues is told through various diagrams and generally plans (rarely cross-sections, still less axonometric or other perspectives) that summarise the spatial organisation between auditorium and stage according to models reduced to architecture, to the perennial; but this does not consider the contribution of scenic devices and scenography. Doesn't the etymological meaning of the word theatre (*theatron*) refer to the place from which we watch, suggesting that we should think of spaces adapted for creation rather than creations to be fitted into constrained spaces? The formula for the place and the action that takes place there invites us to think not only about the stage set, above all about the way in which the audience is organised in relation to the action. We ask these questions within the speculative framework of our academic research work, focusing on the context of the teaching experiments we carry out in architecture schools. Our practice as assiduous spectators and as critical journalists specialising in theatrical venues and scenography is also part of this examination, which crosses the rules of visibility and listening to performances.

In this proposal, we intend to share our experiences of the *Des Architectures scénographiques* design studio (2024-25), which combines theatre architecture and stage design, at the École nationale supérieure d'architecture Paris-Malaquais, in partnership with the Comédie Française. Based on Paul Claudel's *Le Soulier de satin*, this was an opportunity to combine confrontation with reality (professional investigations) and fictional experimentation (educational explorations) to enrich the range of scenic spatial situations, going beyond the morphologies of what the building offers. It's a question of the creative space, of the relationship established or to be developed between actors and spectators, of the spaces of performance. Teaching is seen as a way of researching, practising and questioning the scenic space.

Keywords: scenography, theatre architecture, scenery, academic, ENSA Paris-Malaquais, Comédie-Française.

Scenographic Architectures

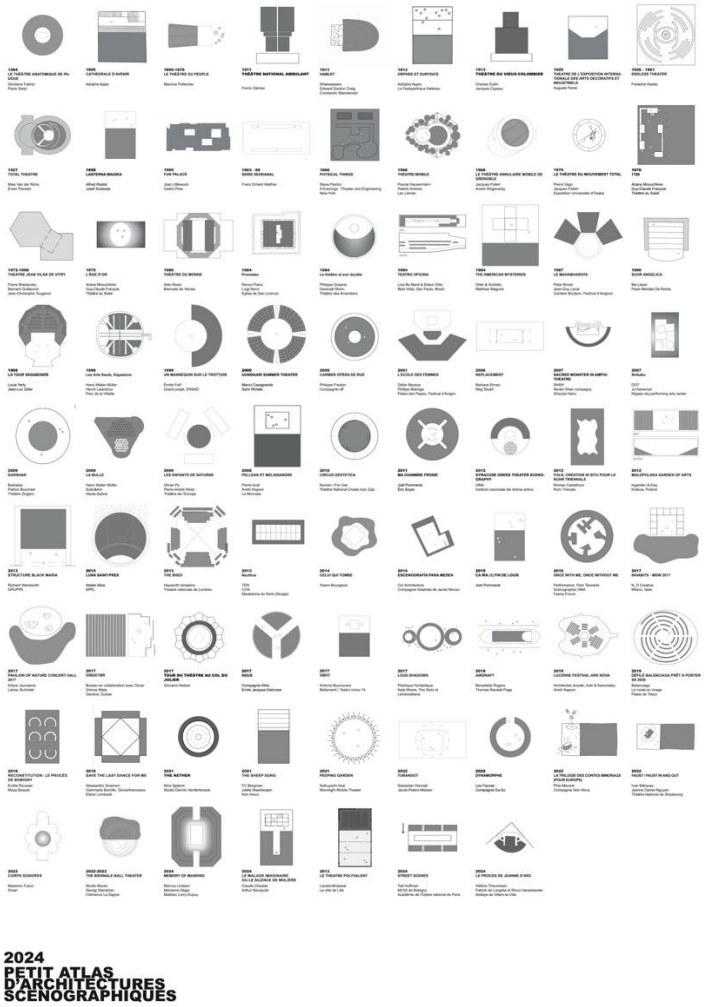
The history of performing arts venues is told through various diagrams and generally plans[63] summarising the spatial organisation between auditorium and stage according to models reduced to architecture, from the Ancient Greek and Roman models until the Italian horseshoe model, including the Elizabethan and medieval models. These have been reproduced in main books dedicated to theatre and dramaturgy, they neglect the fact that scenography has contributed to the evolution, transformation, even some revolutions of the existing models. The history of theatre architecture has never fully considered the dialogue established with the stage thinkers and designers. In this context, the Master design studio *Scenographic Architectures* at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture Paris-Malaquais (ENSAPM) is an experimental pedagogical stone and a researcher development to try to link the two disciplines, the building and the staging. Its aim is to better understand how the two disciplines interact or could interact each other. Formed as an architect, teaching theatre architecture and scenography at a French school of architecture, here I will share the evolution of my academic approach, in partnership with some of the main French venues.

At its starting point, the theatre architecture design studio that I led at the ENSAPM focused on building a theatre, a multivenue construction. In 2016–17, *Entre abris et édifices* experimented with some various temporary scenic locations scattered around the city of Nanterre, in collaboration with Les Amandiers-Théâtre de Nanterre. In 2017–18, *Une cité du Théâtre* proposed a complex of venues to be shared by the Comédie-Française, the Odéon-Théâtre de l'Europe, and the Conservatoire national supérieure d'Art Dramatique, at the same time of a competition that didn't reach the end. A partnership was then established with the Comédie Française to create a design studio I entitled *Des Univers scénographiques*, mostly focused on scenography. Students were inviting to create scenography based on repertoire plays on the Vieux-Colombier stage, a former from Jacques Copeau and Louis Jouvet legacy founded in 1913. The stage was mostly frontal, but could be bifrontal, with a flying tower and dessous: an ideal instrument for learning about theatre architecture and stage devices. From 2018 and running a course until 2024: *La Vie de Galilée* **(**Brecht), *La Conférence des objets* (Montalbetti), *Bajazet* (Racine), *Le petit Maître corrigé* (Marivaux), *Le Mariage forcé* (Molière) and *Lucrece Borgia* (Hugo). Our special guest and main lecturer was Éric Ruf, an actor, director, and stage designer, as well as the general administrator (i.e. general director) of the Comédie-Française. Students worked on the scenography of a play alongside the Comédie-Française own design project on stage, with

[63] As we can find in the works of Sabbatini & Jouvet (1942), Sonrel (1943), Izenvour (1977) or Lori (2014).

the support of Éric Ruf and his team (including dramatic councillor, technical director, pedagogical staff).

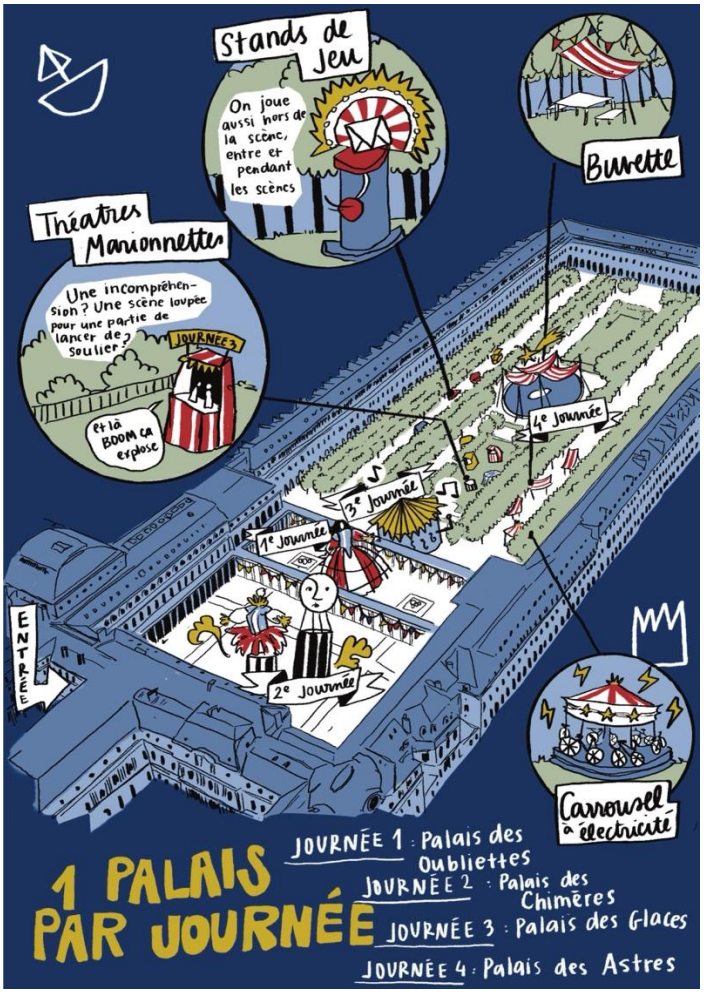
Figure 1
Petit atlas des architectures scénographiques, inventory work dedicated to identifying diverse stage typologies © ENSA Paris-Malaquais.



During the semester (fall or spring depending on the plays), at a certain point in the creative process, the students could see in real the result of the stage designer Éric Ruf's proposal and react to it, adjusting or resisting it in order to develop their own design. Several meetings were organised and visits of the main halls (the historical Salle Richelieu and the Vieux Colombier, of course, as well as the scenography workshops, exceptionally open for us on this occasion). Ultimately, the final jury comprised Ruf and his team, occasionally joined by the play's director (Clément Hervieu-Léger for *Le Petit-Maître corrigé*, who will become the new general administrator in August 2025), the lighting designer (Bertrand Couderc for *La Conférence des objets* and *Le Mariage forcé*), and other Comédie-Française team members. They sometimes found that some student projects were sometimes more

interesting than their own. Impressed by these proposals, they decided to renew the experience each year, as the students' projects were very stimulating for their own design. It is also important to keep in mind the main pedagogical aim of this design studio is to teach theatre architecture and develop student' scenography skills and critical thinking. This necessary distance from the history of theatre architecture led them to consider the contribution of scenic devices and scenography to the transformation, conception and mutation of performance spaces.

Figure 2
Poster of the "Vogue la galère" project into the Palais Royal gardens (Iman Pekdemir, Capucine Magadou, Simone Leblanc and Paolo Saillard).



What form should the theatre space take? While awaiting a dramaturgy, should it not remain as flexible as possible, not impose pre-established constraints, leave the field open to all kinds of research, allow the use of all modern techniques, and offer a useful and effective tool?

At the Théâtre de Royaumont symposium in early 1960s, the theorist Denis Bablet said:

> What form should the theatre space take? While awaiting a dramaturgy, should it not remain as flexible as possible, not imposing pre-established constraints, leaving the filed open to all kinds of research, allowing the use of all modern techniques, and offering a useful and effective tool? (Bablet, 1963, p. 25).

Figure 3

Presentation for the final jury of the "Vogue la galère" project (Iman Pekdemir, Capucine Magadou, Simone Leblanc and Paolo Saillard).



Following this mark, I may ask: doesn't the etymological meaning of the word "theatre" (*theatron)* refer to the place from which we watch, suggesting that we should think of spaces designed for creation rather than creations to be fitted into constrained spaces? This was the central question of my PhD *The Spatial Dimension in Stage Writing: The Scenographic Architecture Resulting from the Compositions of the Author-Director Joël Pommerat (Compagnie Louis Brouillard)*. I took this case developing "stage writing" (*écritures de plateau*) in which the performance spaces, the set design and all its components are developed in a different order to the conventional system as the text is completed at the end, after rehearsals. My research aims to shed light on the challenges of such an approach and trying to understand the way in which the spatiality of the Louis Brouillard company's plays come to the stage considering shows such as*: Cercles/Fictions* (2010) and *Ma Chambre froide* (2011) which are both theatre-in-the-round productions; the traverse stage created for

La Réunification des deux Corées (2013), and the whole theatrical space (hall and stage) for *Ça ira (1) Fin de Louis* (2015). Indeed, the methods, techniques and tools deployed during the exploration on stage are ending up with a device at the service of the text. More generally, the object of this thesis was to explore a territory of encounter between theatrical architecture and scenography, between the perennial and the ephemeral — a troubled and under-researched zone.

The formula for the place and the action invited me to consider not only about the stage setting, but also the organization of the audience in relation to the action. I pose these questions within the speculative framework of my academic research work, focusing on the context of the teaching experiments I carry out in the ENSA Paris-Malaquais, as developed before.

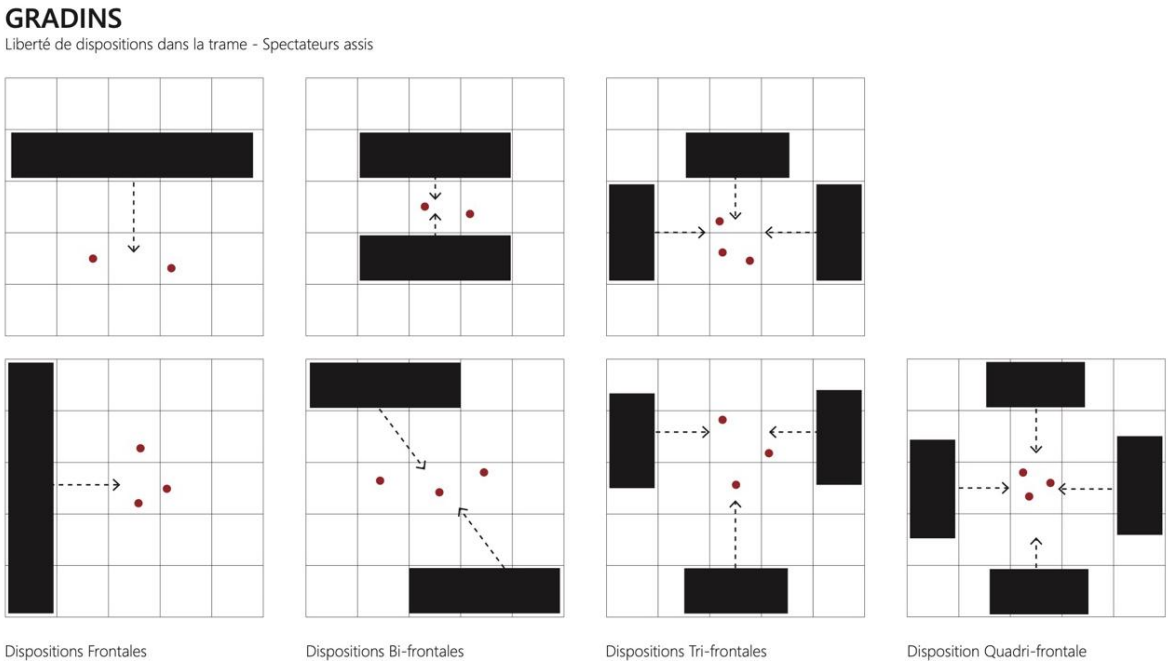
Figure 4
Presentation for the final jury of the "Toronogachi" project (Camille Duhamel, Méline Frank, Julie Ferraro and Vincent Delattre).



Then, my Master design studio' seventh year of collaboration with the Comédie Française, 2024-25 took a new turn from "Des Univers scénographiques" to become "Des Architectures scénographiques", a formula I borrowed to Jacques Gaulme's book (1985). In this publication, this teacher and stage designer developed the conventional history of theatre architecture. He gave some examples of diverse constructions, melting architecture and scenography, for specific situations such as a theatre for an author (Racine for instance), a play or creating some new patterns that are not part of the Jouvet's nor the Izenour's theatre schemes.

The first development of this new formula was the 2024–25 project design studio that I directed. It started with previous research on theatre typologies combining architecture and scenography, to widen the range of spatial scenic schemes. It was organised in a poster and calling for completion considering the different plays organisation between stage and were the same as in previous years: a repertoire play gives the opportunity to design these "scenographic architectures" and, for this year, *Le Soulier de satin* by the French author Paul Claudel was particularly adapted, as it lasts more than 10 hours, split into four acts. To implement the temporary scenographic architectures, I suggested two sites: Beaux-Arts (where the ENSAPM is based) and the Palais Royal gardens (where the Comédie-Française's Salle Richelieu is located). Finally, 2024–25 was supposed to be the last year of close collaboration with Éric Ruf as he was leaving the Comédie-Française at the end of his mandatory. This event was the perfect opportunity to share a more architectural approach with him and to rethink the relationship between spectators and actors.

Figure 5
A selection of plan organization of bleachers in the "Toronogachi" project (Camille Duhamel, Méline Frank, Julie Ferraro and Vincent Delattre).



The main idea was to treat the spectator's experience as a journey. Working in groups of four students, each group had to imagine their own stage for one of the four acts in the play. For instance, the group consisting of Iman Pekdemir, Capucine Magadou, Simone Leblanc and Paolo Saillard imagined in the Palais Royal as a series of "palaces" for their "Vogue la galère" project. It's combining big tops and carousels to create diverse mechanisms and structures that would offer the public a variety of experiences, like a Luna

Park, including food trucks and fairground stalls (Figures 2 and 3). Meanwhile, Camille Duhamel, Méline Frank, Julie Ferraro and Vincent Delattre proposed a single pavilion in the Beaux-Arts, “Toronogachi”, like a *lanterna magica* based on a Japanese wooden construction (Figures 4 and 5). Shojis, textile panels and organic mesh screens transformed the space into (like) a Villa Katsura theatre, relating to Claudel’s diplomatic position in Tokyo. On the same site, Ines Petit, Sjaan Rossi, Elsa Kalifat and Hugo Wacrenier split the play renamed “Une vie en plus” into seven pavilions located around the Beaux-Arts site, using the Chapel, courtyards, Palais des études, etc (Figures 6, 7 and 8). They explored several typologies of theatre relationships, using the same construction vocabulary, declining materials for the envelop and protections. Finally, with “Le monde est un jeu de formes”, Romane Fauzic, Maria Tedesi, Rim Sahli and Rebeca Motta Gomes’ post-constructivist project used a scaffolding composition to guide the audience to a central space where bleachers could be assembled in different ways (Figures 9, 10 and 11). Surrounded by galleries, for players and musicians, the audience was literally enveloped by the performance.

Figure 6

Presentation for the final jury “Une vie en plus” into the Beaux Arts (Ines Petit, Sjaan Rossi, Elsa Kalifat and Hugo Wacrenier).



The scenography students’ proposals for *Le Soulier de satin* pleased the jury members, as it led them in other discussions with the students and a critical distance to their own work. The students’ proposals explored diverse combinations of spatial organisation, audience seating and participation, and even immersion in several moment in the play — some serious, some more fun — with the aim to create various positions for audience in relation

to the stage, echoing with the Paul Claudel's idea, as a serious analysis is supporting the scenographic architectural proposals. Indeed, the author foreword:

> Everything must seem temporary, in progress, sloppy, incoherent, enthusiastically improvised, and the result must include some successful parts, if possible, to avoid being tedious even in agitation. Order is the delight of sound minds, and mess is imagination's treat (Claudel, 1912, pp. 11-12).

Thus, the variation in the relationship between hall and stage gives the opportunity to explore this spatial and temporal dimension, formal or informal, sometimes combining them. It gave a space of freedom for the imagined director and actors and contributes to the existing models identified in the poster, enriching the range of scenic spatial situations. It went beyond the morphologies that a building can offer. Finally, this research has been a great opportunity to combine confrontation with reality (professional investigations) and fictional experimentation (educational explorations), related to the creative space and what could happen in such disposals. It is also acting in the public space, with other constrains than the stage. Finally, it made the existing and non-neutral space to resonate, for instance the use of the Beaux-Arts Chapel in the scenography, creating sense with Claudel's mystical approach.

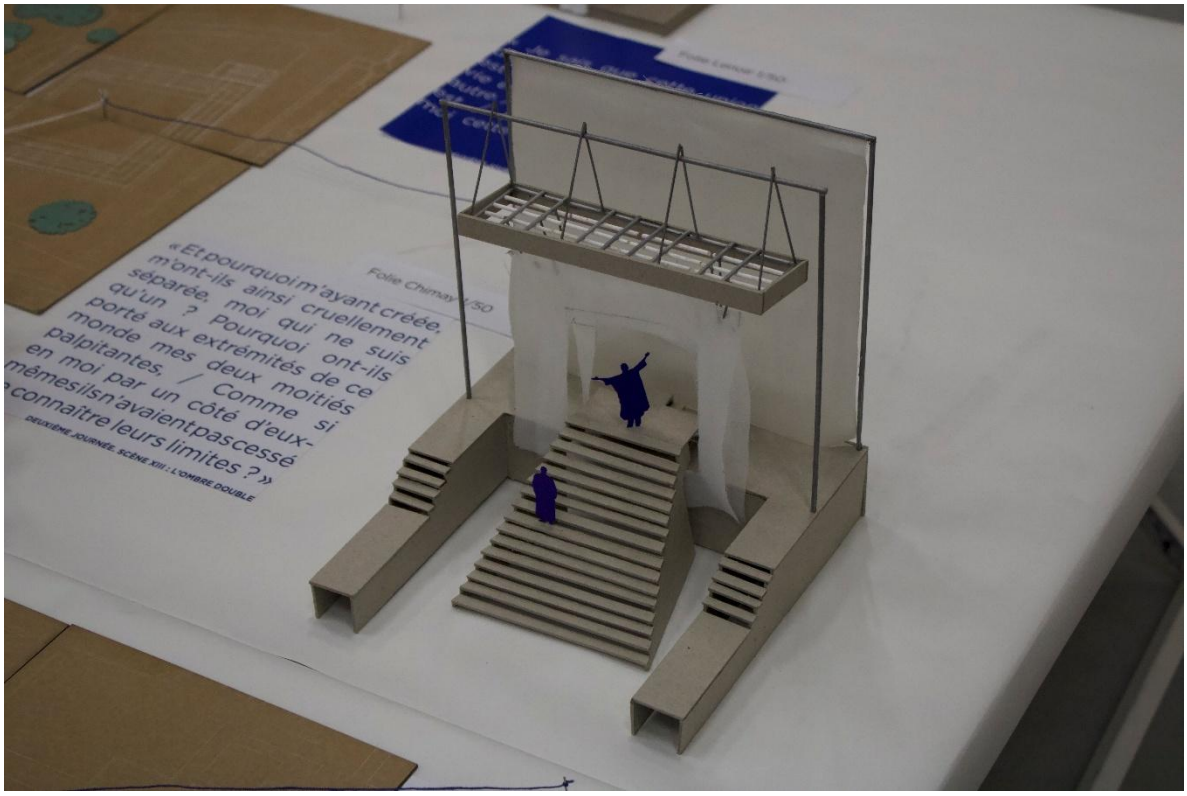
Figure 7
Detail of the presentation "Une vie en plus" showing position and typologies of stages (Ines Petit, Sjaan Rossi, Elsa Kalifat and Hugo Wacrenier).



In 2025–26, this design project studio will continue with the Comédie-Française's new general director, Clément Hervieu-Léger. Based on the Carlo Goldoni's play *La Scuola di ballo* (*The Dance School*), I organised a "travelling theatre" program, inspired by the Théâtre

national ambulant (Firmin Gémier, 1911–12), the Teatro del Mondo (Aldo Rossi, 1979) and the MobilTeat' (Raymond Sarti with Art&Oh and CNOI, 2025). I was also influenced by the utopias of the British 1960s group Archigram and Cedric Price and Joanne Littlewood's Fun Palace. This is the excuse for bringing shows to places without venues. We expect to see some other inventive proposals for this new session, with the travelling theatres. We will be pleased to share them with you next year.

Figure 8
Detail of the presentation "Une vie en plus", final stage of the play (Ines Petit, Sjaan Rossi, Elsa Kalifat and Hugo Wacrenier).



Conclusion

This development demonstrates teaching as a way of researching, practising and questioning the scenic space. It involves experimentation, sharing experiences and seeking to delve deeper into theatre, space and performative arts. Performing arts can take place in an appropriate building such as Theatres, and it can also happen in any shelter, wasteland, urban or rural situation, Vitez developed giving two types of theatres, the shelter and the edifice (Vitez, 1978, pp. 24-25). These distinctions have less to do with architectural quality than with a way of using space. The former allows a variety of uses, while the latter permits only some form of production. The edifice states "I am the theatre", while the shelter suggests the transitory quality of performance conventions. A significant example of this was

provided by the Théâtre du Soleil in the late 1960s gave at the Cartoucherie de Vincennes, a former gunpowder warehouse, where they succeeded in inventing and hybridising historical stage sets beneath the huge metallic industrial nave. Following these approaches, considering the ENSAPM design studio “Des Architectures scénographiques” as a laboratory to explore these developments is also a way to engage in critical reflection on the current production of theatre architecture and to be align with the humanistic and environmental approaches. Creating a play or a theatre is a political action, echoing with the instability of the world. As the director and researcher Frédérique Aït Touati, close to Bruno Latour philosophy, demonstrates:

> On stage, in a place that is either constructed from scratch or imagined, the forces of the world are distributed, arranged and negotiated. It is one of the spaces where a society, an era, a worldview — a cosmology — can represent to themselves. This cognitive and modelling power of theatre makes it a place for reflection and experimentation capable of questioning our present, marked by the transformation of our perception of the Earth, but also a historiographical tool — a practice as much as an object of research (Ait Touati, 2024, p. 10).

Figure 9
3D model of proposal “Le monde est un jeu de formes” (Romane Fauzic, Maria Tedesi, Rim Sahli and Rebeca Motta Gomes).

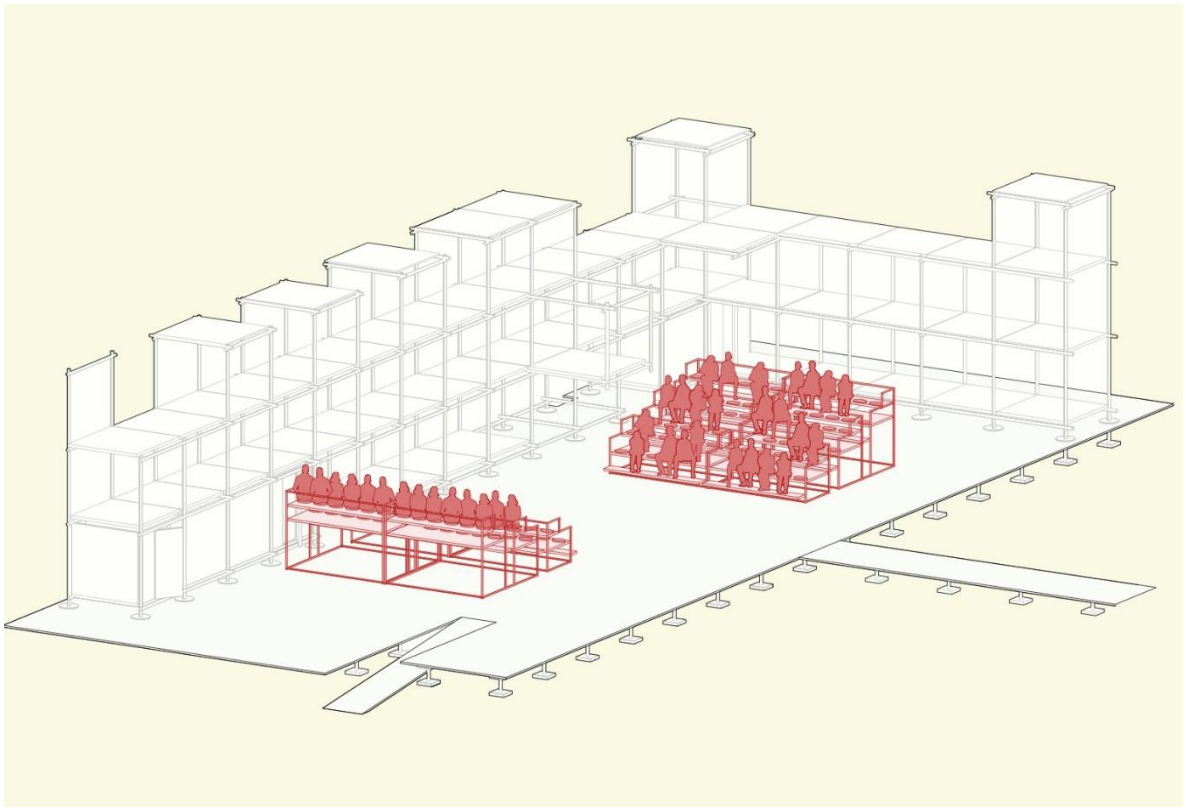


Figure 10
3D model of “Le monde est un jeu de formes” (Romane Fauzic, Maria Tedesi, Rim Sahli and Rebeca Motta Gomes), showing another organization bleachers-stage (amphitheatre).

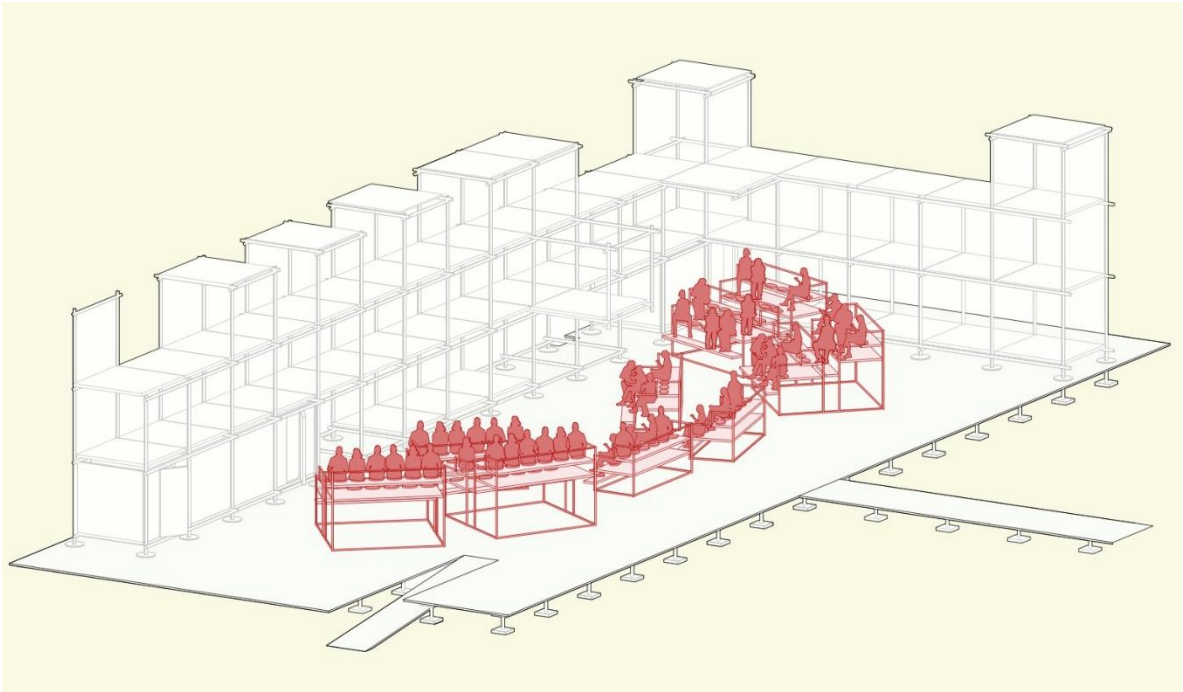
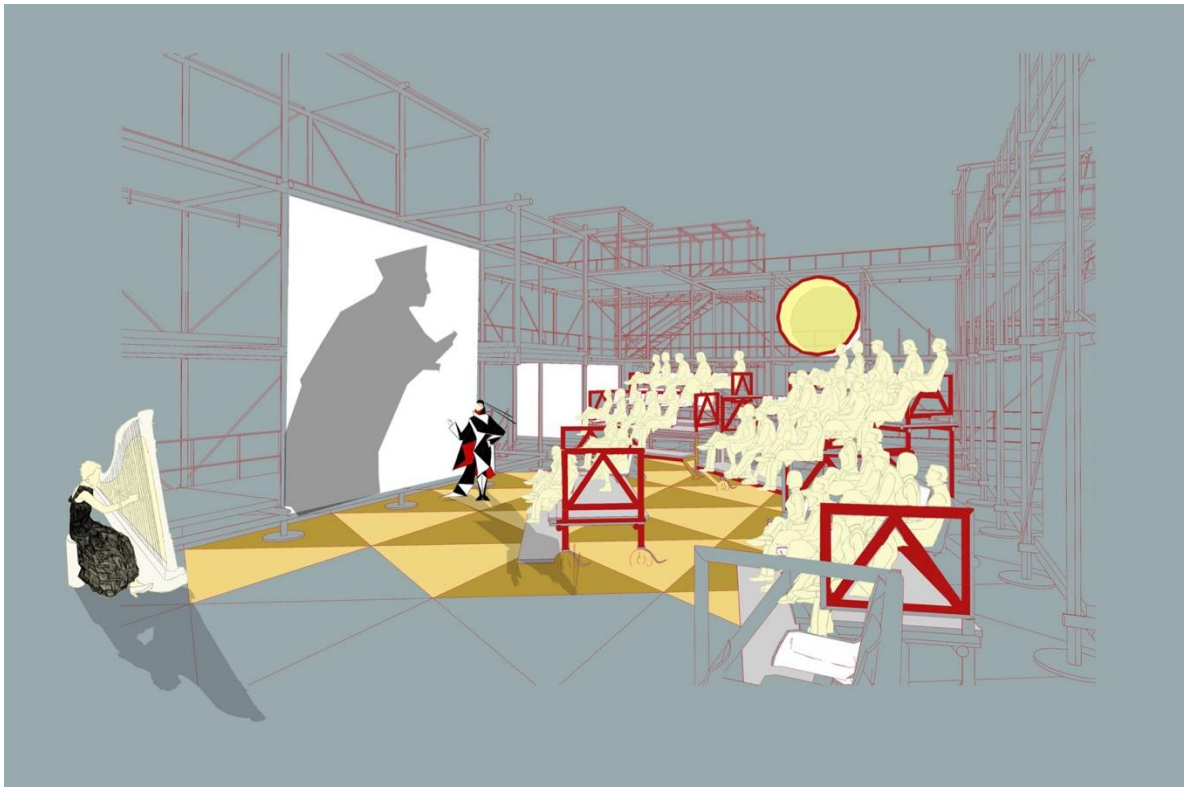


Figure 11
View corresponding to the amphitheatre organization of “Le monde est un jeu de formes” (Romane Fauzic, Maria Tedesi, Rim Sahli and Rebeca Motta Gomes).



All documents (FIGURE) are © ENSA Paris-Malaquais

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Exploring the Spectator / Performer Interface: Architecture as a Catalyst for Interactive Theatre

Edward Nilsson, AIA
Architect and Independent Researcher

Abstract

Using the archetype of the ancient theatre as a springboard, this paper explores whether contemporary theatre architecture can retain that traditional form yet intensify the relationship between spectators and performers. It proposes an alternative approach through a case study of a particular site: Grecian Garden in Yonkers, NY, chosen for its classical motif and symbolic representation of the birthplace of the ancient theatre. Adapting a theatre program to a classical garden overlooking the Hudson River offers an example of how the spectator/performer boundaries of the theatre space can be blurred to reach the goal of a more interactive and energized performance. For the spectators this can occur by entering and exiting the space across the stage, and for the performers by extending the acting area from the stage into the seating area to minimize the traditional fixed line between the two. In addition, by varying the steepness of the seating, or rake angle, the proposed geometry offers a subtle change in floor elevation between adjacent seats that individualizes each seat, and further loosens the uniformity and rigidity of flat rows. The case study example will be compared to a larger site, using the same geometry, to see if the increased scale of performance area can maintain proximity and interaction between spectators and performers.

Keywords: Architecture, interactive performance, spiral theatre.

Exploring the Spectator / Performer Interface

This study explores a reinterpretation of the classical Greek and Roman theatre forms that allows for new kinds of interactions where the audience is no longer a passive observer, but active participants in the unfolding narrative. Physical space can be made an active component of the theatrical experience, and the design of the theatre — its entrance and exit, stage configuration, and seating arrangement — not only frames the visual experience but also shapes the emotional and physical engagement between performers and viewers.

Figure 1
Grecian Garden, Yonkers NY. Source: Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0.

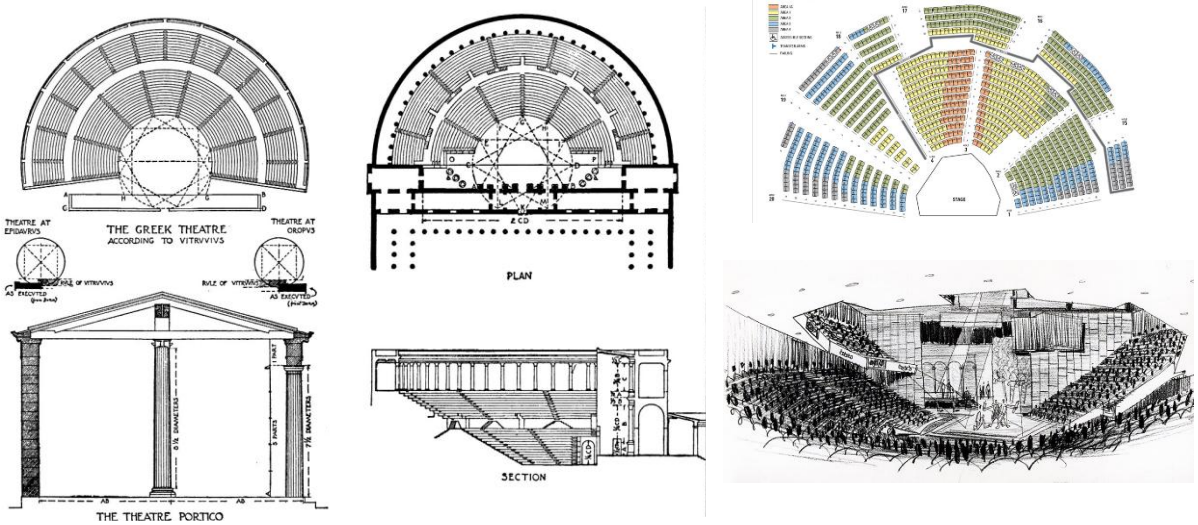


In rethinking the classical model, the Greek and Roman theatre form has a traditional fixed line separating actors and audience, a division of seating into equal pie-shaped sections, and uniform rake angle (steepness of seating rows). This has evolved in the mid-20th century with horizontal and vertical fragmentation of these elements for increased blurring of the line between actors and audience. In both classical and contemporary instances, the seating is typically arranged in a semi-circle around the stage to maximise proximity. This has ensured that the audience could hear the voices and see the facial expression of the actors, thereby feeling connected to the performance, and which emphasises the communal aspect of theatre.

Theatre architecture of today has continued to reinterpret these traditions as it reflects contemporary culture. For example, the 1963 Tyrone Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, Minnesota, designed by architect Rapson, offers more than one rake angle, asymmetric single tier and double-tiered (balcony) seating, and seating areas of varying shapes (Figure 2). Director Guthrie saw in Rapson's balcony design how breaking down rigid symmetries and traditional spatial relationships could enliven the house, while preserving good sight lines, enhancing acoustics, and facilitating actors' aisle entrance and exit (Rapson, Hession & Wright, 1999, p. 148). Guthrie's focus on reinterpretation of the classics found a parallel in reinterpreting the theatre space itself. Using a case study of a particular site, Grecian Garden in Yonkers, New York, (Figure 3) a hypothetical theatre design explores how the architecture itself can influence one's experience of the performance.

Figure 2

The Greek theatre and Roman theatre. Source: 'Vitruvius: The Ten Books on Architecture,' The Contemporary Theatre. Sources: Top; theatre seating plan, Guthrie Theatre; bottom; sketch permission by Toby Rapson.



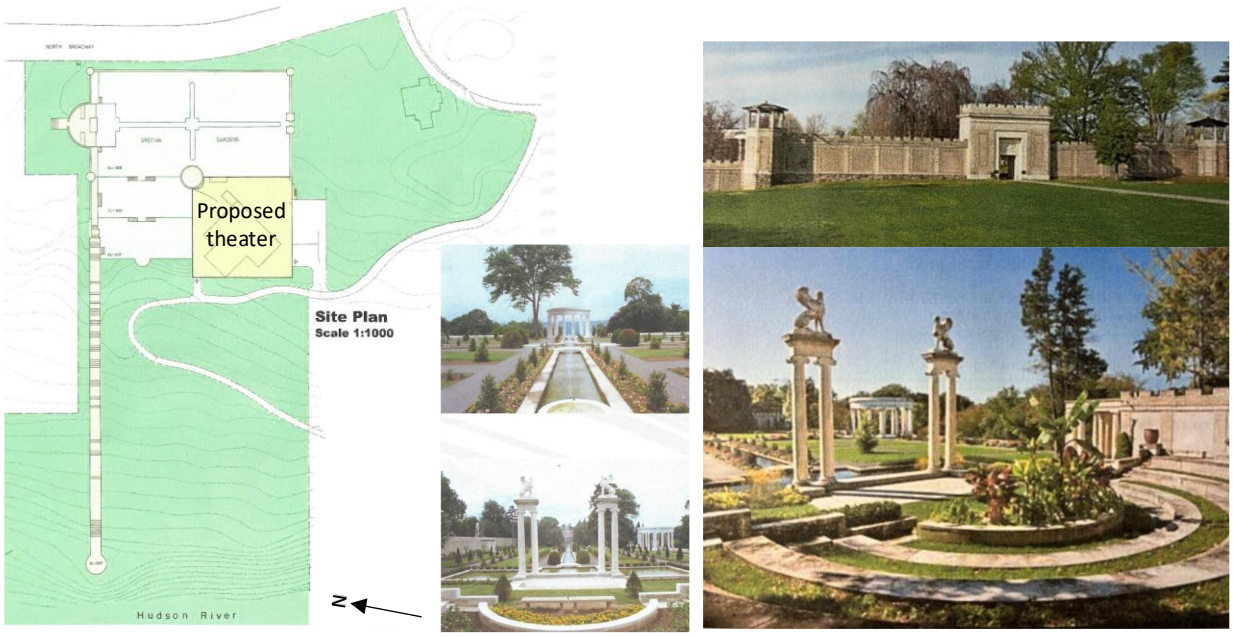
Greek theatre **Roman theatre** **Contemporary theatre**

Tyrone Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis

Architect, Ralph Rapson

Grecian Garden was constructed between 1916 and 1940 in Yonkers, New York, at the estate of Samuel Untermyer, a prominent American lawyer and civic leader. Designed by architect and landscape designer William Bosworth as a classically themed site, it offers a particularly favourable setting for adapting a theatre building to explore how the boundaries of the spectator/performer space can be blurred to reach the goal of a more interactive performance.

Figure 3.
Grecian Garden site plan and photos. Sources: left plan by Edward Nilsson; 2 right photos by Jonathan Wallen; 2 left inset photos from Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0.



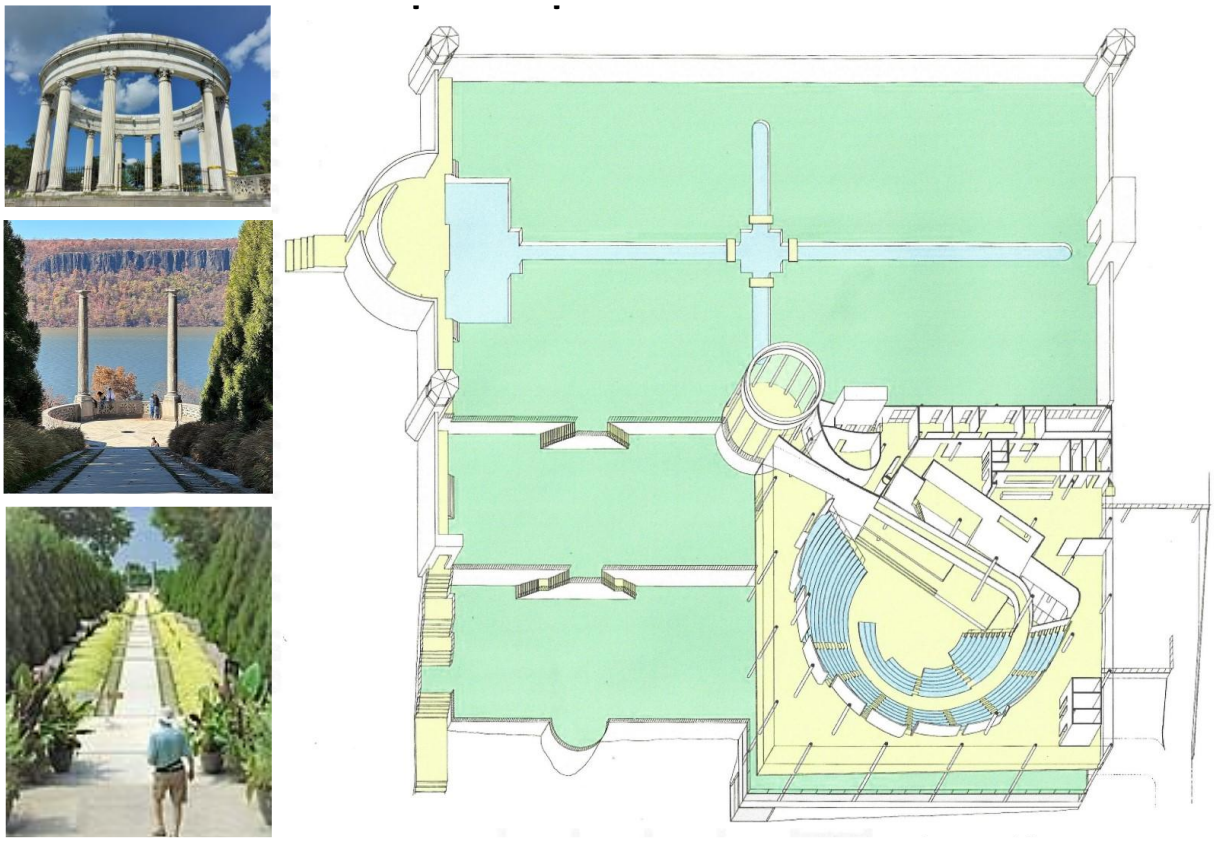
Grecian Garden, as a segment of the overall Untermyer Park, was regularly opened to the public, hosted performances of noted dancers, actors, and musicians, and was considered to be one of the finest gardens in the United States. The Vista is a long descending staircase which runs from the loggia of the terrace down toward the Hudson River where it culminates in the Overlook of the river and the Palisades cliffs beyond (Figure 4).

The walled-in garden is approached through a main gate based on Mycenaean motifs, over which is a carving of Artemis, Greek goddess of the hunt, welcoming all who visit. The garden is divided into four quadrants by a canal and fountain system, with the north-south canal axis terminating at a small open-air amphitheatre, and the east-west canal terminating at the “Temple of the Sky,” a tempietto made up of a crown of Corinthian columns topped by an entablature. Its intricate mosaic floor features the head of Medusa, the winged demon in Greek mythology. The circular colonnade draws one towards it revealing the main entrance portal to the theatre.

Upon entering through the circular colonnade and lobby, spectators approach the performance space by means of a ramp descending across the open stagehouse, then curving down through the seating area before merging with the orchestra/stage floor below. Similarly, the performers in the orchestra can extend the acting area from the stage up the curved ramp into the seating area and upper stagehouse to signify a shared theatre space with the audience. As the entrance ramp spirals down two levels, the intermission gallery behind the seating echoes the ramp in descending along the window-wall to the outdoor terrace below (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Proposed spiral theatre axonometric drawing by Edward Nilsson with 3-photos (from top left) 'Temple of the Sky' by Lionel Martinez, 'Lookout' by Magpieturtle, and 'Vista' by Beyond My Ken, Source: Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0.

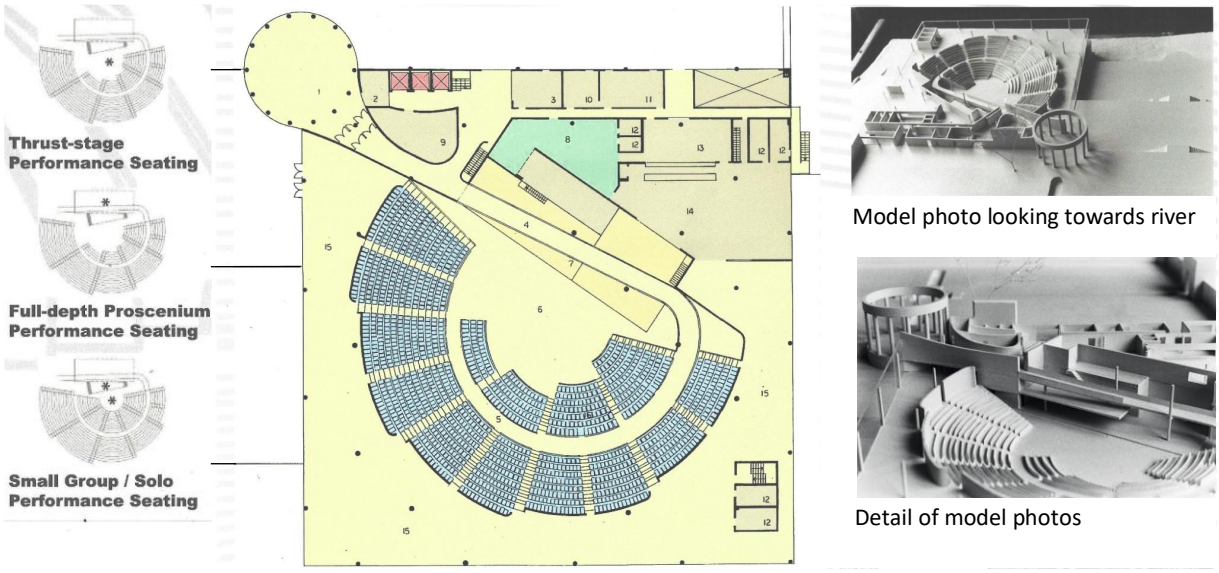


Each of the five pie-shaped seating sections fan out by several rows along their common edge, creating a stepped pattern along the perimeter of the main performance area (see Figures 4 and 5). This shifting suggests movement of the seating sections by opening the lower corners of each section to additional angular sightlines. The resulting stepped pattern diffuses the traditional fixed line, or "fourth wall", between the performer and the spectator. While the U-shaped forms of both the ancient and contemporary theatres are broadly similar, a further variation in the contemporary theatres is in modifying the rake angle of its seating sections. This feature, found also at the Guthrie Theatre mentioned above, offers shallower or steeper sightlines as the spectator might prefer, and modestly increases the asymmetry of the interior space.

The parallel curved rows of seating all focus downward toward the orchestra/stage area where the principal action takes place. When the rake angle of seating is gradually increased across the theatre, the floor of each row slopes gently sideways as well. In such arrangement, every seat is differentiated vertically from neighbouring seats — on right and left side, and in front and back row.

Figure 5

Types of performances (left), floor plan, and model photos. Source: Edward Nilsson.



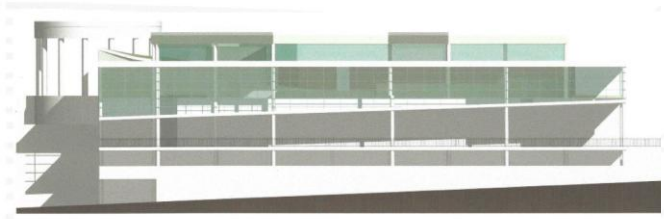
For a thrust-stage format, the stagehouse opposite the seating area may be screened off, as needed, for the duration of the performance (Figure 5). Alternatively, as a proscenium space the stagehouse can function with a traditional curtain, or even left exposed in its realistic setting. Smaller group or solo performances can adjust the scale and closeness of the audience to the performance area by additional seating in the orchestra area.

Using movement as a theatrical device, the ramp entrance offers an overview of the entire seating area, allowing the spectators, when seated, to imagine themselves where they were a moment ago as part of the backdrop to the stage. Both the ramp, coiling through the seating area, and the intermission gallery curving gently down to the outdoor terrace, enhance the perception of spiral movement as an activator of space in creating theatrical meaning (Figure 6).

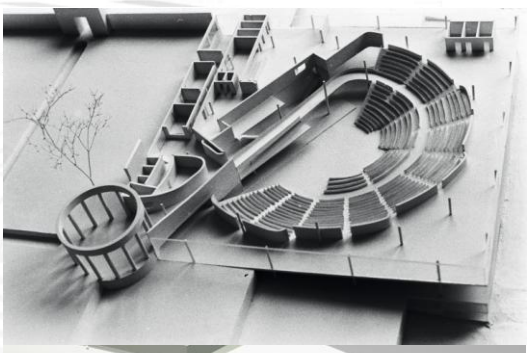
Applying the spiral theatre concept to an open-air venue is a 2003 proposal for the World Trade Center (WTC) Memorial Park in New York City. The Grecian Garden theatre's seating capacity of 1,440 is doubled in the Memorial Park theatre's nearly 3,000 seats, however it also doubles the maximum sight line distance to the centre of the thrust stage from 58 feet to approximately 120 feet. At such distance, it would likely compromise the visual intimacy of a play without video or audio enhancements, such would be found in large venue musical performances.

Figure 6

Exterior elevation, interior views of theatre, and model photo. Source: Edward Nilsson.



Elevation of the sloping intermission space





View of spectator/performer space.



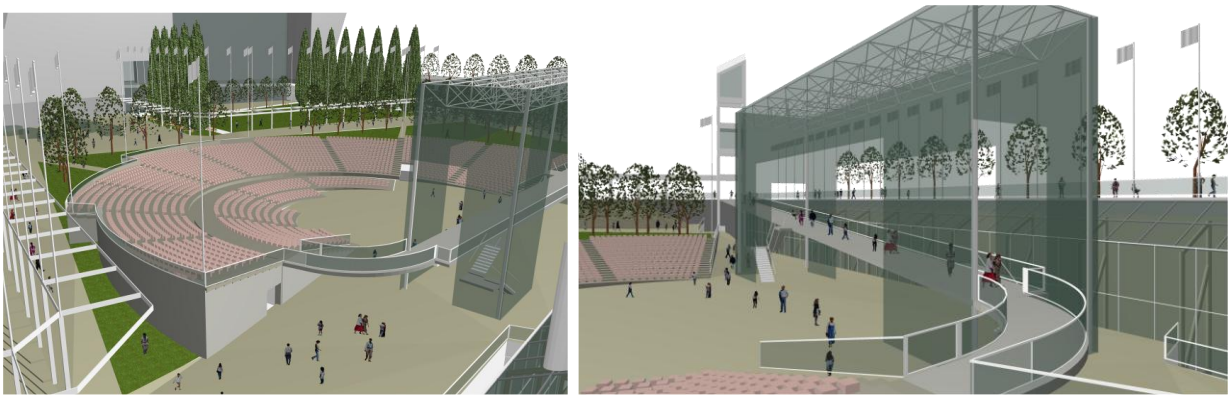
View of ramp, sloped seating, and model above.

Similar to the Grecian Garden, access to the Memorial Park theatre is via a ramp through a symbolic stagehouse down to the seating and orchestra/stage area and a backdrop view of the 300-foot surviving WTC foundation wall that held back the pressure of the nearby Hudson River (Figure 7). Each seat of the theatre would be differentiated further with a name of a person who died in the 9/11 attack. As noted below in one of the commentaries after 9/11, theatre architecture can add meaning to the event:

> Among the very highest honors awarded to an (ancient) Athenian citizen was the right to have his or her name inscribed upon a seat in the city's theatre. Politicians, generals, and others of distinction were granted the privilege by which generations that followed could read and remember the names of those who had contributed so mightily to their community. Let those who perished communally…be honored through a never-ending chorus of the living. A theatre filled with exhilarated and inspired, entertained and contemplative Americans encircled in one of the oldest architectural forms given to us by those who invented democracy itself. (Connelly, 2002).

Figure 7

Proposal for World Trade Center Memorial Park, Source: Edward Nilsson.

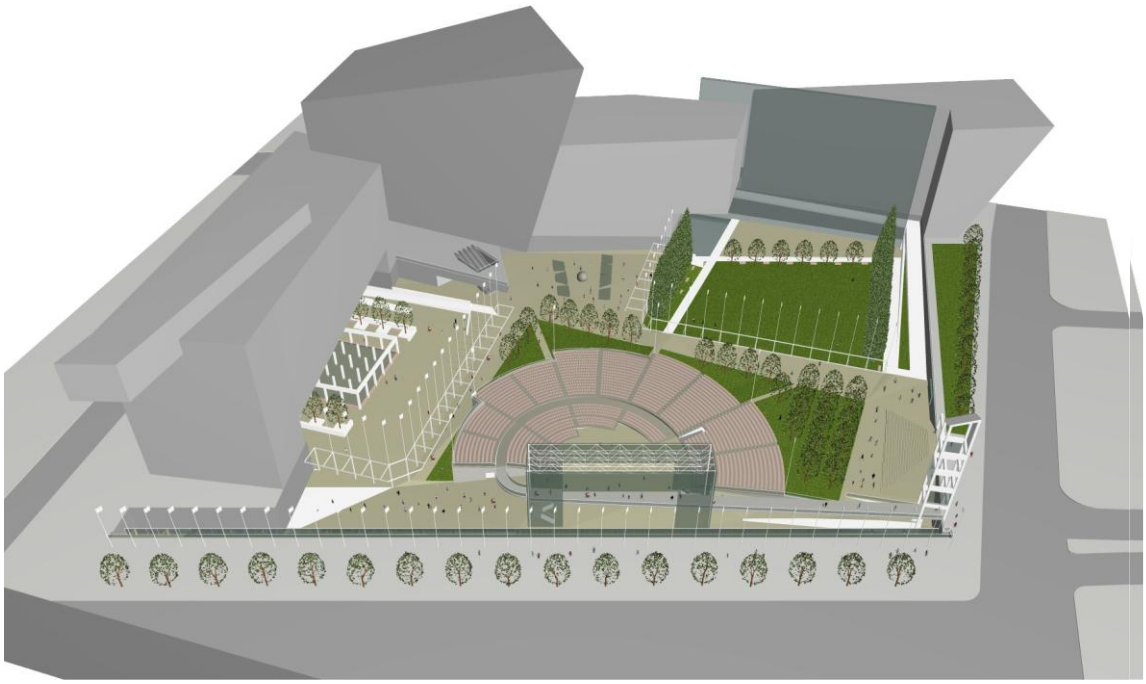


Ramp entrance through stagehouse to seating area

Proscenium and stagehouse

Figure 8

Proposal for World Trade Center Memorial Park, Source: Edwa Nilsson.



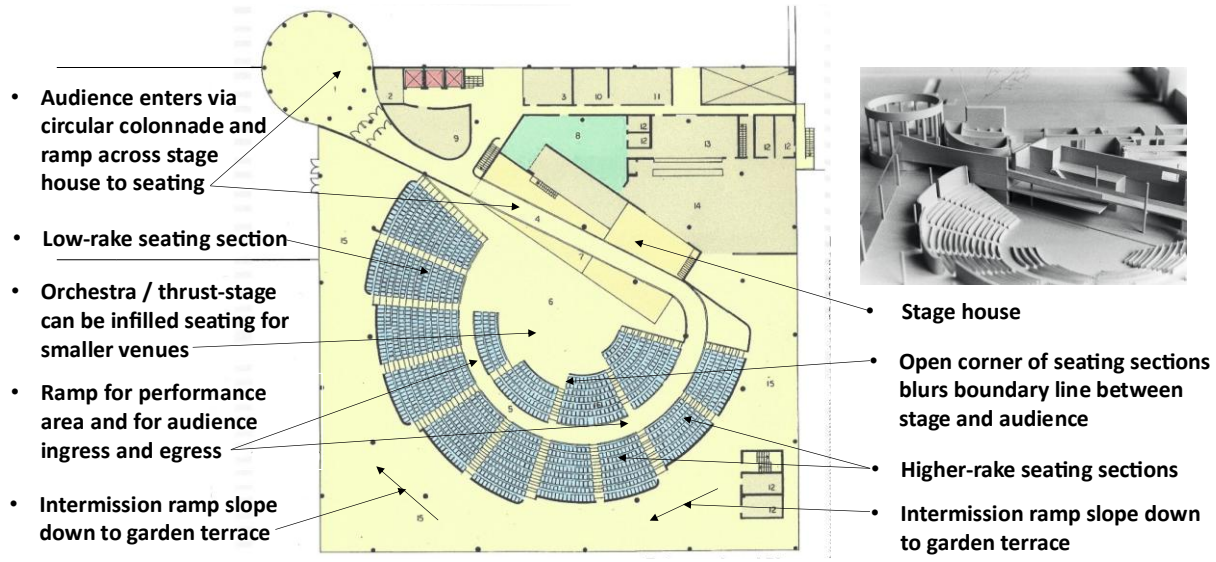
Summary

The architectural features in the Grecian Garden and World Trade Center Memorial Park proposals aim at intensifying the relationship between spectators and performers through use of the following elements:

- Spectators enter and exit the theatre via ramp through the stagehouse enroute to their seat.
- Extension of the acting space into the audience area via spiral ramp.
- Open corner of the seating sections to blur the fixed boundary line, or 'fourth wall.'
- Individualised seating through multi-directional sloping of floor.
- Varied rake-angle of the seating sections to differentiate sightlines and connectedness to the performance area.

Figure 9

Architectural elements to encourage interactive performance. Source: Edward Nilsson.



The proposed project exemplifies implied movement of people and architectural elements to provide a more dynamic setting for performances. Theatre is not just a performance but also a spatial experience. By rethinking classical forms and adapting them to contemporary architectural languages it is possible to create theatres that do more than house performances — they become part of the performance itself. The proposed Spiral Theatre at the Grecian Garden exemplifies how architecture can act as a catalyst for interactive theatre, activate space, and engage audience as active co-creators of the theatre experience. Ultimately, these proposals demonstrate that in retaining the recognizable form of theatre architecture, subtle manipulations of geometry and circulation can transform the spectator into an active participant in performance.

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New Technologies Reshaping the Performative Space: The site-specific set and the action props

Bokovou Paraskevi
Film department, Aristotle University, Thessaloniki, Greece

Abstract

Since the invention of film, emerging new technologies have been gradually taking over the stage and the performative space, reshaping the art of scenography. Performances nowadays are mostly participatory, and the spectators are directed via technological means, or, in interactive narratives, are the manipulators of the plot. Many site-specific performances become virtual and the spectators are presented with technological action props that act like catalysts for the performance. To support the arguments above, a series of examples will be presented in four categories of performances that use site-specific sets and technological action props. One axis is based on the technological means, and another on the space; real or virtual.

Visual directions are given on screen or via sound while the spectator is on the street of a city. For example, audio headsets provide the narration of the experience while the spectator becomes the performer. A virtual reality (VR) headset may even transport the spectator to another environment, for which the real set design may be a match, or no. A performance can now be a VR interactive experience: the spectator may even be at his/her place, anywhere with an internet connection, watching a tele-performance, having an experience not unlike a cinematic one.

There are many emerging new technologies that could be used for performance: the question is which to use and why. What more does this specific technology offer to the spectator? Does a performance become an experience just because it incorporates new technologies? How does technology influence the performative space and its scenography? New perspectives, extra information, new experiences, accessibility to all no matter the space and time: these are some of the reasons why performances pair well with new technologies.

Keywords: new technologies, performative space, scenography, site-specific, virtual reality

The Emerging New Technologies Take Over the Stage

Emerging new technologies have been taking over the stage and the performative space for over a century, profoundly influencing the arts and, in particular, scenography as they tend to invade the space and become visible elements of the set.

Since the first photograph was taken in 1816, photography has challenged painters to rethink how landscapes and nature are represented. Similarly, the invention of artificial light created a new artistic role in theatre. In 1895 a film was presented at the Grand Café in Paris as a spectacle, and since then, films have continued to enter theatres either as standalone performances or integrated into the set design and narrative (Santorinaios et al., 2015). Notable examples include documentary theatre, Erwin Piscator's political theatre (Piscator & Palmier, 1983) and Josef Svoboda's multimedia experiments at Laterna Magika (Svoboda, 1993). The advent of synchronised sound in 1927, exemplified by Alan Crosland's *The Jazz Singer*, transformed storytelling by shifting the focus from the written word to the spoken word. Sound later entered theatre in the form of prerecorded effects, synchronised with the on-stage action. The invention of television in 1920 led to dramatic changes in cinema and theatre, fostering the rise of media-oriented practices. Peter Sellars and R. E. Jones pioneered approaches that eventually gave rise to video art, which was quickly succeeded by the transformative impact of computers, the internet, and social media. More recently, virtual reality headsets have merged physical and digital environments, to create immersive experiences for audiences accustomed to multiple choices, simultaneous actions and constant flow of information.

This type of spectator expects more from contemporary spectacles; as a result, performances nowadays are participatory, and innovative, with unexpected twists, and the use of different means and spaces. In interactive narratives, spectators may even manipulate the plot by making artistic choices that shape their experience. Many site-specific performances become virtual, or need technology as an "action prop" such as a mobile phone, to function like a catalyst for the existence of the performance.[64]

This paper presents a series of examples of performances in which performative spaces are site-specific and non-traditional; spectators take on the role of performers or co-creators; technological devices function as action props; and the boundary between virtual and physical realities becomes blurred. These examples are separated in four categories of

[64] The term "action prop" is borrowed from the film industry as in cinema anything used on a set is a prop, but an action prop is indicated in the script and without it the shooting would not be possible; which is to say that the technological means indicated in this paper are only those with a meaningful role for the performance.

performances that use site-specific sets and technological action props, with one axis focusing on technological interventions and the other on the transformative nature of the set.

Performance and (Mobile) Phones

The first category comprises performances that utilise mobile phones or other devices. This technology has become deeply embedded in everyday life, and is changing and reshaping so profoundly that its integration into interactive performances was almost inevitable.

Figure 1
Poster for the tele-performance Esprit poétique *(2020), by Julien Daillère. (Source:* https://www.julien-daillere.com/fr/portfolio/au-telephone/*).*



In this type of performance, visual directions appear on the screen, or sound instructions are provided to guide spectators as they move through the streets of a city, public spaces, or even their own homes. One tele-performance created by Julien Daillère during the quarantine of covid-19, *Esprit poétique,* is described as “apartment theatre audioguided” (Daillère, 2020). The spectator can either remain in their own location, or move to a designated site. They can choose to become performers themselves, interacting with others while following direct audio instructions, or simply observe and assist if they are present at the performance site.

This freedom of space enables anyone, regardless of geographic location, to participate in this exceptional experience facilitated by a technological device.

Performance and Audio Headsets

In this category, site-specific performances are outlined for the audience through the use of audio headsets. These are usually handed out before the performance begins, and the spectators are invited to walk along a designated route while listening to audio directions and/or narration.

A very distinct example is that of the German collective Rimini Protokoll, which is renowned for creating interactive digital site-specific performances in various cities. One of those performances was *Remote Thessaloniki*, which was presented in Thessaloniki, in 2021. During the performance the audience was instructed by a cybernetic voice to where to go, what to do and even what or whom to observe. There were no traditional performers: passersby in the city and the audience members themselves became the performers. The narration was dystopian in tone and context, and challenged the participants' perspectives, transforming the once-familiar urban environment into a "remote" space as envisioned by the creators.

This "traveling" performance, adaptable to different cities, enables audiences from different countries to experience a similar performance. Yet, each iteration remains unique, as the site-specific set shapes the visual environment and influences the directions provided.

Figure 2
Photography by Tasos Thomoglou of the performance Remote Thessaloniki *(2021)*, *by Rimini Protokoll.*



Performance and 3D VR Headsets

Performance spaces are no longer limited to traditional theatres: any space can be used for a performance. Museums, streets, and other public spaces have long been transformed into performative environments. With the advent of new technologies, such as 3D virtual reality (VR) headsets, virtual spaces are now integrated into these performances as well.

VR and the Real Environment

In this category, the technological action prop is a 3D VR headset that provides visual and audio information, combining virtual and live narration. As the spectators enter an environment that resembles or complements the virtual one, they become performers alongside the actual performers.

One example is the interactive VR experience *White Dwarf*, by Giolanda Markopoulou in which the participants enter in small groups, and have a collective experience. They are welcomed into a space where they work with the performers and participate in a “science experiment” (Markopoulou, 2022, URL). Spectators coexist and explore the space, before putting on the headset thus experiencing the virtual reality individually.

Figure 3
Photography of the interactive VR experience White Dwarf *(2022), by Giolanda Markopoulou. (Source: https://www.onassis.org/initiatives/onassis-air/fellowships/yolanda-markopoulou-white-dwarf)*.



Another example is the *Terra Nova* spectacle, by Crew where each spectator wears a virtual reality headset and is guided through the space by performers. The physical set is carefully designed to align with the virtual environment, enhancing and amplifying the participants' immersive experience.

Figure 4
Photography of the spectacle Terra Nova *(2011), by Crew. (Source: https://crew.brussels/en/productions/terra-nova).*

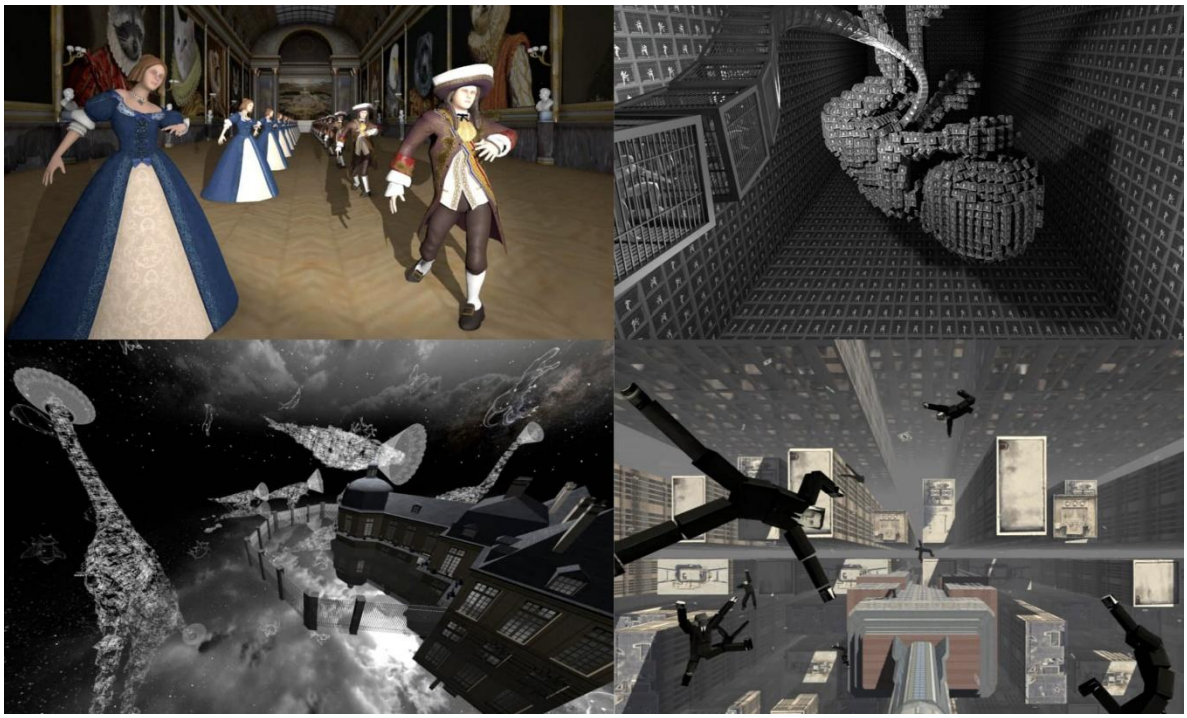


VR Exclusively in the Virtual World

An increasing number of artists are turning to the virtual world where anything is possible. They are creating virtual performances that offer the spectator a unique experience. In these cases, one or more spectators may enter a space designed to accommodate them, either seated or standing, and are equipped with the necessary VR gear.

A notable example is the VR interactive installation *The Eye and I*, by Jean-Michel Jarre and Hsin-Chien Huang, which took place in a space covered in black curtains and provided no information other than details of the technological equipment and seating. Although two spectators could enter simultaneously, they did not interact with each other during the performance. It is referred to as a performance because spectators assume the role of performer within the virtual environment, making choices that affect the narrative, plot, and duration of their experience.

Figure 5
Screenshots from video of the VR interactive installation The eye and I *(2023), by Jean-Michel Jarre and Hsin-Chien Huang. (Source: https://www.filmfestival.gr/en/event-tdf/event/1087).*



Performance and Laptops-Projections

Theatre and cinema have been crossing roads ever since the latter was invented. Advances in video, projection, and digital technologies are now being used creatively, pushing the boundaries of performance and audience engagement.

The Spectator Anywhere with an Internet Connection

In the first subcategory, the action prop is a laptop or computer. Spectators can participate from anywhere in the world with an internet connection, often experiencing performances in fully virtual environments.

One example is the “game-play/play-game” (Shaw, 2020) *The Seagull on the Sims 4* (2020), by Celine Song an artist who was due to stage *The Seagull* (1895), by Anton Chekhov. However, due to the lockdown of the global pandemic, the project had to be adapted. Using the Sims 4 game, with audio and a live chat available for everyone to participate, she recreated this well-known play via a game engine. Spectators enter the game as avatars and become co-creators during pre-production (a one-hour casting session), rehearsal, and the five-hour performance itself. Additionally, several well-known writers made live phone calls and shared their opinions, further enriching the interactive experience.

Figure 6
Screenshot from the game-play/play-game The Seagull on the Sims 4 *(2020), by Celine Song. (Source: https://www.vulture.com/2020/11/the-best-online-staging-of-chekhovs-seagull-is-in-the-sims.html).*



The Spectator Present in a Space with a Filmed Projection

In this case, the action prop is the projector. Cinema and theatre are entangled in this cinematic kind of performance.

Spectators may be situated in a space that mirrors or complements the projected environment, as in *The 7 Deaths of Antona* (2022) by Bijoux de Kant[65], or in a more conventional viewing setup, as in Dimitris Papaioannou's video installation *Inside* (2024).[66] As in cinema, spectators primarily assume the role of observers, but the experience is different in that it links the visual with their environment. "Not a stage performance, not either a film. Theatre made to be projected on screen" (Bijoux de Kant, 2022) highlights the distinctive nature of this category.

These projection-based performances extend the continuum of digitally mediated theatre, moving from fully remote participation to shared, physically present experiences.

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[65] Bijoux de Kant. (2022). The 7 deaths of Antona [Performance]. Onassis Foundation https://www.onassis.org/whats-on/the-7-deaths-of-antona-bijoux-de-kant

[66] Papaioannou, D. (2024). Inside [Performance]. Thessaloniki Documentary Festival. https://www.filmfestival.gr/en/event-tdf/event/1086

Figure 7

Photography by Michalakis Dimitris of The 7 deaths of Antona *(2022), by Bijoux de Kant.* (*Source:* https://www.onassis.org/whats-on/the-7-deaths-of-antona-bijoux-de-kant).



Figure 8

Photography of the video installation and backstage documentary Inside *(2024), by Dimitris Papaioannou. (Source: https://www.filmfestival.gr/en/event-tdf/event/1086)*



In this category, a LED screen can serve as the technological action prop, as in the performance *I have no name* (2025), by El Conde de Torrefiel[67] which pushes the boundaries even further. With no visual imagery beyond subtitles displayed on what may or

[67] El Conde de Torrefiel. (2025). I have no name [Performance]. National Theatre of Northern Greece. https://www.ntng.gr/default.aspx?lang=el-GR&page=91&newsid=5243

may not match the spoken audio narration, spectators sit or stand in an outside landscape and watch a technological performance with no human presence and no performer other than the occasional passer-by. Performances using LED screens emphasize how digital media can redefine spectatorship even in the absence of live performers.

Figure 9

Photography by Bokovou Paraskevi from the word performance I have no name *(2025), by El Conde de Torrefiel. (Source: https://www.ntng.gr/default.aspx?lang=el-GR&page=91&newsid=5243)*



Conclusion

Technology has expanded the possibilities of performance, transforming any space — physical or virtual — into a stage. Contemporary artists must consider not only how they use new tools, but what these technologies contribute to spectatorship: a new perspective, additional information, or a novel experience. VR, projections, mobile devices, and LED screens blur the lines between observer and performer, cinema and theatre, and the real and the virtual, challenging traditional definitions of performance. Ultimately, technological interventions are not merely instruments: they reshape the very nature of theatrical experience, pointing towards a future in which creativity and innovation coexist across digital and physical realms.

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44

Where do I Play my Body? A Round Trip Between Virtual Stages and Real-World Arenas

Alessandro Di Egidio
Università degli Studi di Roma “La Sapienza”

Abstract

In 1991, Laurel published the book *Computers as Theatre*, positing that to enhance the user experience, computers should engage users dramatically, stimulating both thoughts and emotions. Thirty years later, the computer and the world it opens up have increasingly become the stage for our actions and lives. Conversely, the tangible and concrete world is progressively losing its role as the stage where our stories unfold.

Rather than complementing the real dimension with the virtual, a substitution is taking place. The virtual, welcoming and tailored to the user, is supplanting the real world, which appears harsh and indifferent to human goals. In the virtual realm, everything seems possible and accessible, whereas in the real world, processes are more arduous and complex.

This contribution aims to critically examine this trajectory. By contrasting the virtual experience offered in Iñárritu's *CARNE y ARENA (Virtually Present, Physically Invisible)* with the experiential physicality of the *Digital Water Pavilion* by Carlo Ratti Associati and the performance *My body, the stones: Accademia sensitiva/somatica* by choreographer Di Pietro, it seeks to highlight the paradox of considering the virtual as a realm of infinite possibilities. In truth, the virtual is inherently bounded by the algorithms that dictate its limits and usability.

In Di Pietro's performance, the body, through its interaction with the surrounding environment, discovers infinite possibilities, invents scenarios, deconstructs boundaries, and proposes new codes. It transcends the confines of the real while remaining rooted within it. The real world, if reimagined as a stage, stimulates actions and imagination, fostering the creation of new possibilities. It transforms the body into the true protagonist of reality, engaging in a vibrant and tangible participation that goes beyond mere appearance.

Keywords: digital-physical space, coding, body, sensorial experience, affordances

In-Active Performing

The reflections in this article are the result of an in-depth study carried out within my doctoral dissertation *"PERFORMING SPACES. From the progressive dehumanization of architecture to the reactivation of the contemporary anesthetized space."* The research aims to understand which direction architecture should take in order to once again become an active stage for human action. The recognised tendency toward the anonymisation and sterilisation of activities possible within space is traced back to the radical advent of the digital realm in everyday contemporary life. Of course, it is not only the computer revolution that has caused a numbness of bodies in space — as Richard Sennett (1996) effectively explains in *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization* — yet the increasing familiarity with worlds constructed within devices, and above all the immaterial nature of those worlds, plays a crucial role in redefining the perception and experience of physical places.

The computer is, in fact, increasingly altering the very concept of interaction. In the early 1990s, much of the effort of programmers was directed toward replicating the stimuli and social conditions through which humanity interacted in physical reality (Laurel, 1991). The last decade of the 20th century was marked by the intention to create a *mirror world* (Gelernter, 1991), a virtual reproduction of the real-world experience: a dimension in which it would be "possible to go out into the square without taking off one 's pyjamas" (Gelernter, 1991, p. 23), where simply interacting with icons on a screen would be enough to affect the external world — gradually replaced by its imitation within software (Gelernter, 1991, p. 5). In a volume intended to suggest to architecture how to integrate electronic instances into physical matter, McCullough (2005) observes how computer developers, recognising the social-infrastructure role information technology was assuming, were intent on reconstructing the dynamics of the physical world: paying particular attention to the way space shaped and influenced activities and social compositions (McCullough, 2005, p. 63).

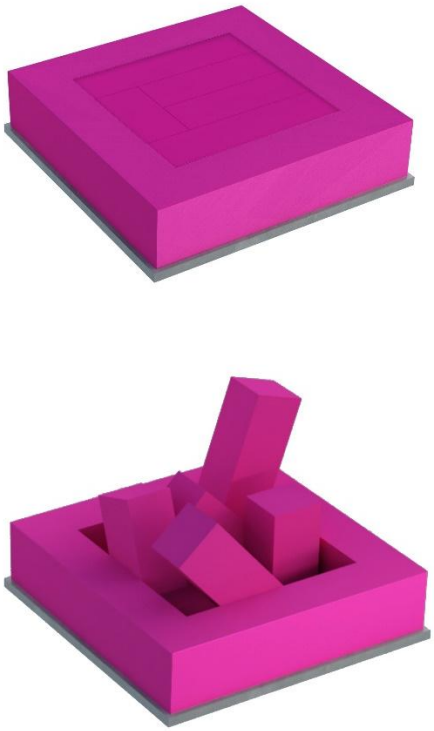
It took only thirty years to make the efforts of computer science effective; in parallel with the pervasive spread of ubiquitous computing,[68] the space of action has undergone a significant relocation into the sphere of the virtual. The experimental universe of *Second Life* has branched out into numerous digital environments, among which the *Metaverse* proposed by Facebook stands out.[69] It is interesting to note how these worlds become attractive precisely because of the possibility they offer of overcoming the physical limits of space: in the virtual dimension the body is freed from real constraints, it can fly, teleport, move from micro to macro scale, explore invisible systems, etc. This corresponds to a

[68] The possibility of accessing and connecting to the virtual sphere seamlessly

[69] It is interesting that Zuckerberg's holding company, which includes the major platforms (WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook), has been renamed Meta.

semantic inversion of what is understood as animated matter and inert matter. The distinction goes back to Spinoza (*materia animata. materia inerte*): the philosopher used it to draw attention to the physical characteristics of the world, their mutability, their capacity to generate interaction, to change through contact. The rise of the virtual world, made of pre-programmed artificial matter, as the dynamic one, on the one hand overshadows the sensitive characteristics of the real world, while on the other reduces human experience to the possibilities inscribed in the code from which it is generated.

Figure 1
Sofa rumble by Gianni Pettena. (3d model by the Author).



A Matter of Code

It is precisely around the concept of *code* that the paradox of virtual space emerges, considered as a dimension of “endless possibilities” (Di Egidio, 2025, p. 6). To properly understand this distinction, it is important to recall Gibson's (1986) theory of affordances, coined by the psychologist in the mid-20th century. Affordance is the ability to perceive information in space, the ability to grasp the intrinsic possibilities of an object or environment; translated into terms of code, it is the ability to decode environmental information. As Duchamp demonstrated disruptively in the 1920s, a urinal can be a fountain. A world apparently inert and with an already-assigned symbolism contains, for those who know how to see them, infinite possibilities of interpretation and use. The choreographer Halprin

demonstrates this when she seeks out all the possible uses and dynamics of a bicycle, just as Pettena — an exponent of Italian Situationism — transforms it into an object: in his project *Sofa Rumble* (Figure 1) lies the provocative possibility of interpreting space according to one's own will or need.

From the definition of *code,* one understands how the word signifies the passage of information from one form to another, from one system of rules to another. This implies an interpretability and a constant possibility of reformulating the semantic sphere of environmental characteristics. Nevertheless, *code* is also one of the cornerstones of computer science, where it assumes the meaning of the skeleton of the virtual environment: behind every web page or 3D model — habitable environments in increasingly familiar and varied forms — there lies a data source and a compositional structure. In other words, the virtual environment is the expression of a code, this time hidden and not directly interactable. Or rather, interaction with elements is permitted only in the way the system allows. Whether broad or narrowly functional, this always reveals the limit of being unable to go beyond what is unprogrammed. In a certain sense, one could say that the distinction between the physical and the virtual world lies in the difference between *de-coding* and *en-coding.*

Translating this split into the sphere of theatrical action, of the performativity of places, two attitudes emerge, set in contrast within the article. When action takes place in a purely virtual context, the participant acts within a simulation whose outcome they cannot change: they are immersed in a dimension they undergo, while believing they inhabit and transform it. A telling example is Iñárritu 's installation *Carne y Arena (Virtually Present, Physically Invisible).* With this work, the famous Mexican director seeks to break the contemplative-only relationship of participation with cinema. He wants to insert the spectator directly into the context, lifting them from their seat and immersing them in a virtual reality made believable through its physical staging: in *Carne y Arena (Virtually Present, Physically Invisible),* those who experience the painful events through the VR headset walk barefoot on sand and are buffeted by gusts of wind. The projection of the Mexican desert, where a group of migrants approaches the U.S. border, is heightened by the contact with dunes spread across the floor and by the air blown from fans integrated into the walls. The spectator's body disappears from view — the headset does not even recognise the hands. When the sound of a border patrol helicopter descends into the desert, the wind in the room stirs the sand beneath the spectator's feet; when armed officers begin firing at the group of migrants, the spectator, completely absorbed in the action, also begins to flee, feeling the desert tangibly underfoot. Yet, while the bullets never strike them, they cannot suggest or do anything to save their traveling companions, who perish before their terrified eyes. The action unfolds despite them; the course of events remains predetermined. While Iñárritu's work perfectly conveys the condition of powerlessness one would feel in such a real-world

situation, it also exemplifies the dynamics of immersive action: in a virtual context, actions are pre-programmed; one cannot go beyond the limits of the code.[70]

By contrast, action in the physical context can rely on a code in constant mutation, depending on the inclinations of the subject who perceives it. The article presents the case of the *Digital Water Pavilion* designed by Carlo Ratti Associati in 2008 for the Zaragoza Expo (Figure 2). This example was chosen because it integrates a technological code into the physical dimension: the pavilion consists simply of a roof around whose perimeter a home-automation system is installed that recognises people. Sensor detection allows the interruption of the water flow cascading from the edges of the roof, forming four sensory, mutable facades and permitting people to enter the illusory parallelepiped. The waterfall opens to create a passage for the detected person. It did not take long for people to start challenging the mechanism, interpreting and interacting with the code playfully: soon the pavilion enlivened the surrounding space, prompting people to run in and out, amused by the bet, “will I get wet or not?” The wall, born as an elegant water curtain, was recoded into a playful mechanism through interaction with space. Almost ironically, the mechanism one day suffered a short circuit, causing the water flow to break its programmed rules and activate randomly — leading people to interact even more actively with the space.

Reading the environmental characteristics also underpins the *Accademia Sensitiva Somatica* workshop proposed by choreographer Lucia Di Pietro. Located within historic and artistic sites — today viewed primarily as heritage to be preserved and minimally interacted with — the workshop guides participants into gradually contacting the elements of space (Figure 3). Starting as paired dynamics, each participant within three minutes, must ask the other to perform specific actions or gestures, the environment itself becomes the protagonist of these requests. The proposal “blindfold me and assist me” is common: in its execution, the surrounding walls become the guide of movement, their structure a sensory labyrinth for the hand moving in darkness; uneven floors prompt requests to be dragged, while the textures of encrusted colours on pavements become invisible maps upon which to move. The inert — and protected — matter of the physical place, to which participants had been essentially insensitive before the workshop, becomes animated matter, suggesting actions. As a reification of the theory of affordances, the workshop turns space into a substance full of information to decode, semantic spheres to reinvent, and possibilities to actualise. The old roof of an Etruscan house, previously just a display material, becomes the refuge in which to seek out the echo of one’s own voice while being enveloped by shadow and coolness.

[70] The Matrix film saga played precisely on the exceptional ability to understand and manipulate the virtual code governing the unaware lives of humans embedded within the system

Figure 2
Digital Water Pavillon by Carlo Ratti as an elegant and playful device. (Courtesy of Ramak Fazel).



Conclusion

If in virtual space — towards which humanity rushes ever more precipitously amid digital transitions and device dependencies — action is permitted only as the code allows, in physical space — considered less dynamic and interactive compared to its electronic counterpart — action can be endlessly reinvented: through reading environmental stimuli and through the depth of an experience that includes not only vision but also fully engages the body and the senses. It is therefore necessary to find a balanced way of integrating the technological revolution into the performativity of places. The question *Where do I play my body?* is crucial in this paradigm shift. The body is in fact a central element, since it can directly perceive the differences: in the virtual world, it is projected into a simulation in which it can only act according to the lexicon of the program, inhabiting a reality that is sensory insofar as it can inscribe sensations into a code. The cognitive sphere of the physical world is reduced to what can be described; likewise, actions are reduced to the code that inscribes them. Analysed in light of expressive conditions and the state of the body, the computer revolution reveals an endemic problem: that of narrowing the field of possibilities. Yet, through the study of the performativity of places, it is possible to steer the process in another direction: interpreting technological devices not as instruments of virtual reduction of spaces, but as tools to enhance the physical characteristics of the environment — thus amplifying the human sensory sphere and opening new perspectives for interpreting the field of existence. This approach could lead toward a new relationship between digital tools and architecture: instead of building architecture into the sensorially limited virtual dimension, it proposes to export into the physical world the possibilities introduced by technologies, as shown with the example of Carlo Ratti Associati’s Digital Water Pavilion. Code can then cooperate with the unpredictability of the real world, instead of defining the predetermined experience of the digital realm, and the body regains an enhanced role in play.

Figure 3

Accademia Sensitiva Somatica by Lucia Di Pietro. Getting in touch with the surroundings. (by the Author).



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Strategies of Creating Presence in the Space of the City - Analysing the Role of Somatic Practices in Performance Within Urban Environments

Natalia Kozakiewicz
University of Music and Dance in Cologne

Abstract

Performance located in public space seems to have a strong potential for creating a base for social bonding. Various forms of artistic activism designed for spaces that are defined as common and accessible open a possibility of experiencing a performative event collectively, and sharing the present moment on the physical and intellectual grounds. Somatic practices, which emphasise the individual body in relation to the surrounding environment, also have the potential to achieve this. How can the somatic practice of presence in the public space be cultivated? Is the collective experience of body awareness enough to make a ground for social change? Based on the collective score-making, this research on performance practice explored the topic of somatic presence in public, questioning what forms of movement performance can connect audiences and performers through a shared experience. This research, moreover, revealed a prospect of participatory performance as a form of collective presence-making and the aptitude of flow as an entry state for initiating the process of social bonding. In this article I focus on developing the somatic scoring practice as an artistic strategy for exploring body politics.

Keywords: presence, somatic, public space, score

Presence and its Embodiment

The phenomenon of presence has been extensively investigated within performance studies. Early approaches often emphasised a singular perspective, either that of the performer or of the spectator. For example, MacKendrick defines presence as the dancer's heightened attention to time and commitment to each moment (Lepecki, 2004, p.150). By contrast, Phelan characterises presence as a "living collection of embodied memories" (Lepecki, 2004, p.14). However, more recent scholarship shifts this focus towards relationality, thinking of presence not as located solely in the performer or the audience, but as emerging in the space between them. As Zarrilli (2012) argues, presence constitutes "a realm between experience, embodiment, and perception shared between the performer(s) and the audience" (p. 120), as cited in Pini (2023).

The question that follows is how this shared phenomenon of presence is embodied. Somatic practitioner and theorist Sondra Fraleigh (1991) situates presence within dance as an awareness of performed movement and a felt connection to self and world. She underscores that attention to the moment and the intentionality of movement render presence an act of full engagement and therefore, makes a performance deeply authentic. In a similar vein, social somatic practitioner and artist Petra Kuppers (2015) conceptualises the somatic field as "embodied labours of attention" (p. 508), defining presence as participation in the performance event through active reception and sensorial responsiveness.

Present Spaces and Modes of Embodied Engagement

If presence is understood in these terms — as participation, engagement, and responsiveness — it becomes necessary to ask how it can be performed within the public space. For the purpose of this study, public space is defined as urban space, which Henri Lefebvre identifies as the dominant spatial form of contemporary societies. For Lefebvre, space is never neutral but rather produced through natural and historical processes, shaped by political and ideological forces. He describes space as the dynamic interplay of three dimensions: spatial practices (perceived space), representations of space (conceived space), and spaces of representation (lived space) (Lefebvre, 1977, p. 341), as cited in (Zieleniec, 2018, p. 7). Within this framework, the urban space appears not only as a physical setting but also as a social construct, structuring daily life and contributing to the formation of identity and belonging.

However, urban space is marked by ambivalence. On the one hand, public and social spaces are subject to an increasing amount of regulation, monitoring, and control, which limits opportunities for the expression of values and aspirations. On the other hand, the street, with its vitality and shifting dynamics, carries potential to disrupt these systems of

order. In this sense, the urban environment may open up spaces for play, improvisation, and learning, where presence — as relational, participatory, and embodied — can be enacted against and within the structures of regulation.

This conceptual framing of presence in relation to the urban environment provides the groundwork for considering other modes of embodied engagement. In particular, the notion of flow (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990) and the practice of scoring (Halprin, 1969) offer valuable perspectives for examining how states of presence are facilitated, structured, and enacted in public space.

Figure 1
Part of research-documentation: participants of scoring preparing material for the session; Center of Contemporary Dance in Cologne (photo: Natalia Kozakiewicz).



Exploring the Flow of Scores

Building on this understanding of presence, the notion of flow provides a productive framework. Csíkszentmihályi (1990) defines flow as “a state in which attention is fully absorbed, self-consciousness disappears, and individuals experience a balance between the challenge of the activity and their own skills” (p. 15). This state resonates with the accounts of presence offered by Fraleigh and Kuppers, who both describe a mode of complete involvement in the present moment, characterised by bodily awareness and sensorial receptivity. Whereas presence emphasises the intersubjective dimension of

performance, flow foregrounds the psychological dynamics of immersion. This raises the question of whether presence and flow can be understood as intersecting states-modes of engagement that enable performers and participants alike to enter into heightened relational and creative experience. The intersection of presence and flow thus points to the need for structures that can both guide and open embodied experience. One such structure is the score, which mediates between individual awareness, collective interaction, and spatial context.

One practice that explicitly engages with this transition between everyday perception and heightened states of presence and flow is working with scores. As Lawrence Halprin (1996) describes, scores are non-hierarchical, dynamic, and site-responsive structures that guide creative processes while leaving space for individual interpretation. They function simultaneously as constraint and invitation: providing clear frameworks while allowing for multiple variations and responses. In this sense, scores create conditions that encourage curiosity, play, and embodied experimentation, and can facilitate both individual expressivity and shared somatic experience. To investigate how scores might possibly enable enter into states of presence and flow in urban contexts, the *Scoring the Public* project was developed in Cologne, Germany.

Figures 2 and 3
Part of research-documentation: participants of the scoring-performance entering the city space, Cologne (potos: Svantje Kawecki).





Scoring the Public — Facilitating Presence in the City

In *Scoring the Public* (University of Music and Dance, Cologne) participants developed and tested movement scores in urban space. Inspired by somatic practices and contemporary dance, these tasks included exercises such as: “Take a few steps in the direction of your choice, notice the rhythm of your walking, and synchronise your steps with your breathing.” The scores were performed during site-specific audio-walks in various locations across Cologne, followed by collective reflection sessions. Analysis of impressions and reflections of scoring shared by participants revealed that the context had a strong influence on the quality of experience. In parks, participants reported a stronger interpersonal connection and greater willingness to engage with surfaces and objects. In busier city areas, the interactions between participants themselves became more pronounced. Cultural background and familiarity with public performance also show strong influence on the responses given.

Importantly, the audio-score format supported participants in maintaining somatic focus despite the distractions of the public space. The structured yet open-ended framework facilitated deeper attention to bodily perception and also strengthened group relations over the course of the sessions. Conducted between February and June 2025, the first phase of the project comprised six sessions, four with a stable group and two with open audiences. The feedback materials, collected and transcribed, indicate that the practice enhanced participants’ self-awareness, encouraged playful experimentation, and fostered greater willingness to take risks and perform collaboratively. The findings suggest that scores can bring participants into states of presence and flow while simultaneously negotiating the conditions of urban environments, as theorised by Lefebvre.

Conclusion

Taken as such, presence — theorised in performance studies as either an individual mode of attention (MacKendrick & Phelan) or a relational phenomenon as in somatic (Fraleigh & Kuppers) — can be further understood in relation to both the psychological dynamics of flow and the socio-spatial conditions of urban life. Drawing on Lefebvre’s conception of space as socially produced, the urban environment emerges as both regulated and controlled and also marked by possibilities for disruption, play, and collective reimagination.

Within this context, the practice of scoring offers a productive framework for facilitating presence. As non-hierarchical structures that balance guidance with openness, scores provide transitional devices that enable participants to move between everyday perception and states of somatic awareness, engagement, and flow. The *Scoring the Public* case study demonstrated how such practices can be adapted to urban environments: participants reported heightened self-awareness, strengthened group relations, and increased

willingness to experiment, while the shifting dynamics of urban sites shaped the quality of their experiences.

The future of scoring practice thus lies not only in its capacity to foster somatic engagement but also in its potential as a performative strategy for negotiating and reconfiguring the politics of urban life. As guided improvisations that both frame and unsettle embodied experience, scores can reclaim moments of attentiveness from regulatory systems, inviting participants to imagine other ways of moving, sensing, and relating in the city. In this sense, scoring contributes to performance studies by foregrounding presence as a political as well as aesthetic act, opening pathways for further exploration of how somatic practices intervene in the lived realities of contemporary urban space.

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Conjuring the Threshold
A Performative Ritual of Repair

Ridha Dhib
Walking Artist, Paris, France

Abstract

Conjuring the Threshold is a performative ritual presented at Performing Space 2025 in Nafplio, Greece. Rooted in a symbolic wound encountered during the 5,232 km performative walk *Ex-tracés* (from Paris, France to Mardin, Turkey, 2022), the work addresses a denied crossing at the Greek-Turkish border. The performance reactivates that rupture through a precisely choreographed device: an eight-metre red Line-Suture, a synthetic voice reciting GPS coordinates in Turkish and Greek, and a walking body negotiating space, memory, and constraint. Inspired by Turner's concept of liminality and Rendell's exploration of spatial thresholds, the performance seeks to poeticise the act of repair and reclaim agency by transforming an administrative border into an embodied site of passage.

Keywords: Walking Art, Performance, Border, Ritual, Repair, Technology

Conjuring the Threshold

Conjuring the Threshold was presented on 7 July, 2025, in the garden beside the Labour Centre in Nafplio, Greece, during the Performing Space 2025 conference. The performance emerged from a rupture experienced on 2 July 2022, during *Ex-tracés*, a 5,232 km performative walk from Paris (France) to Mardin (Turkey). At Stage 107, on the Greek-Turkish border, I was forbidden to cross a 100-metre bridge walking. This interruption created a symbolic wound within the continuity of my journey.
The performance reactivates this wound through an embodied ritual of repair. It explores the threshold as a physical, symbolic, and temporal space — a site where absence is transformed into presence, reclaiming agency over a denied territory.

Genesis of the Wound

Borders are not just administrative lines; they are lived experiences shaping the body's relationship to space. On July 2, 2022, standing before the Maritsa River bridge between Greece and Turkey, my steps were stopped. The crossing was forbidden to pedestrians, privileging motorised bodies over walking ones. This prohibition fractured a continuous line of thousands of kilometres, creating a *symbolic scar*.

Drawing on Anzaldúa's (1987) concept of *Borderlands*, the moment revealed the border as a site of negotiation between identity, memory, and political power. *Conjuring the Threshold* transforms this rupture into an artistic and poetic act of reclaiming place through walking.

The Device: From Line to Suture

At the core of the performance is the **Line-Suture**: an eight-metre-long medical bandage dyed in red eosin, assembled from four two-meter strips joined with red glue. These visible junctions — like scars — evoke both fragility and resilience.

The soundscape, carried on my body, unfolds over four minutes and seventeen seconds. A synthetic voice reads the GPS coordinates of the forbidden bridge, first in Turkish and then in Greek. At the midpoint, a 20-second silence emerges: a liminal interval where time suspends, echoing Turner's (1969) concept of "in-between spaces."

Ritual of Repair

The performance begins with a spoken prologue, followed by a silent ritual. As the synthetic voice speaks Turkish coordinates, I zigzag towards the Line-Suture — a metaphor for the constrained movement imposed by geopolitical regimes. Reaching the bandage precisely at

the moment of silence, I place my walking stick — the same one carried across 5,232 km — on the ground.

This “gesture of dispossession” opens the possibility for passage.

When the voice resumes in Greek, the act transforms: I cross the Line-Suture and walk straight ahead, exiting the garden until I disappear from the audience’s view. What remains is absence, a scar marked in red — a poetic negotiation of denial, embodiment, and repair.

Technology as Extension

Throughout *Conjuring the Threshold*, technology operates as an extension of the body rather than a spectacle. The smartphone, carrying GPS coordinates, and the synthetic voice act as mediators between memory, space, and digital presence. Following Hannah’s (2018) approach to performance spaces, the device functions as an “architecture of passage,” where analogue and digital dimensions converge.

Figure 1
Conjuring the Threshold — The Line-Suture at Nafplio (photo: Ridha Dhib, 2025).



Conclusion

Conjuring the Threshold demonstrates that performance can transform personal and political wounds into collective rituals of repair. By translating a denied passage into an embodied act, the work challenges the fixity of borders and reclaims the walking body’s right to inscribe meaning onto contested spaces.

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ISSN 3057-434X
ISBN 978-960-89135-6-1