

SPATIAL LAYERED PRACTICE



How does a theatre act as a space that builds different memories from multiple perspectives and merges them together as one collective experience? How this can be related to a site-specific performance?



Abstract

Theatre has a very special place at my heart. I have been part in different theatre groups and performed in multiple plays on different stages across my home city – Varna, Bulgaria. The following thesis looks back at these moments and recalls memories and experiences from the past. Since a theatre performance could be experienced in two types of ways – as a performer and as an actor, I am sharing the multiple viewpoints in the various theatre buildings I have performed. My reflections are also entangled with the history and architecture to these buildings as they happen to be also crucial for the theatrical history of my city and relate back to the act of performing itself. The thesis then explores more in depth what is the relationship between a performance, actor and a spectator all again being accompanied by 'lessons' and thoughts I've learnt through my 'theatrical education'. Going even further I investigate what does happen in the spectator's mind from a psychological point of view in order for one to empathize to the actors and emotively experience a performance. Then, I connect all this research with site-specific performances and theatre and how my own experience counts as such. At the end, I then summarize my investigations with my own memories and reflect on it through a current perspective. Throughout the narrative a storyline with the 'renaissance'-s and downfalls with one of my site locations is being woven in which is interlinked the theatrical performance.

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Introduction

People tend to be lost in their own realities in lives. Life is fast paced, we have busy schedules and for many people life turns into an on-going continuous process that simply repeats itself. We have our problems and worries and it seems hard to imagine that they will ever finish they will never finish and nothing can stop us from thinking about them. As a society we are focused more on the physical rather than mental and immaterial. However, around us there are these monuments that are like portals to the ethereal world. They make us forget our uncertainties and problems, and even forget who we are. Whatever we have as a difficulty in the outside world, is being shown again but in a lightening way. Because of which we easily manage to find a solution to whatever we are facing. Everything slows down its tempo and we just let being involved in what is to be shown. After that, we are never the same.

“The act of theatre is more complex than either holy communion or physical congress. For a start more than two are involved. Theatre is a three-dimensional and three-way event, actor or actors communicating, not simply with you, the spectator, but with you and he, or she, over here and that group over there. All interact one with the other.” (Mackintosh, 1993:2)

Understanding however fully the narrative of this thesis, then one should know more about the background of the country where it all starts from – Bulgaria.

Bulgaria

Bulgaria is a country in Southeast Europe. It occupies the whole eastern part of the Balkans, (and is bordered by Romania to the north, Serbia and North Macedonia to the west, Greece and Turkey to the south, and the Black Sea to the east.) Bulgaria covers a territory of 110,994 square kilometres and has a population of 6, 88 million (June 2021).

The Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78 resulted in the formation of the third and current Bulgarian state. After the war the foundations of the secular Bulgarian culture were laid. At the same time, this is a qualitatively new stage in Bulgarian history, represented by the spectacular construction of state, political and cultural institutions. In the next century the Bulgarian state is building a modern and constantly evolving institutional system of culture. It skillfully finances and stimulates publishing, literature, fine arts, music and theater. Even during communism in Bulgaria, despite censorship, culture was very well funded. (Wikipedia, 2022)

In recent decades, however, one can trace the decline of Bulgarian culture. More and more galleries, museums and theaters are empty or almost no one visits them. The pandemic and the political situation in Bulgaria have further contributed to this. Since 2020, most of the time the theaters are either closed or have 50 percent attendance. The irony in this case is that there were times when restaurants and nightclubs were opened with much more attendance, but the theaters still remained closed.

Varna is regarded as the sea capital of Bulgaria and is one of its biggest and oldest cities.



Fig.2 Yankova, M. (2022) Diagram of Bulgaria

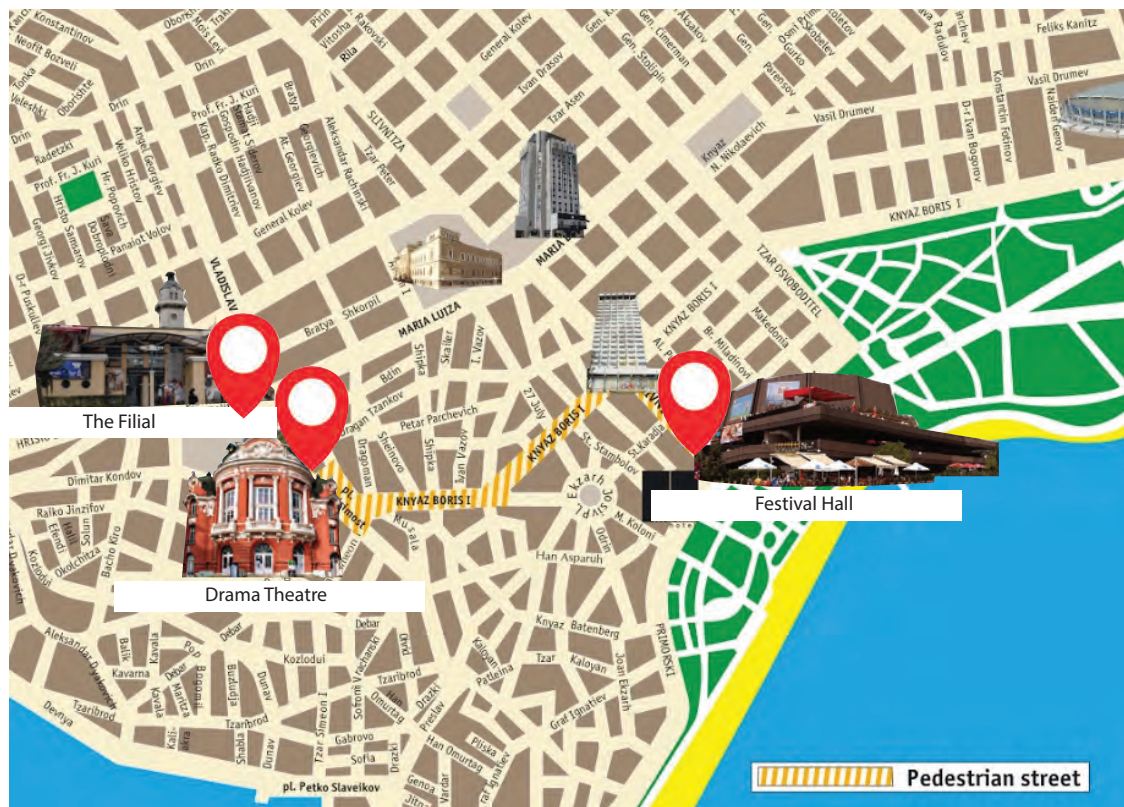


Fig.3 Yankova, M., Artist Unknown (2022) Case studies' location

Chapter One: Case Studies

History and experience

As a beginning, I will start with a quick journey throughout the ‘main’ characters in this chapter of the thesis – three buildings in Varna, my home city. On their stages I have played and experienced them as an actor, but also as someone part of the audience. I will as well talk through their history since this is a big part of how the buildings look and what feelings they bring.

			
Name	'Filial' Hall	Dramatic theatre	Festival Hall
Year built	1890	1921	1986
Style	Italian Renaissance	French Baroque	Brutalism
Used for	theatre	Theatre, concerts, opera	Theatre, concerts, cinema, festivals
Capacity	270	535	1011

Festival Hall

The Festival and Congress Centre Varna is built in 1986 and corresponding to the place and time (Soviet times and socialism) it is an example of brutalist architecture which was very key at the time. Construction is steel and minimalist. Materials and structural elements are exposed and the building consists of few geometrical blocks. The material palette is monochrome. The Centre is massive and imposing, giving to some a sense of nostalgia of the old times and to others it seems intimidating and cold. The building has 12 Halls with different capacities where theatre plays, festivals, movies, concerts, etc. are held.

It is located on an area of 4 acres and has a volume of 80,000 cubic meters, half of which are underground. The 12 Halls have a capacity of 50 to 1000 people. In the 80s of the last century, the Festival Complex was the second most important cultural center in the country, after the National Palace of Culture in the capital. For a long time, Varna's multifunctional center is the only one in Eastern Europe that is located near the sea. The first name of the Centre was "Festival Complex Lyudmila Zhivkova" who is one of the main credits for this project. She is the daughter of the former first during the communism times in Bulgaria and because of her the initial intention of the project to be a new cinema grew in a larger scale – Festival Center.

When being a visitor in this building, it feels very broad in a sense. It is a very, very big main concert hall. At times, you would feel lonely I would say. Like that feeling you get sometimes when you are with a group of people but you feel alone. There is also still this presence of the communism as well.

I recall memories from the past and try to remember what it felt inside. I love the building because it is a popular place in my town and is an important historical monument of Soviet times. However, it gives me a bit of a cold feeling. Playing on stage does not seem that natural. Since the stage is more rectangularly shaped and narrow, there is not much of a freedom where space of theatrical movement can be used naturally. The backstage is also not as communicative as it should be. The sense of being on stage is lost and although backstage you cannot sense the problems of the outside crawling upon you, you cannot either be fully aware what is going in front of you (on stage) and be fully part of what is being played and be with peers.

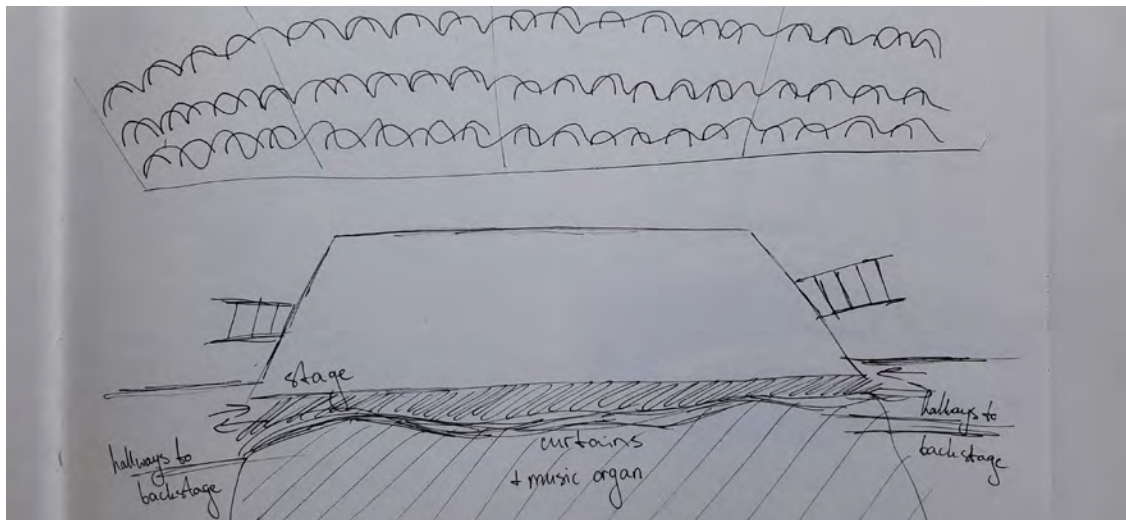


Fig.4 Yankova, M. (2022) Quick sketch of Festival Hall's stage according to personal memories

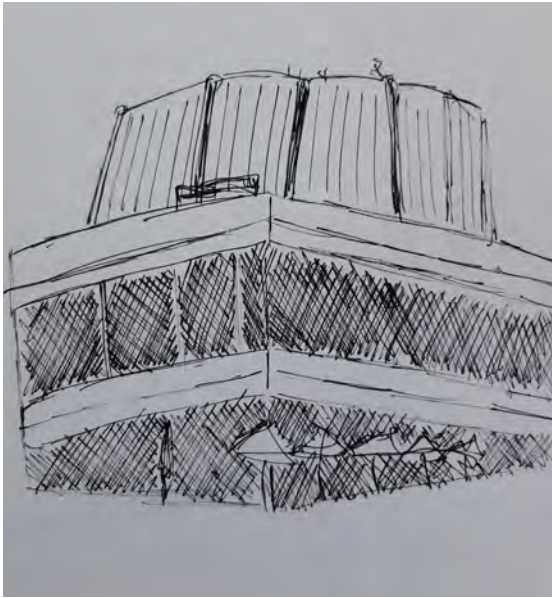


Fig.5 Yankova, M. (2022) Quick perspective of Festival Hall

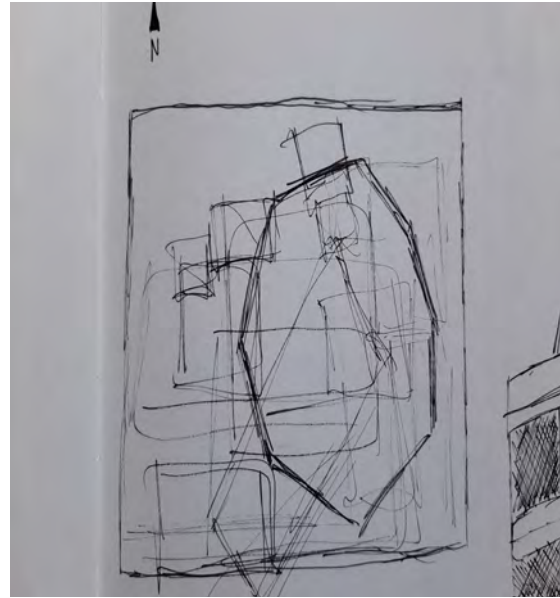


Fig.6 Yankova, M. (2022) Quick sketch of Festival Hall's bird-eye view with transparency



Fig.7 Yankova, V. (2022) Festival Hall

Dramatic theatre Varna

Dramatic theatre Varna is finally built 1921 with help and donations of locals in need of a big, presentable and worthy theatrical hall. In terms of style, the building is a representation of French Baroque with rich plastic decoration and voluminous shapes. The façade to the square is designed as a rounded corner, of which are situated three main entrances, leading to a large lobby, above which on the second floor there is built a huge ballroom. Rich sculptural pieces are embodied both externally and internally.

The idea for a new and modern theater building in Varna dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1909, the newly elected mayor Ivan Tserov raised the issue at the first meeting of the Municipal Council, councilors agreed and soon the construction site was determined - the southern corner of the city garden, between the clock and the fountain of Sultan Mahmoud, facing the square. The national competition for the project was won by the famous architect Nikola Lazarov, author of the former building of Radio Varna and many iconic buildings in Bulgarian capital and the whole country. The building was to have a thousand seats on a ground floor and two balconies, and the project initially included a casino and a summer stage, which were later excluded from the plan. On March 26, 1912, "on the second day of Easter ... the foundation stone of the city theater was laid with due solemnity ..." In the presence of the Varna public, Mayor Tserov delivered an enthusiastic speech. After the speech, the officials and architect Lazarov signed the solemn act and built it into a special stone box. Various Bulgarian coins were placed in the base of the building.



Fig.9 Yankova, V. (2022) Drama Theatre Varna Close-Up



Fig.9 Yankova, V. (2022) Drama Theatre Varna Close-Up

Construction began immediately, the term was three years, but the ensuing wars soon interrupted the endeavor for a long time. Until 1918, the building remained unfinished, without a roof and overgrown with weeds, and the funds were exhausted. In the winter of 1920, the municipal council unanimously decided to create a professional theater troupe. On March 12, 1921, with the performance "Instinct" by Henry Kestmecker, the troupe made its debut. This day is considered the birthday of the Varna theater. The public was infected with enthusiasm and the whole city got involved in the restoration of the theater building. In 1922 a civic committee was set up, the newspapers wrote constantly on the subject, in 1928 the municipality concluded a five million target loan. Donation fever spread to the people of Varna - stamps from the "Completion of the Varna City Theater" fund were sold for every loaf of bread, for every movie ticket, entertainment, bathroom, for every municipal service, even for the chairs in the Sea Garden. Many of Varna's citizens also made donations, so that in less than a month one million leva were collected. The building, completed by architects D. Dabkov and J. Bogdanov, was inaugurated on June 5, 1932. The first Bulgarian director and director was the prominent Bulgarian artist Stoyan Bachvarov, whose name the theater bears today.

With his architectural solution for city theater arch. Lazarov brings Varna closer to the big European cities. The rounded baroque facade of the building is richly ornamented with decorative elements, columns, cornices and sculptural images. The three front doors are raised on several steps, which further brings an element of solemnity when entering the theater. An elliptical Art Nouveau lobby and side corridors lead to the hall. Spectators climb the wide stairs to the bright foyers on the balconies. The hall itself has the classic horseshoe shape of the theaters, with lodges near the stage. The rounded shapes of the soft chairs repeat the curves of the balconies. The building ends with an attic roof and an oval dome above the entrance vestibule and four smaller domes above the side spiral staircases.

This building feels like the heart of Varna. It is so popular and well known by anyone. It has some warmth to it and its round shape stimulates that feeling. No matter where one sits, one feels so close and 'in' the performance that is played on the stage.

Recalling memories from playing on its stage, I can remember feeling whole and complete. An ambience of a true theatrical space could be felt. This is such an ethereal and beautiful space, making you feel like out of this world. You go inside and you are stunned by the interior. Stage is round and spatial, a curtain is the border of stage and backstage but through it a whole theatrical body is moving and breathing together. Actors, director, sound and light effect person are one whole.



Fig.10 Yankova, M. (2022) Mixed art sketch showing the overgrowing weeds on Drama Theatre Varna

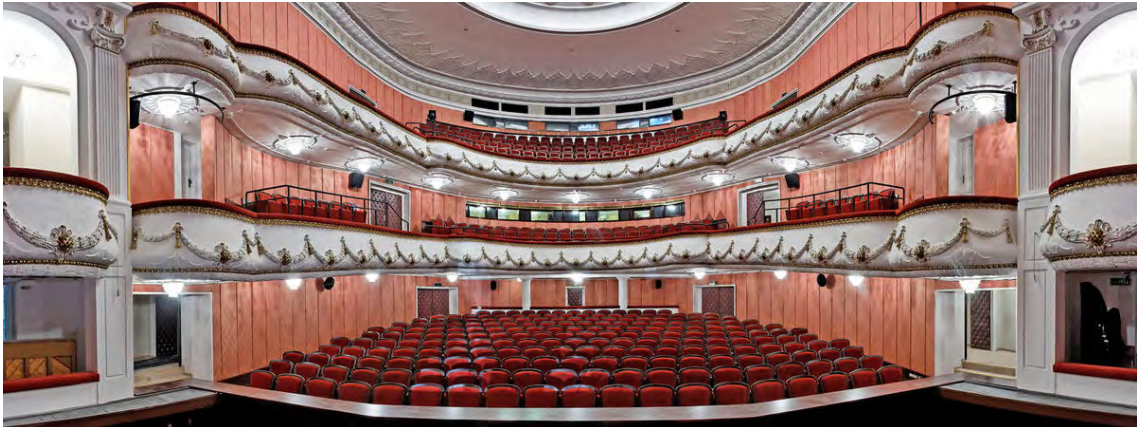


Fig.10 Artist Unknown. (Date Unknown) Inside of Drama Theatre Varna

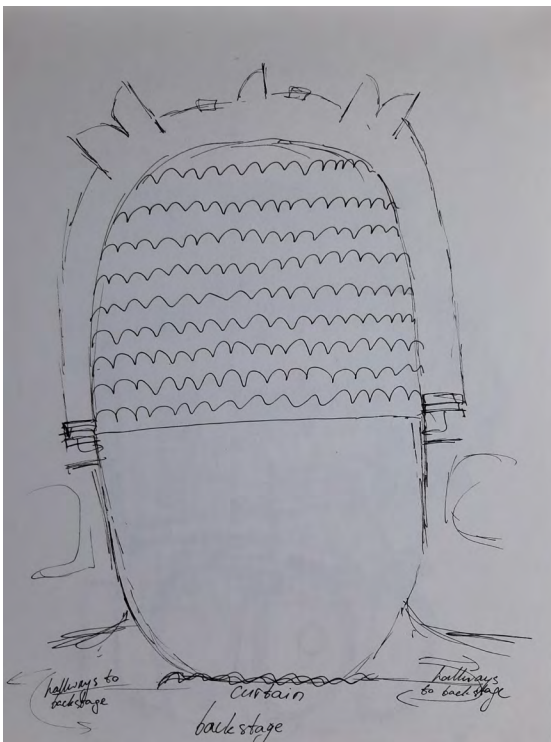


Fig.11 Yankova, M. (2022) Quick sketch of Drama Theatre Varna's stage according to personal memories

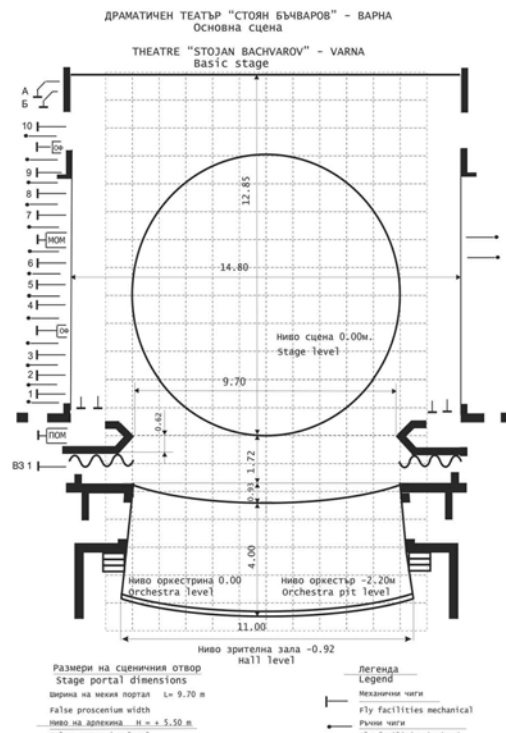


Fig.12 Artist Unknown. (Date Unknown) Actual Plan of Drama Theatre Varna

The branch of Dramatic theatre Varna (with the Clock Tower)

Although a branch of the theatre, this building with the clock tower was constructed first in 1890. The then called hall "Union", now is known as hall "Filial". The architect of the building is the same as the one of the dramatic theatre. He was commissioned to design a stone fire tower with a clock (24 m high) with an adjoining hall for theater performances, concerts and meetings. The former wooden hall, leaning on the stone clock tower is a long narrow hall with a gallery erected at one end, with an improvised stage and two rooms next to it. Its eastern side – the façade – is in Italian Renaissance style and became a symbol of the city in many advertising photos and drawings. There are 5 rooms for dressing rooms, office and storage built. Unfortunately, there is no wardrobe area neither for the audience, nor for the actors in the building. Whereas, in the former theatrical hall there are were spaces specifically designated for that. The 'Filial' is the first place which is specifically built for theatre plays and citizens could go and watch. It was a big breakthrough in the cultural life of the city. In 1909 the hall also turned into the first place in the city where cinema is played. Being the first place in the city that welcomes theatre and cinema, the 'Filial' hall is of a significant importance to the city.

In this building the atmosphere is very domestic but in a good sense of way. You still feel that warmth as in the Dramatic Theatre, but there it has more aristocracy and poshness to it, whereas here you can be whoever you want to be as if you were at your own home. The energy with the stage performance again is widely shared.

Speaking of my experience playing on the stage I can only describe it as similar only to similar as to the one in the dramatic theatre. It is normalwise, since it is its branch. A feeling of wholeness, togetherness and unity is apparent. As actors playing on the round stage you can always cover up someone or something wrong and improvise. The backstage area is a place where also lots of movement happens working towards the final outcome on a stage.



Fig.13 Yankova, M. (2022) Quick sketch of Filial's stage according to personal memories



Fig.14 Yankova, V. (2022) Filial Varna

Chapter Two: The act of building a performance

Introduction

In this chapter I might not go in depth with all the changes that have occurred in the history of theatre since they are many. I will also not discuss the different types of theatre, nor the way they are portrayed. Theatre as a type of art has taken lots of shapes and forms, has changed from one to another and opinions about it vary throughout decades. It is also very different and unique depending which country it is from, what the stage is, how it is organized, etc. What I am trying to focus in this chapter is solely on the act of performing and the effect that it has on the audience and each and every individual. I am following that connection and reflecting on it with personal memories, but also with my own thoughts and opinions on it.

Reflecting on my experience on stage throughout the years, I am recalling memories and quotes from the past. In my acting group few years ago our mentor would refer and describe the stage performance as a sand castle. Every sand castle is not identical to any other. It is unique. The performance starts and everyone who is part of creating it starts building the base, then the walls, then the towers, etc. But if something even slightly fails in to keep the energy, then everything falls apart and the audience is lost. Every single performance is a different universe, different castle and only the once observing it are the ones being part of it as well.

After that I believe that the castle is stored somewhere in the universe as an extraction of an experience. But when the audience leaves the theatre hall and the cast leaves the stage, it can never be revisited physically as before, it can be only reached as a memory.



Fig.15 Yankova, M. (2022) Collage of building and ruining a sand castle

Theatre as an Art Form

Theatre on itself it is a different universe. It is a whole new place that has the responsibility to educate, entertain and transform. On its own in the eyes of some it may look just like a simple building with a simple function, but what differs it from others is the history that lies behind and the generations that it has changed. It is a space that does not solely act as such, but it affects everyone in a different manner. It is one to one viewer, different to a second one, etc. and then completely different to the actors on stage.

However as to make the picture of theatre in ones head complete, we need to first look at it as an art form and how theatre remains being deliverer of such since its creation. 'Art should not add new object to the world to enslave men. It should begin the process of freeing men by calling into doubt the solidity of objects – and laying bare the fact that it is a web of relations that exists, only; that web held taut in each instance by the focal point of consciousness that is each separate individual consciousness.' (Huxley and Witts, 1996:193, citing Foreman, 1985)

Developing from what Foreman has said art primary force should be to disturb people and make them think all over what is bothering them. Because everything is interconnected and although it so, until one does not see it in front of their eyes from a point of witness rather than 'actor', one may never realize where the core of the problem is. What art's aim is to show us what does not make us satisfied and give us an opportunity to fix it and simply make us happier, better versions of ourselves. (Foreman, 1985) Possibly, some or most of it might be provoked by bringing critical attitude towards it. But without it people are not able to fully evolve. This criticism should not be regarded as something negative, it should be seen as something stimu

lating for a person to outgrow its problems, fears and demons. And that's what art brings with itself – a critical mind with which everyone can look from a far and improve its life. (Brecht and Willet, 1978:146) A very vital part of art is not being delivered with the modern and postmodern ways of communication like radio, film, smartphones, etc. but books and theatre still manage to achieve fully art's function. (Brecht and Willet, 1978:48)

Relationship between actor and spectator
When people come to watch a theatre performance, sit on their seats, lights are off, curtains are open and the play begins, a mutual energy between spectators, artists and play is being shared. It is important to look and examine this relation since that is the most vital and unique part of theatrical experience and space. It is like infinite crossover from one part to another and these parts vary. They can be from audience to stage, the opposite way, or simply the stage itself. 'A collective entity is created in the auditorium for the duration of the entertainment, on the basis of the 'common humanity' shared by all spectators alike.' (Brecht and Willet, 1978:60)

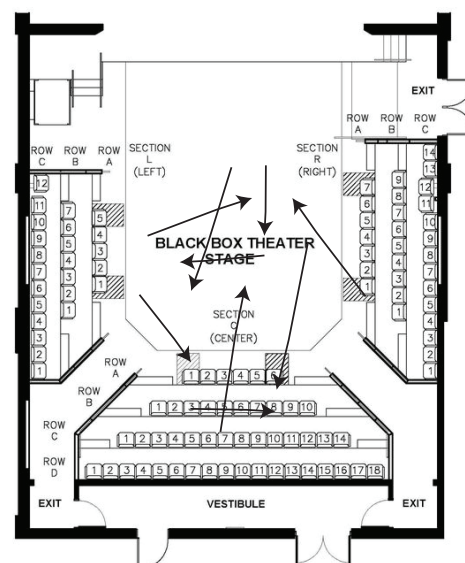


Fig.16 Yankova, M., Artist Unknown (2022) Energy Sharing

My theatre teacher used to tell us that playing on stage is like passing a ball of energy from one to another and then to audience. And that energy grows continuously. If one on stage is full of energy, his soul, mind and body wholly prepared for an act, he can pass that energy on to someone, and then that someone onto the other one. Failed energy leads to a failed performance. Everyone has to have their minds thinking on the performance and nothing else – no matter on stage or not. The whole performance is actually miraculous when the energy is moved onwards and expanded from the actors on stage and backstage. Even if one of them does not fully match the energy, the act is failed and the sandcastle ‘ruins.’

The theatrical performance is combination not only of one but of multiple art forms. It uses film projecting to point out the most important parts; music, orchestra and choir are accompanying the action on the stage and giving life to it. And this in itself is also passing ‘energy’ from one art form to another. Drawing the spectators’ attention to the play initiates them into thinking which actions are right and which are wrong. An act of catharsis happens and the spectator self-identifies with the play, but not only. Its point is also to teach one a practical attitude. (Brecht and Willet, 1978:78-79) So theatre as a space could be understood as a space in which man comes not only for ‘entertainment’ but actually to gain knowledge, because in theatre one constantly learns and re-evolves.

Theatre is one of the most human and universal arts of all. It is the most practiced of all, but not on stage only, it is in fact – daily since thousands of years. The theater of a certain group of people or certain time should be conceived as a whole living organism which if it is not healthy in any part of it, is not healthy at all. (Brecht and Willet, 1978:152) And this reminds me of a very well-known quote by William Shakespeare:

‘All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players: they have their exits and their entrances; and one man in his time plays many parts, his acts being seven ages’

But most of the time we do not even we realize we are actors ourselves in this big whole world, so there is theatre to remind us of that.

Art is ripening, it is an evolution, something that elevates a person and makes it go out of the dark and embrace the flames of light. We are fighting to find and experience the truth about ourselves, so that we take off the masks behind which we are hiding every day. (Huxley and Witts, 1996:218, citing Grotowski, 1968,1969)

In a video interviewing Bulgarian famous actress Koyna Ruseva, she states: “See how life changed? My dream was to become a surgeon and I became one for souls.” And that sums up perfectly, what the actors’ job is about – building a theatrical performance, representative of a pure art form that can cure the broken souls of the spectators.



Fig.17 Zhechev, A. (2019) Creating collective energy part one

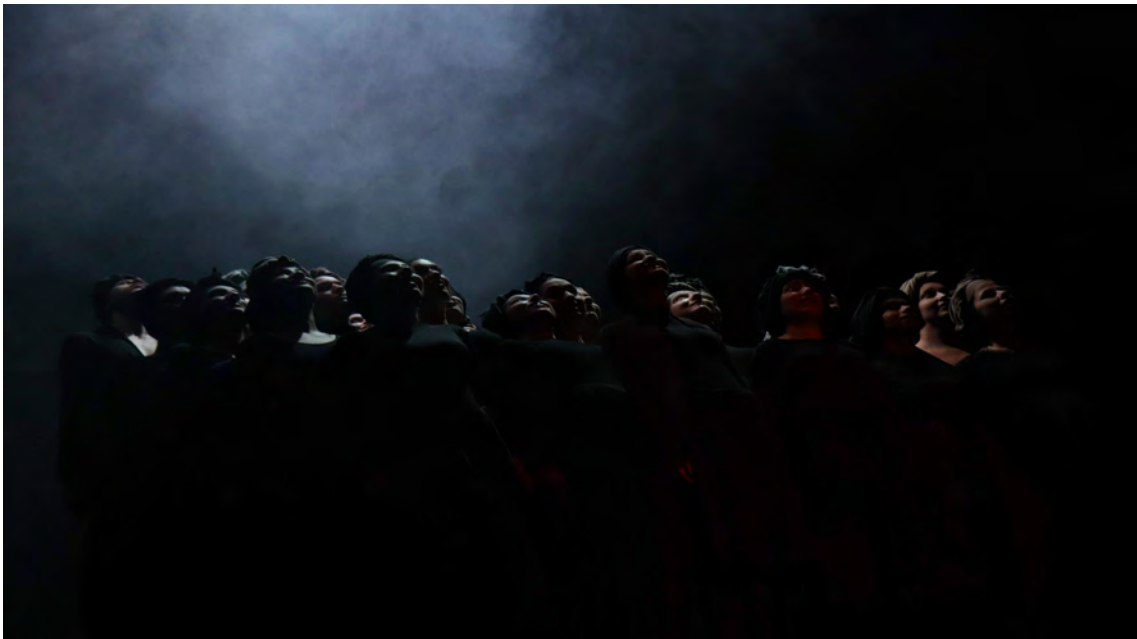


Fig.18 Zhechev, A. (2019) Creating collective energy part two

Theatre as a Space and Atmosphere

Understanding the physicality and meta-physicality of the theatre as a space is going to further help build the image of the theatre as a character. Its relationship with the human form is impeccable. The history of theatre is change of that form. This is the history of the man being part of all physical and spiritual events, varying from naivety to reflection, from naturalness to artificialness. The materials are the shape and color and the stage is merging together with the space and the building. This is the kingdom of the architect and the stage emerges as a 'transformable architectonic structure'. The term theatre means the most basic essence of the stage: fiction, mummery, metamorphosis. Arts like architecture, painting, sculpture are fixed, but theatre is in motion being representative of each one of them. The stage is the place where everything is in motion. It is continuous and forever transitioning 3d image. And the man is at its center.

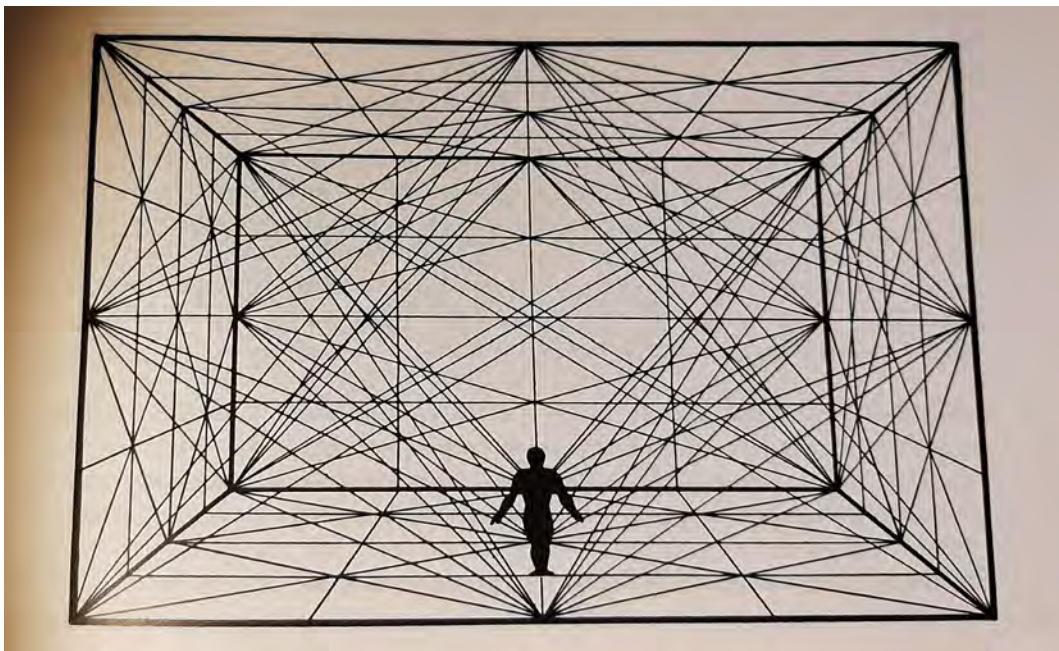


Fig.19 Schlemmer, O. (Date Unknown) Man In Centre

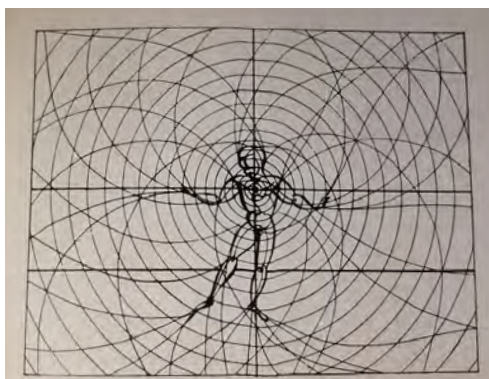


Fig.20 Schlemmer, O. (Date Unknown) Metamorphosis

We already depicted theatre as an art form and theatre as a place where there is mutual energy shared. But looking at it and the performance from even more spatial perspective is going to establish the connections between all of them even further. Every space is not merely a still setting bringing no experience with it. No, what most people remember from a space is precisely how they felt and what they experienced and this is actually very much dependent on the atmosphere. Gernot Böhme theorizes atmosphere as an interobjective event, 'something that proceeds from and is created by things, persons or their constellations'. (Lucie, 2020:17, citing Böhme, 2017) Atmosphere offers something that exists between spaces through evolving collaboration between the different materialities (human and non-human) sharing theatre space. The atmosphere exists between subject and object but does not belong to any of them. It is not located at a certain place, it occurs in the space.

The concept of atmosphere provides a framework for explaining more stable and embodied materiality, as well as the material basis of affective intensities. It is, indeed, a location where the physical and the abstract collide. Böhme theory is important for theatre studies for his attention to the ways in which one can create an atmosphere with materials and aesthetic, or more accurately to build up potential for particular phenomena. The materiality of individual things produces aspects that radiate outward, articulating the object's existence through these affect-producing elements. The atmosphere emerges during the act of sensing, and it is this action that brings the otherwise disparate objects together. (Lucie, 2020:19)

Another very interesting theory is that of Karen Barad's – the idea of 'intra-action'. Barad states that the performance has a complicate nature with multiple layers. The 'unit' of the performance is not individual object with certain measured boundaries and qualities but rather phenomena. Phenomena is understood as 'observable fact[s] or event[s]' (Merriam Webster 2021) or objects known through senses. Phenomena exist even when people do not observe it. The focus is on the effects of the event interacting with various agencies and resulting in other events and effects. Barad believes that the human is not the main part of it rather than something that shows up and becomes part of an intra-action. Any separate agencies do not come from the event, but rather from their intra-action, and mutually constitute further entangled agencies. (Lucie, 2020:20, citing Barad, 2007)

Our activities alter the current materiality, impacting the possibilities of future intra-actions by changing the material with which future intra-actions must operate. This is referred to by Barad as 'sedimenting,' describes as continuous in which the past is not forgotten, but remains a part of the matter that unfolds in the present and future. We are not part of a construction that we as people have decided to build ourselves. The reality consists of certain practices in which we participate and shape but they also shape us. That is why we are responsible for the world we live in. Understanding the concept of reality like this makes our responsibility as a society even greater compared to that of only one human because that means that we need to respond to our interactions with all other agents — human and non-human, past, present, and future – on a constant basis. And these entanglements not only have an impact on the world, but they also actively shape it. Understanding this from the point of a theatre perspective the audience is not simply depicted as a witness but as mass being present and contributing to

something, to a communal intra-active event, 'agent in the atmospheric intra-actions'. This is something that always occurs in theatre buildings – namely, the creation of the atmosphere. It is felt and all spectators can sense all the human and non-human objects interaction taking place in an establishing of the event. Because atmosphere is a collaborative event formed by the multiple contributions of every object/agent in the area, it offers a method to think beyond binary conceptions. Atmosphere is an in-between and ephemeral phenomenon, an intra-action in which the human audience collaborates with non-human materials. The environment then takes on a life of its own, producing consequences in a never-ending chain of occurrences. A theatrical show's ambiance has an impact on the audience and draws them into a relationship with their surroundings. As a result, it's critical that we think about the environment of each performance and pay attention to its effects. (Lucie, 2020:21-23)

In an interview with Robert Lepage he says:

"Theatre's theatre. There's no fourth wall; it's live, it changes every night." (Huxley and Witts, 1996:281, citing Lepage, 1992)

And that very much reminds me of how my theatre teacher described theatre as a space. He said that theatre has in fact four walls, but one of them happens to be invisible so that people can see through it and experience the act.

No matter if the stage is being depicted as one with three walls or four, but one invisible, everyone states the same – theatre space consists of multiple intra-active events that emerge from one to another and do not have a linear direction. There are comprehensive and remind a bit of the way in which fireworks are lit.

Chapter Three: Psychology Of A Performance

Introduction

The social transformation in which the theatre has an effect on the spectator is not simply in a way of arousing its interest, but where he brings it to be satisfied. As a result, the tempo of the drama performance is then different. Mental processes, for example, require a very different tempo than that of emotional processes. (Brecht and Willet, 1978:55) And since theatre was already described as a place where we as spectators are put to think, the act of understanding the psychology behind the seeing of a moving image is also very important. Because technically what we see through our eyes is a change of pictures and settings - from a two-dimensional (2D) retina projection of objects at the back of the eye, our visual perception system can infer a three-dimensional (3D) item in the subjective realm.

Theory of Moving Imagery

The atmosphere in Böhme could be affected through manipulation of materials such as objects, noises, apparatus, and light. These material conditions are referred to as 'generators' by Böhme, as they aid in the formation of phenomena. The atmosphere is created during the act of sensing, and it is this action that brings the otherwise disparate objects together. (Lucie, 2020:17, citing Böhme, 2017) The phenomena or the phenomenal world is a term that is very important in this chapter since it is very much related to the theatrical atmosphere. Phenomenal worlds is the understanding the experience of the world through senses, perception, thoughts and emotion. Narratives and imaginary worlds are important phenomenal entities that are generated by others (novelists, filmmakers, and game creators) or by oneself through play, toys, and games. We enter such fictional worlds, and they have an immediate and long-term impact on our experience and behavior. As a result, the phenomenal world is the world we sense, experience, feel, desire, think about, talk about, and have attitudes about; it is made up of the things we live with and through. The phenomenal world has many layers and faces, involving complex systems of bodies, thoughts, culture, artefacts, history, social processes, and individual experiences. (Persson, 2003:1-3) As a summary, we can conclude that the phenomenal world is also a perspective from which I could be understood since in the mind of each individual is different. This is a psychological approach to research that looks into psychological, perceptual, cognitive, and emotional processes.

Understanding is more essentially the technique (or means) through which we have such experiences in the first place, rather than just after-the-fact comments on previous experiences. It is the way in which the world appears to us. And this is the product of a tremendous complex of culture, language, history, and bodily mechanisms that have come together to create our reality. This more fundamental form of cognition enables our later propositional thoughts on our experiences. (Persson, 2003:7, citing Johnson, 1987) Huge part of our understanding is taken by our dispositions. With the dispositions people have they are already halfway through 'in the world' they live in. Individuals project their expectations, assumptions, hypotheses, theories, norms, codes, and prejudices onto the world as dispositions. Humans are predisposed to comprehend the world in a certain predefined way, already prepared for some of the world's regularities, thanks to their capacities. (Persson, 2003:13)

Another important term in the means of psychological theory of imagery is the discourse. Discourse includes all media like imagery, sounds, gestures, written words, moving pictures, and other modes of communication. In this sense, discourse, natural language, and imagery are also artefacts, probably the most important ones. These artefacts, on the other hand, inspire mental responses and thinking processes rather than real behavioral interaction patterns. Assuming that discourse is one component of that environment, this may be applied to how people comprehend or receive discursive structures. Readers, observers, listeners, and players, for example, will employ their dispositions in an attempt to comprehend the discourse and make it meaningful and intelligible. (Persson, 2003:22)

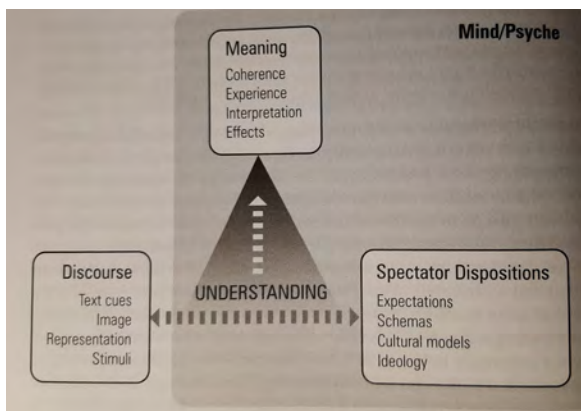


Fig.21 Jung, Y. (Date Unknown) Meaning emerges from understanding

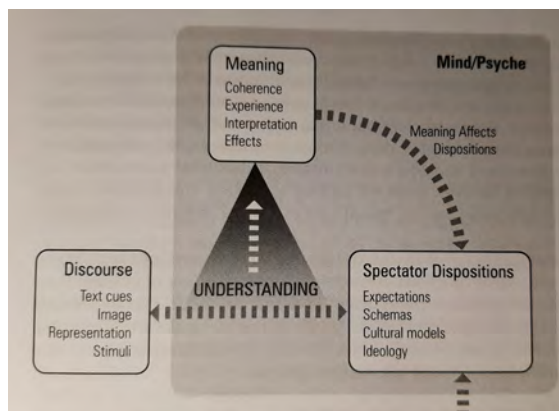


Fig.22 Jung, Y. (Date Unknown) Understanding visual discourse affects disposition

With combination of the discourse and spectator's disposition there comes the understanding which runs into meaning. Many of the meanings however have to be inferred or constructed on the basis of textual cues and background knowledge of the reader, that's why they split into level (0-5).

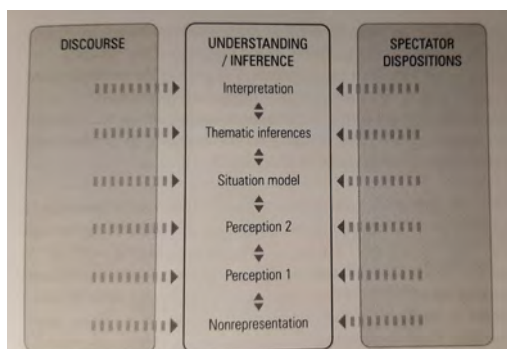


Fig.23 Jung, Y. (Date Unknown) Levels of coherence and their interaction

Different performances have intention of bringing the spectator to 'preferred' levels of understanding. Most theatre plays focus on level 4 and 5, whereas music videos which tend to be more 'lyrical' in nature are aiming around level 1 and 2. The level also varies between the mental capabilities of the spectator. For example children who still do not have their brain and mind fully developed may lack particular skills in attributing mental states to characters and hence have difficulty building coherence on that level, preferring instead to focus on levels 0-2. In each situation, the observer constructs meaning and coherence "to the best of her or his ability," that is, by concentrating on the levels of meaning building at which she or he is 'capable.' (Persson, 2003:35-36)

The spectator employs a variety of dispositions to make sense of the many levels of image-based discourse, though not always consciously. It is also worth to note that upper levels do not show more sophistication than the ones below – it just shows different amount of capacity and speed. (Persson, 2003:43) After all this, it is visible that what we see and understand is a whole world of complexities and interconnections. What we see and reckon as the phenomenal world, has a lot to do with the atmosphere from Böhme's theory. But also how we experience and feel a situation is very dependent not only on the outer world influenced by different cultures, economies, geography, etc. but on our inside world, mind, perception and capabilities.

Site-specific theatre and performance

Any type of theatrical production that is performed in a unique, particularly modified setting other than a normal theatre is considered site-specific theatre. It's possible that this one-of-a-kind location was created with no intention of being used for theatrical purposes (for example, a hotel, courtyard, or converted building). It could possibly just be a unique performance environment (for example, a forest). Consequently site-specific performance is a type of performance that is created in response to a physical location and staged there.

However with the research I have gathered and the moments I have experienced in the buildings from Chapter One, I believe that the three case studies are in fact strongly connected and dependent on their site. What can be understood as site-specific theatre and performances is in fact also the coexistence and overlay of two primary sets of architectures: those of the existing building, or the host, that is on site, and those of the created scenography and performance, or the ghost, that is brought to site on a temporary basis. Rather than being a neutral venue for exposition or a scenic backdrop for dramatic action, the site became an active participant in the development of performative meaning. (Tompkins, 2012:8) This connects with Karen Barad's idea of 'intra-action'.

The way in which the spatial arrangements and relationships are understood and how the performance can reformulate the way we experience and perceive space and place is also very vital for site specific performances. When studying the site it is important to understand the politics and social production since the place is governed by structures far beyond topography. Engaging with 'site' must accommodate various features of place and space throughout

time. Site also becomes a part of a 'cultural landscape,' which accounts for human interaction in, through and around geographic space. (Tompkins, 2012:5) In other words the site is a flux of the things that generates its context like politics, geographical location, economy, etc. but also a very unique and special way of experiencing everything present, past and future with the play as well. That is why my belief is that the buildings I have played in are perfect example of that taking into account their history and the way the buildings (especially some of them) have 'acted' according to that.

Remember the Dramatic Theatre? The one that was built with the help of municipality and donations of local citizens in 1921? Its one hundred anniversary was supposed to be held on 12 March 2021 and be celebrated with the start of a new play – '100'. Supposed because it never happened, or it did not go as it was planned initially. Officials from all over the country as well as the president were invited. They accepted and somehow day before the celebration Varna's municipality announced that it closes all cultural events from 12th March ahead because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Somehow nightclubs and restaurant were still open, but theatres were closed – most likely because of political reasons. Next day the restriction was removed but it was already too late. The celebration spirit was gone and bitterness could be felt in the air.



Fig.24 Radev, S. (2021) Shame

Conclusion

In conclusion, theatre is not merely just a building in which people impersonate some characters and audience is entertained as some might see it. It is firstly a pure example of an art form that cures people and helps them fix their problems. The connection between theatre, play, performance, performers and spectators is also very unique and interactive. It is such that could not be experienced if one is not part of theatre atmosphere.

This thesis wanted to demonstrate how everything is entangled with one another – the play with the theatre, the audience with the actors, the ‘intra-actions’ that emerge and the atmospheric ambience. It tried to connect that atmospheric and ephemeral theatre with the way humans perceive visuals and use their beliefs and understanding to conclude a final image of it that keeps changing because of the ever changing phenomenal world. And last but not least, connect all the memories and reflections with the specific site and its own ever changing realities. The Dramatic Theatre in Varna has so many ups and downs regarding its building process or the way it was shut and reopened relentlessly during the lockdown. It is so similar and connected to the way culture in Bulgaria has a rise and fall or to how a theatre performance could be built as a sandcastle and then destroyed. And I firmly believe that this building is a pure example of site-specific theatre.

Probably its ending here has left someone else also very bitter and sad. But quality is presumably something very specific for the site for now since everything is interconnected. A possible solution is actually hidden amongst the lines of this thesis. Looking as an adult at a certain thing (theatre) and experiencing it will be totally different compared to the way a child will. But that does not mean it might not get it or it might not experience bits of the atmosphere as well. Because it does, but on a different level – more like 1 or 2 as explained in Chapter Two. In its childhood the kid develops its emotional connection with the world, its cultural identity. Older people already have a big resource of dispositions and discourse whereas children are more pure version and are more easily drawn to an experience. But in fact no matter, whether a child or an adult a connection with theatre should be built. That can only happen when one decides to enter the hallways of these ‘out of the world’ monuments. Only like that one can experience the ethereal uniqueness of these buildings and keep the ‘sandcastle(s)’ and feeling forever in its memory.

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Fig.1 Yankova, M. (2022) Front page cover collage [Collage] In possession of the author: Canterbury

Fig.2 Yankova, M. (2022) Diagram of Bulgaria [Diagram] In possession of the author: Canterbury

Fig.3 Yankova, M., Artist Unknown (2022) Case studies' location [Collage] In possession of the author: Canterbury

Fig.4 Yankova, M. (2022) Quick sketch of Festival Hall's stage according to personal memories [Sketch] In possession of the author: Canterbury

Fig.5 Yankova, M. (2022) Quick perspective of Festival Hall [Sketch] In possession of the author: Canterbury

Fig.6 Yankova, M. (2022) Quick sketch of Festival Hall's bird-eye view with transparency [Sketch] In possession of the author: Canterbury

Fig.7 Yankova, V. (2022) Festival Hall [Photograph] In possession of the author: Varna

Fig.8 Yankova, V. (2022) Drama Theatre Varna [Photograph] In possession of the author: Varna

Fig.9 Yankova, V. (2022) Drama Theatre Varna Close-Up [Photograph] In possession of the author: Varna

Fig.10 Yankova, M. (2022) Mixed art sketch showing the overgrowing weeds on Drama Theatre Varna [Digital Art] In possession of the author: Canterbury

Fig.10 Artist Unknown. (Date Unknown) Inside of Drama Theatre Varna [Photograph] At: <https://www.operavarna.com/index.php/bg/galeria/%D1%81%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B0> (Accessed 10/01/2022)

Fig.11 Yankova, M. (2022) Quick sketch of Drama Theatre Varna's stage according to personal memories [Sketch] In possession of the author: Canterbury

Fig.12 Artist Unknown. (Date Unknown) Actual Plan of Drama Theatre Varna [Photograph] At: <https://operavarna.com/index.php/bg/programa/repertoire/23-za-operata/66-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B5%D0%BA%D1%82-%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D0%BC%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D1%81%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0> (Accessed 10/01/2022)

Fig.13 Yankova, M. (2022) Quick sketch of Filial's stage according to personal memories [Sketch] In possession of the author: Canterbury

Fig.14 Yankova, V. (2022) Filial Varna [Photograph] In possession of the author: Varna

Fig.15 Yankova, M. (2022) Collage of building and ruining a sand castle [Photographic Collage] In possession of the author: Canterbury

Fig.16 Yankova, M., Artist Unknown (2022) Energy Sharing [Collage] In possession of the author: Canterbury

Fig.17 Zhechev, A. (2019) Creating collective energy part one [Photograph] At: https://www.facebook.com/studiotheatre/photos/?ref=page_internal (Accessed 15/01/2022)

Fig.18 Zhechev, A. (2019) Creating collective energy part two [Photograph] At: https://www.facebook.com/studiotheatre/photos/?ref=page_internal (Accessed 15/01/2022)

Fig.19 Schlemmer, O. (Date Unknown) Man In Centre [Photograph] In: "The Twentieth-Century Performance Reader" p.363

Fig.20 Schlemmer, O. (Date Unknown) Metamorphosis [Photograph] In: "The Twentieth-Century Performance Reader" p.365

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Fig.24 Radev, S. (2021) Shame [Photograph] At: <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=4118025564875565&set=a.1176119079066243> (Accessed 15/01/2022)

Appendix

If it were up to me, I would never send invitations to so-called "officials". I would invite them to buy tickets at a preferential rate, twice as high as the highest price. They have the highest salaries in the country - why should they enter for free?

They don't even come in. They receive invitations, but are reluctant to at least say they will not come. For years, the seats reserved for them remain empty at every premiere in the theater.

They do not enter the theater!

They have the power to open and close it. Like a chicken coop.

They think the theater is a chicken coop.

Because they did not enter the theater.

They are today's officials. Our rulers.

The photo shows the bust of Stoyan Bachvarov, which was to be officially unveiled tonight. It is better that it is covered - it does not see the blades.

Stoyan Radev



Fig.24 Radev, S. (2021) Shame [Photograph] At: <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=4118025564875565&set=a.1176119079066243> (Accessed 15/01/2022)