

**Alternative Methods in Architectural Education
(Intermediality of the educational process in
architecture in relation
to theatre stage design and performing arts in the
Faculty of Architecture
at Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava)**

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ABSTRACT

The development of generating methods for architecture pushes the medium towards new intellectual codes. The theoretical and architectural discourse, influenced by philosophy, sociology, and literature creates by its multiplicity still opened and complicated discussion in the 20th century. Architectural education reflects the need for such creative participation with other media at different levels depending on the possibilities or focus of the university where architecture is taught. The paper focuses on a case study from the Faculty of Architecture of the Slovak Technical University (abbreviate FASTU), where, besides other visual media, it is also possible to attend scenography as an optional course. It also deals with the reasons to build such an intermediary learning process. Theater, like architecture, has always had great power and the potential to open discussion and be a critical mirror of complicated political and social phenomena. The aim of the study is to analyze the alternative method in education and in the teaching of architecture.

INTRODUCTION

Scenography on its way to co-forming of the architecture

Temporality, recording of news and information, documentary reflectiveness – these too are the features of the theatre art. One of these features that forms the theatre is the space, where it takes place. The atmosphere's theatre space as well as the architectonic utilitarian space, has its own cultural and social functions. Through the means of the scenography theory and architecture, we analyze in this study theatre that is the theatre of site – space and its symbolism. The theatre, that is not only the method of theatre work, but also designing and thinking that is applicable to the creation of architectonic concept. We formulate this study as a brief overview of theoretic and applied theatre approaches towards scenography, which uses space outside of the theatre building, while we put it into the new context in opposition to the medium of architecture. At the same time we use these examples to show the students the importance of understanding the genius loci not only in theory but also in practice. We study the theatre tendencies that are put on the level of precise “social imitation”, transforming the timeless value questions that are the drama's scope. We contemplate on the scenography, which works with tangible architecture, its image or fragment that creates fiction, whose power acts differently than spatial theatre abstractions. Such substitution of stories into known architectonic typologies can have the benefit for the audience to analyze their own value system from a different perspective, in comparison with perception of scenic art abstractions. Specific architecturally-hyper realistic scenography of social and political imitation receives in another layer new symbols and meanings. The architectonic form, that is the scope of this study, is at the same time a scenography. The architecture theory is being discussed in its relation to the theatre science, whereas the space is perceived as area of imagination.

MERGING THE THEORIES

Architecture theorist Sigfried Giedion (1888 – 1968) deals in his work *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*, 1941) with modernist architecture. As the main current task of architecture he recognizes “the interpretation of a way of life valid for our time” [1]. Per Karsten Harries is this theory without defining the way of life valid for our time incomplete, however in spite of that, Harries considers as the truth, “that architecture should help us to find our place and way in today's world which evokes in us more and more disorientation” [2]. As ethical function of architecture, Harries understand its role with helping to articulate common ethos. He argues with Giedion about the role of translation and interpretation of architecture: “If the main task of architecture is interpretation, architecture must possess the power of speech” [3]. However, it is not clear to him, whether it is possible to claim about architecture that it speaks or in what sense it is possible to claim: “Semantics of architecture will be functioning, if the architecture will aim to be the medium to the interpretation using tools, which are signs: representation and symbol.

Architecture which represents a different architecture, fulfils itself a symbolic function. It challenges us to perceive it – and necessarily also its environment – in a certain manner. The point of symbols in architecture, similarly as of signs and symbols in theatre scenic art, is not

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to describe but to express” [4]. A well-known study about postmodern theatre by Hans-Thies Lehmann intensively touches the architecture in several points. This German Germanist, literature comparatist and theatre scientist labels postmodern theatre approximately in the span of the seventies and nineties of the 20th century. He sorts it into four ways: the theatre of deconstruction, multimedia theatre, restoratively traditionalist theatre, theatre of gestures and movement.

American architecture theorist and critic, representative of the world postmodern architecture Charles Jencks (1939) defines postmodernism as a hybrid from of eclecticism and irony. It is for him a constant choice, double coding, sign of wide choice, conflict and discontinuity of tradition. He perceives postmodernism as witty and innocent, with hybrid expression, which is clearly stylistically defined and is a strategy – in opposition to fragmental expressionism, aggressively oriented style, defined as neomodernism. For Umberto Eco is the postmodern a reply to the modern, consists of recognizing that the past cannot be ignored, because its destruction leads to silence. Therefore, it must be revisited: but with irony, not innocently [5].

Any reflection of reality is considerably influenced by visual-acoustic experience, standards and templates. Level of visual perception enables things to enter into consciousness. What factors most linger in us is based on a condition whether we will analyze the space as objectified or subjectified [6].

The objectified space will be interesting for us as a group of certain features independent of individual experiencing, whereas the subjectified space will refer about individual experience. Both spaces are mutually linked and influence each other. In the theatre scenography it is possible to observe this division on the physical use of the space. Scenography creates with its volumes tangible limits that lead the interpreter towards schematic manoeuvres. However, simultaneously it gives the option to reinterpret these manoeuvres and use the site in individual, subjective approach.

Contemporary theatre practice in its contextualization and interdisciplinarity deals with anthropology along with other directions, also at a level of specific site examination – not as scenography anymore, but as an actual site of an event, territory, its documenting and contextualization. If we study the theatre space as heterotopic, we found out that in certain social group it opens the possibility to shape forming of collective memory. The literature theorist Svetlana Boym understands the collective memory as “shared orientation points in everyday life”, which span and integrate individual memories into shared social network [7]. The art visuals made of symbols receive this way a specific narrative, legible for the ones who share this collective memory. It is associated with the dramaturgic and scenic choice to elaborate the quotation of subjects or objects in the theatre art, which are historically related to recent time period until the year 1989 (for example in the works of the scenographer Anna Viebock). In the contemporary theatre is the presentation of specific visual symbols from the time period prior the year 1989 a tool of “ostalgic” discoursus. The origin of the term Ostalgia is in former East Germany – it is a combination of words Ost (East) and algia (sadness). Society and its space is formed in a mutual relationship of understanding of its own past and presence. This understanding is materialized especially in places, where this society lives, eventually in places, where it wants to understand them – in our case, in theatres.

SCENOGRAPHY AS A COURSE AT FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE STU

Based on the four year long experience with the course Scenography we have found out that university level of architecture education at FA STU is capable of adequately offer possibilities to represent site specific theatre concepts to their comprehension and practical demonstration. Ongoing interest of students about this course is another proof to justify the offer of extensive interpretative possibilities of architecture as art medium.

Following the example of the Akademie der bildende Künste or Die Angewandte in Vienna, which are with their theatre tradition and influence the closest inspirational environment of “German theatre provenience”, where the scenography as academic course is taught at art schools, we would like to, at least partially, dedicate ourselves to the influence of this art form at the architecture work and obviously, in optimal case, vice versa. Because the education should provide more than just the craft skill.

The theatre scenography at the Institute of Interior and Exhibition Design FA STU has in the leading of its students to the scenography an interrupted tradition. Graduating from two year study at the FA STU was a condition to study at the Academy of performing arts in the scenography field.

In the '30s of the 20th century, "the scenography specialization in Slovakia was not so far to become an individual profession. Not that long ago the theatres had only standard scenes for specific types of plays that were made by skilled craftsmen and were changed only rarely. The modern theatre gradually brought a change and the closest profession, which could creatively seize the theatre scene, was the hoary profession of the architect." [8]. Emil Belluš, the FA STU founder, was that kind of scenographer. His acknowledged executions of scenic space for the director Ján Jamnický meant to turn away from the tradition of painted backdrops and bring the specific place to the scene. Scenography university education was established in Slovakia by the persona such was the professor Ladislav Vychodil, who was the head of the Scenography department at the Academy of performing arts in the years 1953 – 1983.

Faculty of architecture STU is a school that accentuates both the creative and technical part of architecture. However, the philosophical creativity needs to rise from the inner attitude. The Institute of Interior and Exhibition Design FA STU aims to support creative thinking about the space. About what is called genius loci. It offers students an option to study Scenography course, whose ambition is to broaden the architecture term also to related fields. It wants to educate and show how architecture can function and not only look as disposition diagram with facades. It wants to read the architecture. To dimension it, so that it can bear both correlation and story collisions. Such kind that creates it and give the dispositions meaning. Scenography

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is the deepest contemplation about sites and therefore who else than erudite architect should be its best creator...

The Scenography course has achieved four successful years. Domestic and international lecturers. Excursions. However, of highest values are the outputs of its students and their courage and openness to co-create performative theatre piece and work with genius loci from another perspective.

THE SCENOGRAPHY COURSE - PROJECTS

Kafka - Kurtág - Belluš Betrachtung (premiere: 10.6.2015)

Project performed at the Faculty of Architecture in Bratislava in the Emil Belluš Aula was a performance of architecture students with site specific concepts based on the motifs of Kafka's short stories *Betrachtung* with György Kurtág music pieces based on the Kafka's texts as well. The audience placed between the lecturer's desk and downswept terraced desk auditorium have found themselves in clenching and daunting place watching Kafka's Contemplations as a continuous slide of emotions' avalanche. The students used the aula as a theatre studio with opposite disposition of stages. They situated the events both in the auditorium and lecturer parts of the site. The examination of the actual site with new optics brought discovery of its many specific details.



Figure 1: *Kafka - Kurtág - Belluš Betrachtung* performed in the Emil Belluš Aula.

A Mistake – Sándor Márai (premiere: 19.5.2016)

In the theatre piece *A mistake*, based upon eponymous short story by Sándor Márai, the scenography students worked with compact literature text. Márai story elaborates a psychological study of a married couple looking for its living space. The bleak atmosphere of the interiors where the young couple lived, described by the author in the dark short story, was illustrated in the theatre adaption by the old boiler room situated in the basement of the FA STU building. Students used the boiler room as theatre laboratory with placing of the viewers – audience only at the balcony at the higher level at the entrance of the room. The stage – space

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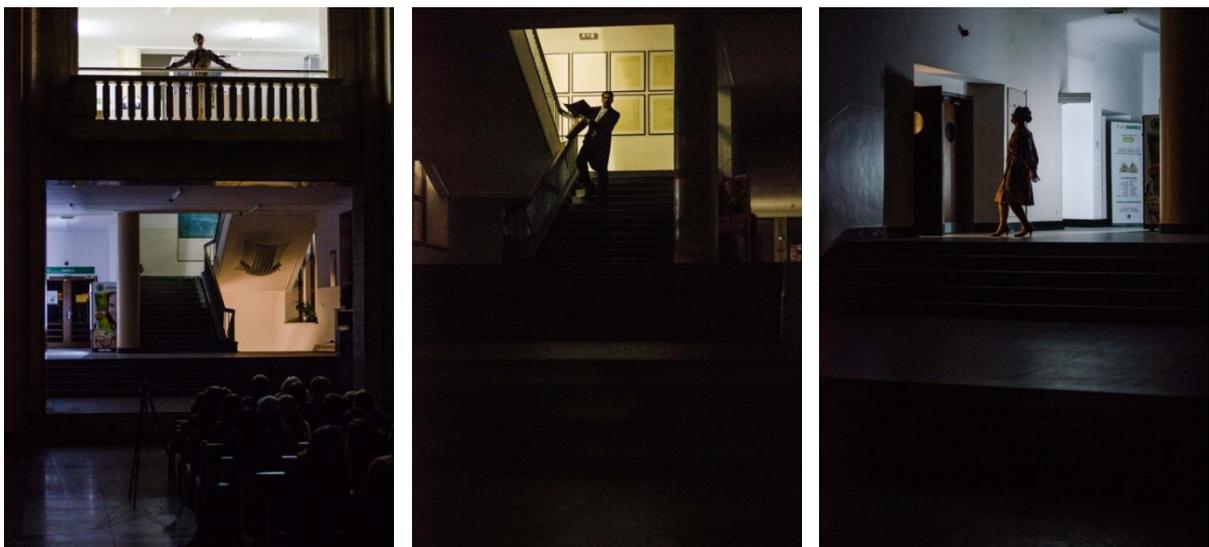
of two flats described in the text; original – old, ugly flat - and longed for new-building, was implied at two levels of unused and dilapidated technical room.



Figure 2: A Mistake performed in the old boiler room.

Scenographer – Emil Belluš (premiere: 28.11.2016)

Workshop dedicated to theatre scenography for the FA STU students enabled the participants to scenically elaborate a selection of song cycle *The Tower of Babel* by the composer Mauricio Kagel in the space of the FA STU entry foyer and its adjacent area. The students thought of the space primarily as a vertical communication system of “The Tower of Babel”. The selected eight songs were always performed in a different scenic spatial image. The viewers were placed between opposite parallel scenes created with framed portal into both blocks of the building. Half of the desk seating was placed to the right and the other half of the viewers seating to the left portal. Main performing space was located in both opposite portals and balconies above them.



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Figure 3: Scenographer – Emil Belluš performed in the space of the FA STU entry foyer and its adjacent area.

The Sound of Aula (premiere: 27.2.2017)

Through their form, *The Sound of Aula*, were documentary music-theater images about the state of the present-day student. Project *The Sound of Aula* was an intermediate piece working with the character and measure of unique university aulas (auditoriums): Slovak university of agriculture in Nitra (arch. Dedeček), Slovak university of technology in Trnava (arch. Dóka) and Slovak university of technology in Bratislava (arch. M.Kusý). Auditoriums were in *The sound of aula* staged in non-invasive form – with visual projection and light. Thanks to the context change, they became a place of discovery of new connections.



Figure 4: *The Sound of Aula* performed in Trnava and Bratislava.

CONCLUSIONS

The architecturally-theoretical discursus with overlap to philosophy, sociology and literature, that aims to solve systematic definitions, is in its versatility brought by the 20th and 21th century (i.e. modernism, postmodernism and poststructuralism experimenting, deconstructivism and others), still opened.

Scenography and architecture belong to disciplines which through the site-specific forms or immersive theatre, find in the latest decade an intensive mutual dialogue. During the historical development of drama, theatrical performances took place in various settings: simultaneous medieval stages, illusional and perspective Renaissance stages, Humanist stages of palaces and academies, decorated Baroque stages. The space of drama has always retained its detachment, being a symbolic world. Theatre has the biggest power and potential to discuss the most delicate and complicated political and social issues. Its role is to be document and communication channel. Since the beginning of the 20th century theatre has started to use completely different form of its expression tools.

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Architecture in this paper was represented by the scenography. Architecture was explored herein in relation to space and its inherent characteristics by means of heterotopy and synaesthesia, space as a sphere of imagination and the audience with its specific role. The study does not understand the classical term architecture as the building and scenography as a staging of decorative mise-en-scène. Architecture in this context was turned into a psychoanalytical laboratory.

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