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THE LOCATION OF ART IN THE URBAN SPACE AS A GOAL OF CONTEMPORARY THEATRE ARCHITECTURE

UMIĘSCOWIENIE SZTUKI W PRZESTRZENI MIASTA JAKO CEL WSPÓŁCZESNEJ ARCHITEKTURY TEATRALNEJ

Abstract

The response of art to the social needs of the environment requires a reference to the relevant public place. Theatre architecture can regain the power to create a proper place for the art of theatre by responding to the demand for public space in the city. The ancient Greek theatre did this by opening to the surrounding urban or natural landscape. Also the medieval theatre did this, when mobile wagons called mansions stood in city squares. It is the same as the phenomenon of street theatre, when the whole city becomes a theatre. Undoubtedly, since Teatro Oficina is based on the idea of street theatre, a place belonging to the city and its inhabitants should be mentioned. Centro Cultural de São Paulo is still a current example of the architects' striving to build a special relationship, based on the unity of the stage, the audience and the world. Teatro La Lira in Ripoll is a pure synthesis of urban public space sometimes becoming a theatre. It is a return to the very sources of European theatre.

Key words: theatre architecture, Teatro Oficina, Centro Cultural de São Paulo, Teatro La Lira

Streszczenie

Odpowiedź sztuki na społeczne potrzeby środowiska wymaga odniesienia się do miejsca. Architektura teatralna może odzyskać moc tworzenia odpowiedniego miejsca teatralnego poprzez zaspokojenie zapotrzebowania na przestrzeń publiczną w mieście. Tak jak czynił to teatr grecki, otwarty na otaczający krajobraz miejski czy naturalny. Tak jak było w średniowiecznym teatrze, gdy mobilne wozy zwane mansjonami stały na placach miejskich. Tak jak w fenomenie teatru ulicznego, dla którego całe miasto stawało się teatrem. Teatrem takim niewątpliwie jest Teatro Oficina, osadzony na idei teatru-ulicy, miejsca przynależnego miastu i jego mieszkańcom. Centro Cultural de São Paulo to wciąż aktualny przykład poszukiwań architektów dążących do zbudowania takiej szczególnej relacji, opartej na jedności sceny, widowni, świata. Natomiast Teatro La Lira w Ripoll to czysta synteza tego, czym jest miejska przestrzeń publiczna, która czasem tym teatrem się staje. To powrót do samych źródeł teatru europejskiego.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura teatralna, Teatro Oficina, Centro Cultural de São Paulo, Teatro La Lira

1. Introduction

Contemporaneity is associated with continuous change. Nothing is fixed or defined. Rapid technological progress affects the pace and lifestyle of cities. From the beginning of the twentieth century, architecture responding to this particular feature of modern times is looking for references and ways to express change in architecture. Architecture cannot escape the social and political responsibility of responding to contemporary problems either. The dynamic and expressive architecture of futurism referred to technological progress and the beauty of speed. The total negation of tradition was associated with the revolutionary slogans of the struggle for change. However, Pedro Gadanho noticed the difference between this futuristic vision of the ephemeral architecture of motion and destruction as a result of the state of war, and the architecture as a contemporary critical response to the volatility of values and needs in a world of consumption [3]. It is no longer about architecture as a static utility or even about the beauty of speed, but it is about a performative (efficient) response to the changing needs of modern society. However, performativity is not limited to economic efficiency, but also refers to the cultural dimension. By adopting architecture as a cultural product, its performative dimension should also contribute to an important role, which is the ability to make comments on ongoing changes in culture and society. As such, architecture as a performance often combines the artistic *modus operandi* with a deep sense of social responsibility. Pedro Gadanho recalls the artistic intervention “The Homeless Vehicle” (1988–1989), a work of Krzysztof Wodiczko. The artist designed a multifunctional machine for sleeping, eating, collecting and segregating



Fig. 1. Krzysztof Wodiczko, The Homeless Vehicle, 1988–1989, 5th Avenue New York 1988, www.culture.pl

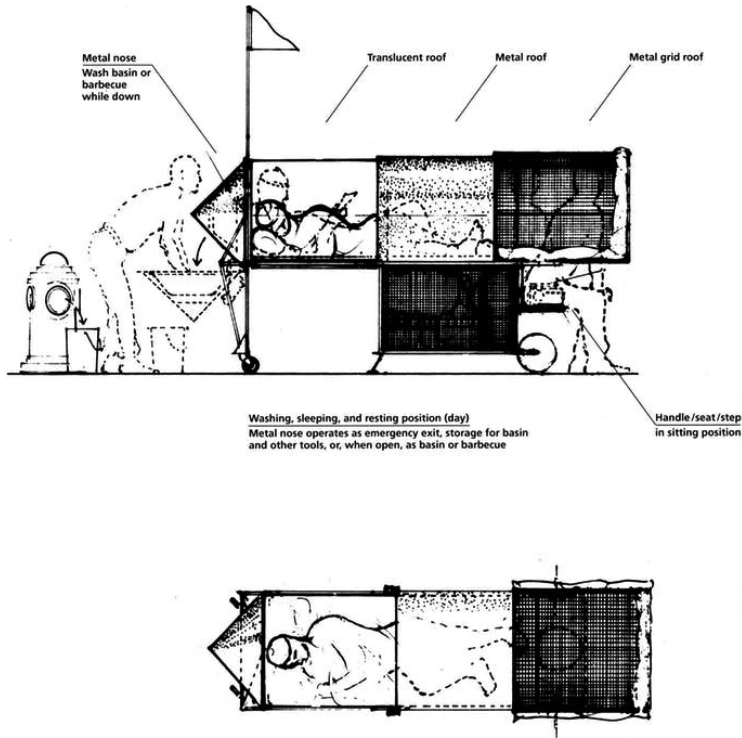


Fig. 2. Krzysztof Wodiczko, *The Homeless Vehicle*, 1988–1989, preliminary sketches, www.walkerart.org

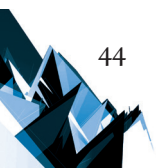
waste. A shopping cart machine, equipped with wheels, is pushed by the owner. It becomes their mobile and changeable fortress and treasury. At the same time, it still remains a trolley and its owner is homeless. Krzysztof Wodiczko himself described the work as such: “This vehicle is not a solution to the crisis of homelessness, it is an emergency rescue service for people who have no way out and an ambulance because it articulates the complex situation of the homeless, does not show them as crows collecting garbage and waste, only as people using a device for specific purposes – which should not exist in a civilized world. The vehicle has a rescue and didactic function, finding a form for what nobody wants to know or see” [12]. At the same time, this work can be considered a work of architecture, a multifunctional, mobile home. It is giving the vehicle the status of an architectural work – a home as a useful artistic manifestation of a social nature. This manifestation does not refer to stable values of durability, but to the instability of the individual’s position in the social structure.

2. Location of Art in the Urban Space

An inherent feature of the *performance* is the location of the work in public space. The performance manifests itself in the streets, stadiums and screens and can no longer be contained in “hermetically sealed cultural vessels”, as Dorita Hannah noticed [4, p. 328].

The response of art to the social needs of the environment requires reference to a place not only on the formal level of scale and visibility, but also to the atmosphere, spirit and significance of this place for its inhabitants [8, p. 38]. The location of art in the public space is not only meant to be the message itself, but the dialogue, commitment and creative activity of the recipient.

The theatre location is created both by the theatre and the public space. A mutual, inseparable relationship between the city and the theatre is built by social or even political involvement. Thus, this bond consists not only in the placement of art in the public space, but also in the operation of art in the public interest [9]. The social mission of the theatre can no longer be limited to theatrical performances only. Other events that aim to gather, activate and bring together residents of the city become its integral element. This way of understanding the theatre's mission should also include an architectural contribution. Theatre architecture can regain the power to create a proper place for the art of theatre by meeting the demand for public space in the city. It is worth paying attention to the fact that contemporary architecture operates not only with two, but three types of theatre space. Auditoriums and black-box interiors are no longer the only types considered. The space that is closely related to its location; always unique, exceptional, site-specific, is the third one. Theatre architecture enters the informal theatre space, previously associated mainly with street theatre. It is worth mentioning the notion of *theatres of interference* here [5]. It was proposed in the search of a theatre building that gives the possibility of penetrating public space through theatre space, in an unexpected and unique way, exceptional for a given place. The ancient Greek theatre did this, by opening up to the surrounding urban or natural landscape. Medieval theatres did this, when mobile wagons called mansions stood in city squares, gathering a spontaneous crowd around them. It is the same as the phenomenon of street theatre, where a theatre is created of the whole city. This is in contrast to traditional theatres, which isolate the theatrical space from the surrounding space, giving them an intimate character. Theatres of isolation are protected inside city quarters, behind the walls of fortresses. Theatres of interference are not buildings dominating cities, symbols of social order, where the building is an expression of the hidden theatre. Theatres of emanation announce their presence by setting the boundary between theatre and the outside world that is built like a caesura between *sacrum* and *profanum*, a holy day and a regular day. Building a theatre, called the interference theatre, takes on the principles of the surrounding urban structure, transforms them and introduces them into the principle of creating the theatre area. The Brazilian Teatro Oficina is undoubtedly this kind of theatre, being a place based on the idea of street theatre and belonging to the city and its inhabitants. To illustrate this idea, it is also worth recalling Centro Cultural de São Paulo (CCSP), a building almost fifty years old. It is still a valid example of the search of architects striving to embrace that special relationship, based on the unity of the stage, the audience and the world. It is also an example of the social involvement of the creators in building a space of dialogue and participation. On the other hand, Teatro La Lira in Ripoll is a pure synthesis of the public space recalling to mind the former theatre.



3. Teatro Oficina – a theatre-street

The first, unrealised project of Teatro Oficina in São Paulo by Lina Bo Bardi, Marcelo Suzuki and Edson Elito was ready in 1982. It was a combination of pathways from Jaceguay to Japurá streets and the opening of a plaza to Santo Amaro Street. Two gates that terminate the long interior of the theatre building lead to a large free space with ramps, pavements and a roofed grandstand, thus creating an open theatre space. The project referred to the vision of José Celso Martinez Corrêa (Zé Celso) – one of the main figures of the Brazilian theatre – who dreamt of an area without borders between the stage and the audience. As Edson Elito recalled, it was a complex process of integrating cultural and aesthetic differences: on one hand architects and their modernist education, formal concepts, purity, constructive rationalism and asceticism, and on the other, the Zé Celso theatre, growing out of symbolism, baroque, meanings, emotions and the desire for physical contact between actors and the public [13]. The reconstruction project involved the demolition of all internal elements, including the slabs above the basement. Only the brick case from the 1920s was preserved, with Roman arches at the base and roof. The result was a large open corridor measuring 9 x 50 m, with high side walls, up to 13 m high, hidden behind a still grey and neglected facade, allowing the viewer a real “rite of passage” while crossing the street to the magical interior. The difference in levels was equalised by a 25 m long ramp, running along the entire theatre, from the entrance door to the rear door. A 1.5-metre strip of land covered with folded wooden planks was also introduced, more strongly emphasising the sense of street and passage. As a constructional intervention, concrete poles were used on high brick walls to strengthen and stiffen them. For the cover, a metal structure that supports the sliding dome was proposed. An interior garden with a waterfall was also designed. Gas was fed from the gas network that powers the theatre. A large opening was introduced in one of the walls with a movable cover that allows connection with the green area. These elements – water, fire and air – appear in architecture, taking part in theatre performances, being part of the scenery. Metal constructions of galleries, catwalks and landings are demountable and can be dismantled and rearranged, if necessary, to achieve the “scaffolding architecture” effect. Nothing in the architecture of the Teatro Oficina is permanent because everything is part of the changing scene. Technical stage equipment, such as stage lighting, equipment and electronic control remains visible. Capturing and distributing video images in the theatre allows simultaneous action in various areas of the stage space. On the ground level of the theatre there is a ramp / crossing / stage, an internal garden and a water mirror with a waterfall, as well as toilets to the entrance to the theatre. On the first level, the galleries / stage / wardrobe give continuity to the space. And on the second level, 7.3 m high, there are dressing rooms. The project consists of the open plan and flexible space. There is a total transparency of space, you can see the actors preparing in the locker rooms – catwalks – mixing the viewing space with the service space. The window in the theatre wall, located in front of one of the stands, reveals the Minhocão viaduct, allowing the viewer to watch the performance at the same time as the view of the city, prompting the viewer to interact with these two realities simultaneously.



Fig. 3. Teatro Oficina, São Paulo, Brazil, L. Bo Bardi, E. Elito, J.M. Corrêa, 1980–84 (photo by M. Twardowski)



Fig. 4. Centro Cultural de São Paulo (CCSP), Eurico Prado Lopes and Luiz Benedito de Castro Telles, 1976 (photo by Thomas Hobbs, www.flickr.com)

4. Centro Cultural de São Paulo (CCSP) – a connector

In 1976, architects Eurico Prado Lopes and Luiz Benedito de Castro Telles won a competition for the design of the city library in the areas located above the Vergueiro metro station built in São Paulo two years earlier [7]. It was already the second architectural competition for this space. The first, carried out by the authorities two years earlier, envisaged setting up an office district there. When construction of the facility was already underway in 1979, the new authorities ordered a change of its function from a library to a cultural centre. They wanted to have a space that would not divide users into age groups or social classes, will have as few doors and divisions as possible, that will combine and integrate people as much as possible, bringing together the interior of the centre with the landscape, using glazed walls instead of full partitions. Centro Cultural de São Paulo (CCSP) is composed of two internal streets. It is a low and long horizontal form, integrated with existing trees. In this way, the everyday life of the street and the artistic life of the cultural centre are permeated in one body. The architects claimed that the building was a democratic act, referring to the equality of the “low” or “popular” street culture (outside) and the “high”, “organized” centre of culture (inside). Apart from separate administration zones, gates to enter the library and the possibility of separating the space for performances and rehearsals; the circulation areas in the building form a kind of a street. The building is reminiscent of a low-rise building, stretching along a curved street of 400 metres. The entrances remind one of alternative streets, rather than of representative doors to public facilities. The four floors of the object begin to be visible in places where paths intersect and cross at different levels, with different functions. Places for formal events and performances are set up between the streets. There are also places for less formal meetings and social activities. An open arena called Adoniran Barbosa Hall is accessible through glazed doors at the entry level with a void in the floor showing the black box studio below. Passers-by may gather around this opening, sit by the balustrade, and participate in events, both planned and spontaneous. Different paths can lead to the same place. “You can censor theatre, music and literature. But (dictatorship) could not censor architecture, because it is difficult to understand the intentions contained in the project. We have built a space that connects people, a democratic building was created during the dictatorship”, as Luiz Benedito de Castro Telles recalled [7].

5. Teatro La Lira in Ripoll – the void

After the demolition of the Teatro La Lira, a vacant plot remained for many years in the centre of Ripoll in northern Catalonia. The theatre was located within one of the town’s quarters, on a plot between the street and the river. Finally, the authorities announced an international architectural competition for a theatre as a multi-purpose space that could serve residents on a daily basis. The footbridge was an important element of the project to improve the circulation system of the town but also enabling residents to access the river. The competition was won by Joana Puigcorbé together with the architectural group RCR Arquitectes (Rafael Aranda, Carme

Pigem and Ramon Vilalta). The architects proposed to conceal the multifunctional hall entirely underground. The terrestrial space has been designed as an urban city square, which was led by a new footbridge connecting the river banks. The porch and the footbridge made of weathering steel shaped a frame to view the mountains, conquered by the dynamic variation of the shadows thrown by the rails forming the frame. The square became a symbolic stage, and the people passing through could be watched from both the riverside gallery and the bridge where the seats were placed. The people within the frame could change their role of actors to spectators sitting on the benches of the riverside gallery at any time. “All this imposes on the subconscious of the observer the reception of the place through the prism of the theatre spirit from the past and memories about the performances played here”, as Jolanta Sroczyńska noticed [11]. The internal walls of the frame filling the tightly broken space of neighbouring buildings, provide an opportunity to hide both the evacuation staircase leading to the underground theatre room and a narrow back room, normally used as a cafe. Due to this, the frame has also been useful for additional behind-the-scenes activity, for example in arranging decorations for various urban events organized on the square. The square also serves as a foyer for the multi-use hall. The ceiling lets light through by means of parallel strips that fold on both sides to cover the side walls. The hall can accommodate up to 800 spectators, with different arrangements of the seats and stage.



Fig. 5. Teatro La Lira, Ripoll, Spain, 2011, RCR Arquitectes (photo by J. Sroczyńska)



Fig. 6. Teatro La Lira, Ripoll, Spain, 2011, RCR Arquitectes (competition drawing)

6. Conclusions

Theatre architecture, as an expression of socially engaged theatre art, itself becomes an expression of this commitment. It can also be said that this is another stage in the search of European modernists, returning to the sources of Western theatre. Wagner strengthened the *theatron* to accommodate his new audience. He replaced the balconies and the lodges arranged in the horseshoe shape with a fan-shaped arrangement of the auditorium referring to the ancient Greek theatre. All viewers gathered in the theatre were turned towards the stage portal and seated in long rows. They were focused only on art having its place behind the stage frame. Craig, on the other hand, strengthened the *skene* to emphasize the universal landscape. Appia came back to *choros* to repeat the theatrical ritual of participation. Theatrical constructivists focused on *deus ex machina* to replace god in the machine with the idea of the machine itself as a liberating and productive force [4, p. 225]. This time it is also a return to our sources - to link the theatre with the surrounding space, nature, the world and the cosmos. As it was in Epidaurus, where the hills were a natural continuation of the theatre, or in Acropolis, where the theatre was open to the city spread out at its feet. "People set the circle themselves and were in it (and they did not surround it and they were not outside). They were inside" [1, p. 49]. The presented examples of theatrical spaces are a natural continuation of the public space of the city, which is the street. At Teatro Oficina, the spectacle begins on the street, then actors and spectators march through the theatre building and end up back on the street. The border between the street and the theatre disappears in the CCSP.

Everyone can come and stay or go out, be a participant or observer of art. In Ripoll, the passerby stops under the roof, in a place that was once a theatre and now it can become one again. Each of these spaces is a part of the city, a street that can become a theatre, and theatres that are streets.

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