

Architecture and performative arts: Introduction

Paolo Furia
paolo.furia@unito.it

Serena Massimo
massimoserenak@gmail.com

This issue of *Itinera* aims to address the connections between architecture and the performing arts in its various aspects and from multiple points of view. The growing emphasis on the performative character of artistic practices, namely, their ability to involve spectators directly and pervasively (Dixon 2007), imbues the relationship between architecture, the performing arts, and the spectator's experience. The sharing of the scenic space by spectators and performers is essential for the co-production of a common energy which operates as a "transforming force" and thereby opens up the shared experience of discovering oneself and the other as a union of the body and the mind (Fischer-Lichte 2004).

Keywords: architecture, performative arts, scenic space, experience.

Architecture and performative arts: Introduction

Paolo Furia
paolo.furia@unito.it

Serena Massimo
massimoserenak@gmail.com

This issue of *Itinera* aims to address the connections between architecture and the performing arts in its various aspects and from multiple points of view. The growing emphasis on the performative character of artistic practices, namely, their ability to involve spectators directly and pervasively (Dixon 2007), imbues the relationship between architecture, the performing arts, and the spectator's experience. The sharing of the scenic space by spectators and performers is essential for the co-production of a common energy which operates as a "transforming force" and thereby opens up the shared experience of discovering oneself and the other as a union of the body and the mind (Fischer-Lichte 2004).

The critique of the traditional conception of scenic space – which began in the second half of the twentieth century – and the emergence of a new relationship with the natural and urban environment are decisive for overcoming the distinction between performers and spectators. The identification of the scenic space as a "metonymic" space, i.e. a *continuum* of the real (Lehmann 1999), and the choice of urban spaces – streets, factories, dumps, prisons ... – as places for artistic performances, render architecture a key element of the spectator's experience. The constitutive link of the performative arts with their settings leads to rethink the performative character of space and spatiality itself. At stake there is the possibility of replacing the quite spread conception of space as a mere background of social action with that of an implicit and circumstantial dimension of action (Relph 1976, Tuan 1977, Casey 1997). As "guests of the same space" (*Ibid.*), spectators and performers elicit the reactivation of the virtualities of architectural spaces, a reactivation that in turn results from the influence exerted on both performers and spectators by architectural spaces themselves. By leaving its impression on performers and spectators in the form of "corpography" (Martínez Sánchez 2021), architecture affects their movement and, at the same time, invites them to explore new ways of expression and interaction. Performers' and spectators' bodily, affective, and dynamic experiences of architectonic spaces thus reactivate the affective and performative nature of architecture. By hosting bodily actions that, in a performative way, give continuity to the bodily process involved in the construction of these same architectonic spaces,

architecture itself appears as a performing art (Gomez 2003). Far from being a place where norms about how to build, live, and “act” space are merely prescribed, architecture is a performative practice that explores new artistic and behavioural practices within and beyond its boundaries (Rufford 2019). Site-specific architectural works and site-specific performances leverage this aspect, exhibiting the continuity and mutual influence between environment, architecture, and corporeality, which leads to the realisation of a “performative ecology” of the subject (Giannetti, Stewart 2005). Therefore, the performative character of built environments has an ecological implication also in the sense that it contributes to give shape to an enactivist paradigm of human-nonhuman-environment interaction, according to which environment is not just understood in deterministic way, but it is the open and ongoing result of the interaction between those who inhabit it.

The issue gathers a good number of contributions that are diverse in scope, content, and approach, consistently with the interdisciplinary character of the subject matter. The theoretical issue at stake, namely the reinterpretation of architectural space and spatiality in performative terms, involves various disciplines such as aesthetics, architecture, human geography, media studies, digital studies, cultural studies, museology. In this issue, many of these disciplines are called to delve into the question of the performativity of space, but there is also room for the views of artists, curators and performers. In the issue, the reader will find both theoretical insights and the presentation and discussion of specific case studies. The articles are distributed into six sections of different lengths.

The first section, composed of three articles, is devoted to the history of ideas: the concept of performativity in arts and literature is explored with respect to the ideas of authors of the past, such as Marcel Proust, and the present, like Jacques Rancière, with a view to retracing decisive contributions to the topic among the classics of thought and art.

The second section the second section collects articles investigating the relationship between performativity, theatre, and opera. The performative character of theatrical spatiality is highlighted both in the history of theatre and in the contemporary. Case studies taken from history result well combined with philosophical inquiries on the notion of representation and the peculiar relationships between play, spectators, actors, and choreography.

The third section concerns dance more specifically. The mutual influence and constitution of dance and architecture is addressed first through an analysis of the link between “living movement” and architecture that characterises Adolphe Appia’s stage reform and Émile Jaques-Dalcroze’s rhythmic education. The idea of dance movement as a response to architectural “affordances” to feel and move in a certain way, and the influence of dance on the affective action of these affordances, is the subject of a second investigation, focusing on the role of Anna Halprin's “dance deck” in the elaboration of her “transformational dance”. Finally, a comparison of William Forsythe's theory of the “choreographic object” with some installations performed in urban environments and the analysis of two case studies lead to an interpretation of the relationship between dance and architecture as the enactment of strategies that engage both the dancers and the audience with the surrounding environment.

The fourth part displays some examples of performative artworks and processes enacting the active participation of the recipients, both spectators and inhabitants of the places where the performance occurs. The performative character of settings and architectures, in this section, is captured in practice. The analysis of two contemporary opera performances shows how the intertwining of the performativity of architecture and the performativity of opera influences the overcoming of the boundary between scenography and urban space. This also the object of an essay focused on the realisation of the Roma Opera House in the twentieth century, which highlights the social and political impact of a building that aimed at showing – according to the rhetoric of that time – that Western civilisation happens through the arts. The final essay in this issue, which provides a detailed description of the "maritime machine" of Renaissance and Baroque theatre and the virtual reconstruction of this machine, shows on the one hand the key role of architectural elements in the staging of performing arts spectacles and, on the other hand, the creative potentialities of the application of digital technology to the history of the performing arts.

Part five is the largest of the issue and concerns the problem of inhabiting. An emblematic example of the synergy between the performativity of architecture and the performativity of the performing arts is the impact of performances based on the direct involvement of the local area and its inhabitants. By offering a participatory collective experience, such performances connect the private to the public sphere, in order to transform the public space into a "common" space whose activation and reconnection is carried out by the users themselves. By acting itself as a "performer", architecture produces spaces that simultaneously welcome a "community" of performative actions and artistic practices, thus strengthening the link between the latter and everyday life and enhancing their social function. The question of architecture and dwelling is addressed by the authors under several respects and with reference to a diverse and rich literature.

The last section deals with the specific contribution of digital media to the realisation of immersive and performative environments. The consideration of digital media and virtual environments raises the theoretical question of the relationship between performance and representation. A close analysis of the different ways in which the architect implies the notion of "performance" – including that implied using virtual models – reveals how the interaction between architecture and virtuality emphasises the corporeal, dynamic and complex nature of the aesthetic experience of architecture. A concrete example of this aspect is provided by the last essay, in which the game-installation-performance *Eutopia* by the collective "Trickster-p" shows how the virtual environment can make us more aware of and involved in finding solutions to the environmental crisis.