

Temporary forms of performative space: Impact of temporary architecture on audience diversification

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Abstract: The term *temporary forms of performative space* was coined out of the need to define the group of objects under study that use temporality and the architectural input into a non-theatrical space, and serve as boundaries for performative content. One such space was designed and built in the previous part of the research. By analysing the space during its functioning, supported by examples from abroad, we offer an example of one of the possible solutions to the problem of theatre attendance. In the conducted study, we aim to support by a practical experiment the premise that temporary architectural forms intended for performance art can diversify and broaden the audience, thus making the theatre more inclusive. The method at hand involves the analysis of two performances. In the Jera show, we analyse the impact of an object located in a public space on the composition of the audience. The object adopts characteristics taken from examples from abroad. The Elektra performance serves as a reference example, where the object is present but not necessary for the relevance of the data obtained. The gathering of information – monitoring the influence of the architectural form on the composition of the audience – takes the form of questionnaires distributed before the performance. The individual questionnaires were processed into a spreadsheet from which research questions with follow-up responses were abstracted. Due to the insufficient number of comparable performances delivered, we can currently confirm the premise of the functioning of the temporary architecture as an attractor of the wider theatre audience only on the basis of the number of spectators who learned about the performance from the QR code, posted in a public space a week before the performance together with the installation of the object itself. This group of visitors surpassed 17%, which we consider a positive result that encourages us to create more testing events in various environments.

Keywords: architecture, performance, space, temporary, statistics

INTRODUCTION

Before exploring the topic, it is necessary to clarify the basic terminology used. In the book *Occupying spaces: experimental theatre in central Europe: 1950-2010*, Tatjana Lazorčáková presents two poles of the spaces in which theatre takes place – i. the so-called *theatre architecture*, which includes stone theatres with a traditional stage and auditorium layout, and auditoriums with theatrical equipment, and ii. *non-theatrical spaces*, which include spaces not originally intended for theatre: bars, restaurants, streets, abandoned industrial halls, squares... The author speaks of "...a disturbance of conventional theatrical attributes, a rejection of the aesthetics of dominant production and instead, leaning toward theatre as a meeting, as dialogue, as a co-experience, as co-existence." (Lazorčáková, 2010)

Attention is paid to the second group of non-theatre spaces mentioned above. The temporary architectural input into these space leads to the origin of the category under research – the term *temporary forms of performative space*. In this part of the research, the architectural input – the *form* – represents an object designed and realized by us. By implementing the object in two different types of non-theatre spaces, we create our own

per-formative space. In addition to the object created for the needs of the research, we also mention examples from domestic and foreign environments that complete the idea of similar types of projects. The fundamental question becomes how such interventions affect the show attendance; we focus on documenting the visitor profile, the ratio of viewers, ranging from new, casual viewers to viewers who regularly seek theatre as a type of culture. We investigate the direct impact of temporary architecture on theatre attendance and audience diversification.

THEATRE IN NON-THEATRICAL SPACE

As Maja Hriešnik points out, the current trend of retreating from existing theatre buildings has already characterised several periods in the second half of the 20th century of the Czechoslovak history, when artists sought more hidden, often slightly unsuitable conditions or environments for their work, in order to express their ideas with greater freedom. (Hriešnik, 2010) The non-theatre interior spaces used for theatrical performances are represented, for example, by *Bytové Divadlo Vlasty Chramostovej* (Vlasta Chramostová's flat theatre) in the 1970s, or a more contemporary example from the early 1990s, the *Divadlo Stoka* (Stoka Theatre).

At the turn of the millennium, the motivation to leave traditional theatre spaces changed. Among other things, there was a need to find new means of artistic expression, as well as new audience to replace the old one that had lost interest in theatre. Nowadays, artists also seek spaces or buildings that initially seem unsuitable and unusable. Often these are industrial buildings, various factories, buildings of transport or energy infrastructure that are no longer used. Some of these spaces are architecturally transformed – adapted, others are used only temporarily, without permanent interventions.

The term non-theatre space also entails outdoor spaces. Squares, streets, parks, together with interior non-theatre spaces, began to be used as early as the 1960s. (Lazorčáková, 2010) Urban interventions, such as various happenings or street theatre, bring spontaneity to the urban experience. These ephemeral events challenge the conventional use of space and encourage citizens to redefine their relationship to the city. Audiences, which are often transient and diverse, reflect the demographic diversity of urban life, promoting inclusivity and accessibility in the arts. The theory mentioned above is confirmed by several realisations. Out of these, we select two examples of temporary performative spaces from abroad, which used a distinct architectural form, temporary occupation of public space and less traditional production, to expand their audience base.

Bouda III, the summer stage of the National Theatre in Prague, Czech Republic designed by architect Luboš Svoboda, was operated during the year 2006, for almost four weeks. The shape of the building reflected the internal function minimized to the stage and auditorium. At the same time, the architectonized form of the initials ND was an unmissable part of the space of the National Theatre piazza. By expanding the productions to include experimental projects or projects by young creators, but also by its distinctive form and the media attention that resulted from the uniqueness of this project, Bouda III had the opportunity to reach a wider audience. (Krausová, 2006)

Using The Shed, by Haworth Tompkins, as an example, we demonstrate a scenario where a temporary object functions as an extension of the stone theatre, an additional auditorium, during the refurbishment of the London National Theatre. Its original planned duration for one year was extended and, The Shed remained in use for four years. The bright red, almost sculptural form, without windows or doors, formed a contrast to the concrete volume of the National Theatre. As the previous project, not only did it substitute for the space of the reconstructed auditorium, but it also offered an extended production of experimental performances, not suited for the National Theatre building. In the words of the studio, from the opening show in 2013 to the dismantling of the building in 2017, The Shed attracted a more diverse audience to the National Theatre and helped to bring energy to the whole surrounding area. (Haworth Tompkins, 2013)

Inspired by these projects, we abstract their characteristic features. Distinctive form, installation in public space and unconventional production are the characteristics that we intentionally use at, for us, realizable smaller scale. Similarly, to the analysed examples from abroad, our object's aim is primarily making theatre accessible to a wider audience. By abandoning the traditional position of theatre as a cultural institution, these projects become more inclusive, more accessible. Inclusivity and accessibility in theatre are highly demanded today, as evidenced by The Dresden Declaration, a document highlighting the key challenges, which the theatre sector is facing. It cites diversity, inclusion, and access as one of these challenges. Theatre and performing arts should aim to represent the whole society and strive to be accessible to all citizens regardless of their social or

geographical origin, age, race, gender, religion, physical ability, or other factors. (ETF, 2020)

MATERIALS, DATA AND METHODS

In the previous phase of the research – research by design – we created an object, currently serving as a test space, filled with performative content, and gradually embedded it in various types of spaces. Two performances were delivered in the space it offers so far. Jera, a dance performance taking place at the square (outdoors), and Elektra, which took place in the former boiler room of the Faculty of Architecture and Design, Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava, Slovakia, indoors. In the current phase, the selected research method is information gathering and statistical evaluation.

The observation of the impact of the architectural form on the composition of the audience is performed by means of questionnaires distributed before each performance. (Fig. 1) The design of the questionnaires and the method of marking the selected answers is the result of the search for the easiest format to choose the answer without using a pen. This need arose naturally because of the different types of environments in which questionnaires cannot be completed. We evaluated a tear-off questionnaire, in which the audience tears off the selected answer, as the most ideal method of completion.

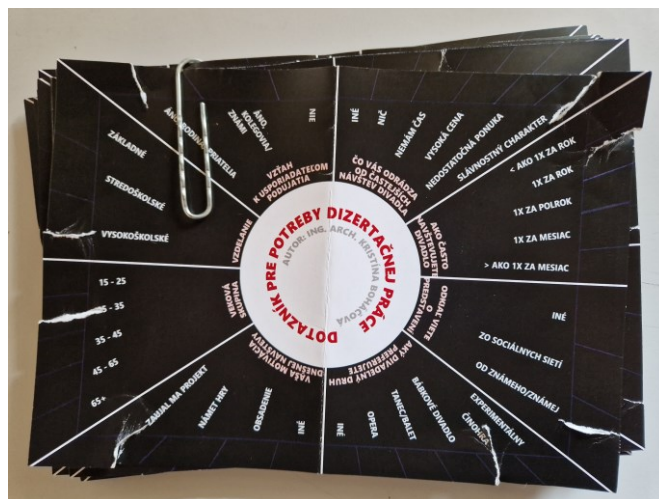


Fig. 1. Tear-off questionnaires. (Author: Kristína Boháčová, 2023)

The paper questionnaires were administered by the main author, meeting the respondents to whom the questionnaire was distributed. The return rate was 93%, out of a total of 45 questionnaires distributed, 42 were returned, of which one questionnaire could not be evaluated due to incorrect completion. A pilot testing of the questionnaire was performed simultaneously with the on-site survey. Owing to multiple performances where the identified deficiencies in the questionnaires will be corrected, we did not have the need for a separate pilot testing. The questions examined belonged to the category of factual questions, which respondents answer mostly accurately, (Gavora et al., 2010) and therefore we assess the responses as valid and highly reliable.

The questions asked were inspired by various sources dealing with statistics in the field of theatre. The primary sources of inspiration include the book *Slovenské divadlo v čísloch* by Martina Čierna and 2018 output of the *Národné osvetové centrum* entitled *Vzťah slovenskej populácie k divadlu*. (Čierna, 2017; Národné osvetové centrum, 2020). The questions were grouped into i. factual and ii. opinion questions. The factual questions comprised age, education, source of information about the per-

formance, relationship with the organisers of the performance, and theatre attendance frequency. The opinion questions investigated the motivation to attend a particular event, preference of a particular theatre type and what discourages theatre goers from attending theatre events more often. In this part of the research, we focused on questions related to the audience's relationship with the event organisers and the source where the attendees heard about the event. The individual questionnaires were processed into a spreadsheet from which the researched questions with follow-up responses were abstracted. The generated sub-graphs are shown in the results.

EXPERIMENT

By performing an experiment, we aim to confirm that temporary architecture forms intended for performative art can diversify and expand the audience, and thus make theatre more inclusive. The method we have chosen involves the analysis of two performances. In the Jera show, we analyse the impact of an object situated in a public space on the composition of visitors. The object takes on characteristics adopted from examples from abroad. The Elektra performance is used as a reference example, where the object is present, but it is not necessary for the relevance of the data obtained.



Fig. 2. Elektra (is not coming). (Photo: Barbora Podola, 2023)

Elektra (is not coming) was a project developed under the interdisciplinary civic association *Objektorárium*, which brings together young professionals from the field of art and architecture. The production was hosted in the Ad: creative centre, located in the former boiler room at the Faculty of Architecture and Design, Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava, Slovakia. The original text by director Matej Trnovec and playwrights Veronika Briestenská and Martina Havierová, Elektra (is not coming), was based on the motives of Euripides' Elektra and other ancient myths. In the production Elektra (is not coming) the object is part of the stage, the play takes place inside and also outside the object, the audience sits in an improvised auditorium. Since the performance takes place in the interior, the object was not intended to function as an attractor. The role of this performance in relation to the research is primarily comparative. We do analyse the data obtained from the questionnaires and use them as a control sample in relation to Jera.

Jera – a dance movement performance for one performer – was delivered at the end of October in an exterior environment on the Námestie slobody in Bratislava. The choreographer was Nela Rusková, a final-year student at the VŠMU, who was invited to join the – at that time emerging – interdisciplinary project *Objektorárium*.



Fig. 3. Jera. (Photo: Barbora Podola, 2023)

The theme of the performance was a Nordic ritual, which often works with circular movements, overall, with the motives of the circle and runes. The chosen concept was inspired by the very shape of the object in which the performance took place. The object also acted as an eye-catcher, as it was already installed in its location, along with a QR code referring to the performance, posted a week before the performance. We were inspired by the aforementioned *The Shed*, or *Bouda III*. In both shows, the objects appealed to potential visitors not only through traditional communication channels, but also by their distinctive form or by appearing in a space that was previously empty. The site for the performance was chosen strategically, on the pedestrian route connecting the main railway station with the city centre as an important transit route. The building provoked curiosity and the information reached people who are not regular theatregoers, which was already evident from the interviews with the audience before (after) the performance and was confirmed later by the answers collected in the questionnaires.

RESULTS

During both performances, audience data was gathered by way of questionnaires. The research questions reflected the need to identify where the audience heard about the performance, or what their motivation was to attend a particular performance. We also investigated the audience's relationship with the performance organisers in order to be able to separate those audience members whose motivation to come to the performance was personal (relationship with the organizing team or the cast). These data are confronted in the interior vs exterior relationship, in order to compare the number of casual (new) spectators that an object placed in the square was able to attract.

The Elektra sample had 20 viewers during the premiere and the rerun. The questionnaires collected during the opening night and the rerun differ from each other mainly in two categories, namely in relation to the organisers and the source of information about the performance. These two categories are closely connected, based on their mutual relationship with a specific viewer, we can learn whether the viewer is new (random), or a viewer who came to the show because of someone from the cast, or event organisers.

For the opening night, up to 95% of the audience had some relationship with the event organisers, and the same percentage of the audience had heard about the performance from friends. This is based on the very nature of the low-capacity premiere, to which audiences were mainly invited from family and friends. The audience changed during the rerun. The statistics show that 40% of the audience were not related to the event organisers. However, if we look at the data which shows the source of in-

formation about the performance, we can see that more than a third of this group learned about the performance directly from a friend. We consider a genuinely new visitor to be a spectator who is not in a relationship with the organisers and has received the information about the performance indirectly, i.e. through

social media. Based on these criteria we conclude that only 25% of the audience are truly casual (new) spectators. Figure 4 shows the questions asked and the answers collected from individual viewers during the premiere and reruns of the performance Elektra.

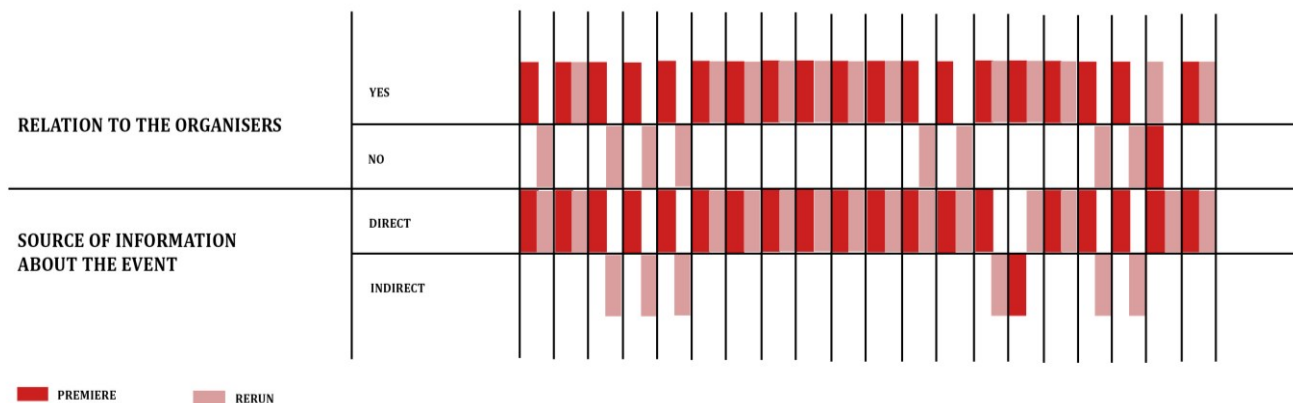


Fig. 4. Graph Elektra. (Author: Kristína Boháčová, 2024)

The questionnaires gathered during Jera are identical to the ones used for Elektra, with the addition of answers regarding the motivation to attend a particular event, as well as the source from which the audience learned about the event. However, we are still able, as with the previous chart, to divide the source of information about the performance into indirect and direct source – from an acquaintance. The indirect source includes responses from social networks, from the QR code, and also the 'any other form' option. When examining the question regarding motivation to attend a performance, in relation to the source of information about the performance, it was found that visitors who chose the answer 'any other from', walked past and stopped to see the performance. Their source of information about the performance was not anyone from the organiser team; therefore, we classify them as an indirect source.

were acquainted with the organisers in some form. We are interested in the 'unrelated' group, where 78.58% of the visitors found out about the performance indirectly. Finally, only 26.83% of the original 34.15% of unrelated visitors are actually new (random) according to our criteria. We emphasize that to be classified as new, a visitor needs to be unrelated to the organisers and to have accessed information about the performance indirectly. Figure 5 shows selected questions and answers of individual viewers during the premiere of the performance Jera.

The sample was composed of 41 respondents. The number of evaluated questionnaires was not corrected in any way; the aim was to collect as many questionnaires as possible. They were distributed to all the participants, of which 41 spectators handed in a correctly completed questionnaire. We found that more than a third of the spectators were not related to the theatre organisers in any way. The other two-thirds reported that they

Comparing these two events, we can observe similar results indicating new (random) viewers, but we have to remember that in the case of Jera, the premiere distorts the sample and thus a comparison is not entirely possible. Despite this imbalance, we can assume, based on the previous data, that in the case of the Jera rerun, the data concerning the percentage of casual (new) viewers will be higher and will confirm the hypothesis. Currently a clear indication of the influence of architectural form on theatre attendance is the figure of visitors who learned about the performance from the QR code, embedded in the object during its one-week implementation in the square, which culminated into the performance. Such visitors surpassed 17% of all spectators.

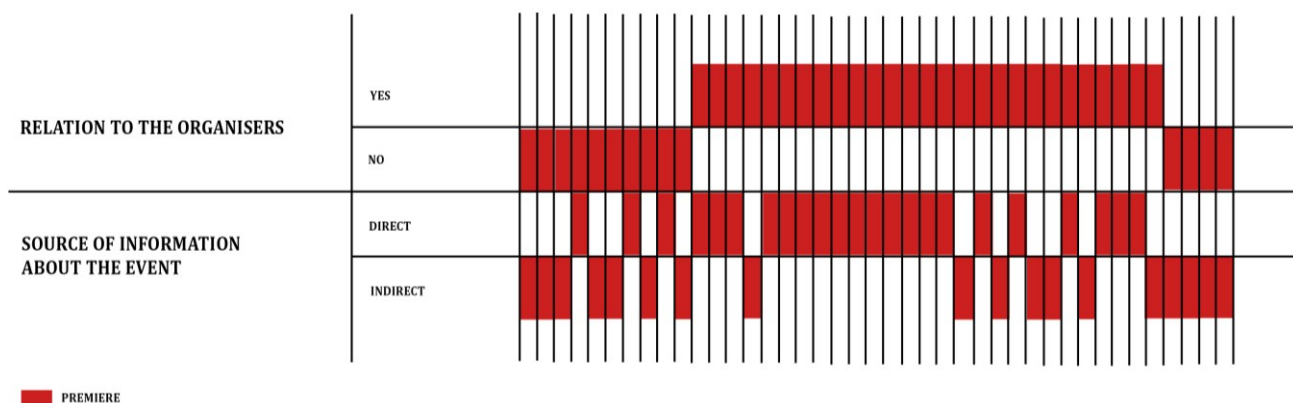


Fig. 5. Graph Jera. (Author: Kristína Boháčová, 2024)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

We considered comparing the results of the experiment with similar research from abroad, but so far, due to the originality of the research, we have not been able to find relevant data that could be compared. Perhaps the closest to the subject of the research is the attendance figure for the National Theatre in London, United Kingdom, which reported more than 45% increase of paying spectators during the 2012/2013 season, compared to data gathered four years earlier. (Healy, 2013) We could discuss whether this phenomenon was caused by the installation of The Shed back in 2013, and which brought a dramaturgy that appealed to a wider audience, or whether its installation was part of a new approach to the marketing of the National Theatre and contributes only minimally to the increase in attendance. If we accept that the increase in visitors is due to the installation of the object, we still cannot determine exactly whether they were attracted by the more varied dramaturgy, the object itself, or partly by both. Therefore, in the experimental phase, we asked the audience about their motivation to visit a specific performance and how they learned about the performance, so that similar speculations cannot occur.

For the clearest comparison of indoor and outdoor performances, it would be appropriate to rerun the Jera, as was done with Elektra. At this point, the results are insufficiently comparable, given that the premiere of Elektra consisted primarily of viewers directly invited, mostly family and friends. The opening night of Jera had a wider audience, which was ensured by the outdoor setting and the possibility to attend the performance based on a form of invitation other than by direct invitation from a member of the organiser team. Nevertheless, the nature of a premiere with many invited guests from among the family and friends is preserved. Consequently, comparing the two performances is disputable, which is indicative of the main limits of this study. The effort to combine the requirements for performances resulting from scientific work with the reality of organizing events in the field of independent culture does not always result in favour of scientific work. Therefore, some performances cannot be included in the study, which is not ideal in terms of their long-lasting preparations.

At the moment, we can confirm the hypothesis of the functioning of temporary forms of performative spaces as an attractor, based on the percentage of viewers who learned about the performance from a QR code. This group of visitors surpassed the rate of 17%. This is a positive outcome that encourages us to create more testing events in various environments. We are already able to confirm the installation of the object in the vicinity of the Chancellor's Office at the University of Performing Arts located in Bratislava old town (Slovakia) and rerun the Jera show. On this occasion, we will obtain additional data regarding the expansion of the audience base. The results not only encourage us to pursue further research, but we think they could also encourage theatre institutions to create their own temporary performance spaces and thus not only expand their theatre audiences, promote, and highlight the institution but also enrich the cultural scene in the city. We further think the experience could be transferable to other art forms – not only theatre, but also fine arts, literature, and philosophy – and could use the phenomenon of temporary architecture to approach people more closely.

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