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Title: Where does *Dance* belong to? The flexible space and museum intervention.

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Abstract: The relation between dance and space is the center of this communication. Because, as the French dance researcher Julie Perrin (2006) remarks: “dance has not imposed a specified place for itself, nor an architectural standard”, but it is relevant to remark that “this space, whatever it may be, is essential” (Barry & Oelofse, 2021).

Our relation with the architecture is based inherently on our human existence because “it is linked to the movement of our body within the space” (Arnheim, 2000, p. 82). It can be affirmed that what is going to happen inside a building (the spatial use through the social practice we might give it to it) has a determinant role when it comes to design it. So, in different words, how do they have to look so we can “see” them as spaces for dance?

Besides the space as an artistic element or analyzing the fact of providing it to the dance production as a key fact of institutionalization, my participation at the Congress will be focused on how any dancespace can be considered as so. It means: what makes a space a dancespace?

Through the analysis of several examples (flexible spaces, museum intervention) the link between dance and architecture will be further developed.

Where does *Dance* belong to? The flexible space and museum intervention

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Introduction

The concept of “space” and its different genealogies are a central part of my thesis work about dance institutionalization. As a dance producer I can tell that the lack of space where to rehearse or to dance, can be determinant for a company to keep creating or to disappear.

Even though it is true, as it can be read below, that dance does not require a concrete space, it is very dangerous to trivialize it. That is why I am so much concerned about researching what it is called “dancespaces”, and how a space can be transformed into that.

Once the space has been given, it can also be subject of analysis, because its dimension has a very different impact on the artist and on the audience. For instance, the fact of dancing inside a museum might have a different meaning than dancing inside a magnificent theatre, or inside a bookstore, as we used to do with *Danza entre Libros*.

This research shows part of my work as a dance researcher, first at the Alcalá University in Spain and now, at the Freie Universität Berlin, Germany.

The architectural profession and its contribution to dancespace

“Theatre structures should be planned by the people who work in them!” (Robinson, 1950, p. 8).

The role of previsualization, design and construction of any kind of place is traditionally assigned to the profession of architect. And it is true that there have been lots of books about the architecture applied to performative spaces. But as Bowler (2015) remarks: “the vast majority of them are written from a historical or technical perspective and only give an account of how theatre buildings stand empty and unused in measurable space” (p. 2). Architects used to be admired because of the magnificence of their works, no matter how useful they were in

the end. As if there was a lack of communication between architecture and its social use. And this is what Robinson claims about.

Always based on the spatial use notion, widespread at the end of 20th century, buildings were not constructed anymore, but developed by the *spatial use* that a community, of which the architect is member. So, the architect's profession became a philosophical problem in its own right. And since "space is the core of architecture" (Dursun, 2009), several questions appeared for the very first time: What is *architecture*? Why do we humans need it for? What is someone supposed to do as architect?

If a space can be defined only in relation to a concrete activity, that has also some kind of link with it, the role of the architect cannot be oriented to build a huge construction without taking into account the final use of it. This 'out of reality' attitude normally owned by architecture professionals or urban planners has been very much criticized. For instance, Delgado (2018) accuses them of thinking that "the urban space is something that is there, waiting for them, fully available for their creative exploits" (p. 34).

As a response, the professional sphere adopted a clear oriented-to functionality mind. In order to understand the requirements of what is going to be built, the architect might need to interact with the community members as future users of his work, through "an active engagement in an expanded field of intervention" (Fox & Nauta, 2012, p. 46). For instance, it might happen that, after such conversations, the diagnosed needs to be attended can be covered in preexisting structures. These talks belong to the "inherently speculative field of research" (p. 47) and it allows the architect's profession to arrange, debate, enlarge or minimize the boundaries it constantly imposes itself anytime it needs to be portrayed somehow.

The need for this communicative process is reinforced by the idea that the lack of connection between the concept of architecture from the act of building can be "problematic because humans tend to connect with and to understand a constructed form. But, at the same time, they want to find the value beyond the structure and to include that value in the discourse of architecture" (Adjaye, 2012, p. 9).

Nevertheless, to be permanently subject to the practice, for instance to choreographers or dancers' requirements, can be detrimental for the architectural self-initiative. Therefore, Bathia developed the concept of "unsolicited architecture" that aims to liberate it from its client. Because, as Van Berkel (2012) argues, if the architect's vision is tended to be omitted and he

or she is compelled to obey “practical indications of others”, the rift between “those that *theorize* for us and those that *build* for them would be furthered” (p. 25).

The flexible space: the black box

I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged. (Brook, 1996, p.7, as cited in Bowler, 2015, p.46)

And, again, space plays a crucial role in that process of through the development of fiction. But besides the tools performers and technicians use to carry this project out, this chapter’s topic deals with whether a performance place might have a constructed form so we, as humans, identify it as a so. That means: What about the physical appearance of the space for dance? How are they supposed to be?

If a classification is required, theatres can be divided into two main groups: those magnificent historical theatre buildings (Teatro Real, Madrid or Teatro La Scala, Milan) and, the most contemporary theatre buildings with a sober and functional aesthetic (Hubbel am Ufer, Berlin). Nevertheless, dance has been inserted anywhere (Perrin, 2006), so what is necessary to consider a space a dancespace?

Bowler (2015) draws upon to the British theater director Peter Brook’s book “The empty space” to analyze what the meaning of *empty* is. She emphasizes the fact that he worked in spaces that were not built as *performance spaces*, like “factory buildings, old market halls, industrial spaces” (p.46).

The fact of giving a different use to an old non-performative space -not even cultural one- means, in some way, breaking into it, modifying its concept and meaning, as well as its relationship (through its use) with humans, both performers and audience. According to this idea, these spaces must have a certain flexibility, which can be given by the absence of decoration, like the objects in the middle of the scene. These may limit the new use that is about to be given to it. In this way, audience might easily focus on the action rather than in the aesthetics that surround it. So, what he is looking for is that engagement of an audience through the absence of distractions. Therefore, according to Bowler, where Brook says "empty", it shall be replaced by "flexible" or “neutral”, that allows the audience concentration at the action.

This flexibility-oriented stage can be found outside those magnificent theatre buildings, like in markets (Mercat dels Flors, Spain), demystified churches (O Espaço do Tempo, Portugal) or industrial zones (Centro per la Scena Contemporanea, Italy), that are now theatres in their own right after a refurbishment (Bowler, 2015). The choreographer Rui Horta considers that the success of the architecture is that, “in order to achieve a desired function, reduces the form to what is strictly necessary” (Horta, 2000, p. 186).

So, a dancespace might be based, as any other performance one, on its allowance to the transfiguration and engagement, being the black box the most sober form to recognize it.

Dance in a non-dancespace: Museum intervention and the “Dance assaults” at Reina Sofía Museum, Madrid.

In his complaint about the lack of transformation of classical dancers towards a contemporary style in British state companies, the ballet critic Vaughan (1975) says: "a ballet cannot work as a museum" (p. 9), referring to the static character of these places. The Spanish researcher Óscar Navajas (2015) stresses that in Europe at the end of the 20th century, the museum as institution was considered “a passive empty and decontextualized space, far from society and the arts” (p. 84).

The tiredness of the repetitive and inertial spatial use of it, led artists to generate different artworks that were moving or ephemeral, rather than a long-lasting piece, and therefore a new conception appeared. The repulsion for the museum is very well described by the performance artist Allan Kaprow (2016): Modern artists looked at it and they used to find there something worse than a mere warehouse of old artistic objects but “a deposit of dead artists and they were not dead yet” (p. 90). He adds that those old palaces try now to seduce masses with short-lasting time events so that public may recognize the institution space as one full of updates and novelties: conferences, pedagogical programs or itinerant exhibitions could be few examples. The architect Josep Maria Montaner (2003) points out that the contemporary museum has turned into a place for people flow, stimulus and interaction.

In the United States of America, this trend began much earlier with the work of Grant Hyde Code, curator of the Brooklyn Museum in New York City. According to Amanda Jane Graham (2020): “he arranged programs that brought together dancers performing in a variety of dance styles and organized exhibitions that combined or aligned dance performance and dance

ephemera with visual art” (p. 213). The journalist John Martin published his article “The Dance: Experiment”, where he sees the work of Code as:

An experiment conducted by the museum and watched with the closest interest, not alone by those who are particularly concerned with the welfare of the dance, but also by the many other museums which are seeking to serve their communities of a living manner” (Martin, 1939 as cited in Graham, 2020, p. 217).

A space can be subject to intervention when the traditionally given use to it is alienated by some other new spatial use. In the case of a museum, seems to be quite *frequent* because it counts on its own specific term: “museum intervention”, that according to James Putnam, it consists of those “artworks that critique organizing principles of the museum” (Putnam, 2001, p. 7, as cited in Smith, 2012, p.1). With *frequent* I mean that dancespaces diversification has also involved museums and art galleries in multiple occasions, in fact, Putnam considers it “an emerging museological tendency in art which is matched by the use of the traditional museum as a site for artists’ intervention” (p. 1) although his summary of artworks are not only dance-related ones.

Previously it has been studied the contemporary need to create new performance spaces, far from the big auditoriums, seeking for absence of external elements that might create distraction on the audience. But some other dance in non-dancespace can be observed that does not seek this engagement, but have other intentions, like dancing inside a museum, for instance, which seems to be much more related to the will of presenting the museum as a place *where things happen*.

During the first years of the 2010 decade, the Contemporary Art Museum Reina Sofía (Madrid) carried out an event called “Los asaltos de la Danza. Explosiones de danza en sitios y momentos inesperados”. Translated into English, this would be “*Dance assaults. Danza explosion at unexpected places and moments*”. It consisted in short pieces among different areas of the museum: the main entrance, the garden the corridors or inside transparent elevators.



Photographies: Claudio Álvarez. El País.

I would like to highlight the chosen name for such events: “Dance assaults”, as if the museum walls were so high that dance had to challenge itself somehow to be inside, reinforcing the idea that dance does not belong there and providing an exclusivity tinge to what was happening. The choreographies happened outside the museum halls, in what inside a theatre could be the intermediary spaces. That means that the pieces did not take place in front of Picasso’s *Gernika*, for instance. In spite this absence of the context, which might be completely intentional, it did change the circulation flow of the attendants to the Contemporary Art Museum: “It was an intermittently rainy, cold and windy Sunday yesterday, but the queues to see the Salvador Dalí exhibition were unexpectedly enlivened by dancing.” (Salas, 2013).

Conclusion

The configuration of the space that we give to something in particular will mark its subsequent development. But not only that, it also shows what relationship with the object there is. For this reason, this publication proves that there is a field yet to be explored in the field of dance, to show how society relates to it.

Those examples proved that there is not only a way to relate ourselves with dance, but several ones, and through the configuration of dancespaces, different terms come into play, such as "belonging to", "excluding" and, in the end, "decision-making" and "power dynamics".

Although architecture is already studied as a social phenomenon, thanks to the theories of spatial use orientation and not only as a science isolated from reality through mathematical formulas, the perspective of this publication is to offer an innovative, cohesive and inspiring vision for future researchers in the fields of Architecture and Dance Studies.

Coming back to the most important question of this research: ‘What makes a space a dancespace?’ It can be answered this way: As far as it allows transfiguration and engagement.

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