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THEATRE AND ARCHITECTURE: A PLACE BETWEEN

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Introduction

This article examines the relationships that exist between theatre, performance and architecture within an 'expanded field' of architectural practice. Viewing contemporary architectural practice in general, and interdisciplinary experiments between architecture and performance in particular, within the current context of neoliberal capitalism, I claim that the crass application of drama to architecture aids the transformation of built space into mere commodity. However, I see in some recent examples of non-standard architectures new ways in which architecture might make artistically and socially affirmative use of drama, theatre and/or performance in order to rediscover its role supporting social and cultural life. Adopting the interdisciplinary methodology advocated by architectural designer and historian Jane Rendell (in her *Art and Architecture: A Place Between*, 2006), I consider the performance architecture projects of Alex Schweder and Ward Shelley (2007-ongoing) and the redevelopment by Haworth Tompkins Architects of London's Battersea Arts Centre (2006-ongoing) as examples of 'critical spatial practice' (Rendell, 2006, p. 1). Thus, at a time when spatial theorists are raising concerns about an architectural culture of shallow spectacle and glib performativity, I argue for a new politics of performance in architecture.

Keywords: Critical Spatial Practice, Interdisciplinarity, Performance Architecture, Politics of Space, Theatre Architecture.

The theatre—architecture problematic

How often throughout history have theatre and architecture been intertwined? Whether in the production, articulation and programming of space, the structuring of events, or the performance of civic identities, the two are founded upon experiences of everyday life in the city. While theatre is world-building: enabling us to imagine, organise and construct social life, architecture plays a performative role in our lives: affecting our senses, directing our movements, containing and sheltering us. Indeed, they have sometimes seemed so closely

related that it makes little sense to separate them. This closeness is especially evident in examples of theatre architecture from the ancient world. For instance, when the sage Bharata, writing in verse in the *Natya Sastra* (c. 200BCE–200CE), describes the ritual construction of the Indian playhouse, it is clear that the event of building fused acts of architectural dramaturgy and social performance together with architecture. And, in another coupling of architecture and performance, the Roman architect Vitruvius, in his *De Architectura* (c. 25BCE), provides insights into the inter-connection of choreography, *chora* ('space'), *choros* ('chorus' and also 'dancing floor') and cosmos in the Classical worldview. Thus, both theatre and architecture can be seen as powerful embodiments of human affairs and as complementary artforms designed to articulate the place of people within a social and spiritual totality.

Theatre and architecture have enjoyed an artistically and socially productive relationship during later historical periods as well. The earliest theatre sets were representations of city streets and buildings that rooted dramatic events in well-ordered representations of everyday environments (see Serlio, 1996). As Christine Boyer argues, such 'scenographic theatrical arrangements [were] mirrors held up to society [...] civic portraits intended to be remembered' (Boyer, 1996, p. 74). Meanwhile, as Marvin Carlson points out, the theatre building has been one of the most persistent of all architectural typologies — a fact that suggests the centrality of both theatre and architecture to collective memory and urban identity (Carlson, 1989, p. 6). Throughout the twentieth century, as theatre and architecture expanded beyond their traditional disciplinary parameters, performance-makers and architects from Filippo Tommaso Marinetti to El Lissitzky and from Bernard Tschumi to Trisha Brown viewed as sacrosanct the tightly braided nature of these two endeavours. And, while the artistic and ideological agendas informing different meetings of theatre and architecture from the Renaissance through to twentieth-century avant-gardist and neo-avant-garde experiments have often been at variance with one another, the sense that these two areas of practice act as important foils for one another has been a constant theme throughout their histories.

What is problematic, for those of us who are committed to socially engaged theatre and the continuing relevance of critical architecture, is that theatre and architecture are increasingly being caught up within a matrix of capitalism, cultural desire and cultural production. The burgeoning trends for starchitect-designed museums, pop-up venues, and 'alternative' spaces that cry out for 'spontaneous' acts of performance and spectatorship are cases in point. In such instances, cities become performatively enhanced 'brandsapes' that place the interests of big business, consumerism and urban governance over those of communities and the cultural life of a city (Klingmann, 2007). The question of what happens to our cultural buildings and rituals when urban districts and landmarks are prized more as real estate than as neighbourhoods, and theatre is seen neither as art nor social practice but as a creative industry is one that is troubling scholars of architecture, geography, and theatre and performance studies (see, for example, Harvey, 2001; Harvie, 2009 and 2014; McKinnie, 2012 and 2013; Read, 2000; and, Roberts, 2018). Similarly, the question of what defines architecture and of whether, in the final analysis, 'all of architecture is a manifestation of capital,' is receiving renewed attention as historians, practitioners and theorists respond to contemporary economic and cultural realities (Deamer, 2014, p. 2). Before I advance my own case for the rediscovery of a genuinely critical interdisciplinarity, and for the construction of alternative architectural performativities, the trajectory that has brought the mainstream of architecture and urban design to its current performance-enhanced state of hyper-commoditisation deserves a brief exposition.

From architectural ethics to brand aesthetics

As Dalibor Vesely reminds the reader of his *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation*, European architecture from antiquity to the Renaissance was practised according to the ethical principles of decorum (2004: 366). But, the architectural values that emerged under the new system of capitalism were dictated, to a large extent, by power and money. From the staging of privilege and authority in the seventeenth-century court

masques and urban masterplans by Inigo Jones to the theatrical expression of social status in the design of the eighteenth-century *hôtel particulier* by Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières, and from the phantasmagoric scenes of Siegfried Kracauer's 1920s Berlin to the stagy representations of American postmodernism, there is an unmistakable emphasis on princely or corporate appearances, spectacle and spatial effects. In these various examples, aspects of drama and theatricality, including perspectival staging, character, theatre design and dramatic illusionism, are merged with space and form in ways that deepen and extend the prevailing social and politico-economic orders of their day.

The thought that the dramatic architectures of a contemporary, globalised design culture are more than usually complicit with neoliberal agendas is one that is being hotly debated by scholars. Whereas critical commentary on architecture and the city has tended to follow Guy Debord in focusing its attention on 'spectacular' images in and of the city, current discussions about lucrative architectural design are beginning to place greater emphasis on atmosphere, embodiment and architecture's role in contemporary processes of subject formation (Debord, 1994). In architect and brand consultant Anna Klingmann's study of architecture in the contemporary experience economy, the brandsapes of the twenty-first century continue to rely on the power of images but their special characteristic (one which marks them as qualitatively different from the cityscapes of previous eras) is their ability to transform subjects, managing their experiences of space through highly affective, theatrically inflected tropes and techniques such as participation and immersivity (Klingmann, 2007; see also Krupar & Al, 2012). This new approach to the design of space, as handbooks in the field make plain, draws heavily on the creation of character, dramatic narratives of space, and scenes that will affect all the senses (see, for example, Lukas, 2013). In attributing the seductions of the urban brandscape to acts of performing, staging and participating, such architectural publications show how theatre's influence on contemporary architecture embeds it evermore securely in economic concerns around urban regeneration and the quest to

improve the 'performance' of previously unprofitable urban districts.

Although theatre buildings form just one small part of urban regeneration programmes, the fact that theatre and arts complexes have been used to boost tourism and investment across cultural districts is a sore point for many theatre practitioners and scholars, who view the theatre as inherently transgressive and as a platform for highlighting social issues. Susan Bennett's observation that, in millennial New York City, the 'enthusiasm of then-mayor Rudolph Giuliani for the Walt Disney Company's restoration of the 1903 New Amsterdam Theatre — an enthusiasm he expressed by way of tax incentives and low-interest loans — was driven by the desire to clean up what the city saw as a problem area' reveals a disjunction emerging in the 1980s between theatre's sense of its social worth and emerging neoliberal views of theatre as an effective gentrification tool (Bennett, 2005, p. 413; see also Bennett, 2008; and Carlson, 1989, p. 94-5). It is bitterly ironic, although typical of the way in which capitalism co-opts difference and neutralises dissent that, more recently still, performance-makers and architects, who have turned their backs on the landmark theatre building, have, in many instances, reinforced the dynamic between theatre, architecture, cultural desire and capitalism. Pop-up venues are a good example of this. In London, the craze for these temporary venues (usually vacant premises leased out whilst they are awaiting development) has been incorporated so successfully within a mainstream logic of transience — temporary jobs, temporary housing, buy-it-now-it-may-be-gone-tomorrow experiences and other (not so) cheap thrills — as to rob these ephemeral architectures of any critical or political potency they might once have had. To summarise: whether we look at the uses of theatre in contemporary architecture and urban design or consider theatre architecture in the context of contemporary urban regeneration schemes, we will notice how both appear as 'symptoms of and agents within a contemporary, globalising urban economy' (McKinnie, 2013, p. 67). For me, the challenge is one of how best to re-frame theatre, architecture and the city, finding in the breach between civic imperatives and the places in which we live or go to the theatre

ways to (re-)politicise our cultural practices and urban landscapes.

A brief methodological interlude

In exploring this question, I have benefited from Jane Rendell's approach to analysing inter-disciplinary arts projects. In her *Art and Architecture: A Place Between*, Rendell discusses a number of projects that she terms 'critical spatial practices' (2006, p. 1). The projects, which include interventions by Cornford & Cross, FAT, muf art/architecture, Rachel Whiteread and Krzysztof Wodiczko, were made at a moment of grave doubt about the social worth of public art. But, for Rendell, each of these projects seems to grapple with much the same social and political problems as were first theorised by members of the Frankfurt School and, more recently, by some post-structuralist and feminist thinkers. Rendell argues that each of the works of art/architecture which she considers calls into question the ideological apparatus that structures the terms and methods of specific disciplinary practices. Instead, these works suggest new ways in which the disciplines of art and architecture can exert a critical and transformative pressure on one another (2006, pp. 10-12). Each work is as concerned with examining its own conditions of possibility — with the social, institutional and politico-economic determinants that shape cultural productions of all kinds — as it is with questioning disciplinary norms. Moreover, in Rendell's view, the projects work through issues that pertain to art and/or architecture to raise bigger questions about the world beyond. This latter point is crucial because it is largely through a work's engagement with questions that have traction in the wider world that Rendell is able to reconceive architecture as art, and art as the material equivalent of critical theory (2006, p. 191).

For me as well as for Rendell, critical theory offers valuable ways of distinguishing spatial practices *that are socially and/or politically engaged* from the plethora of cross-disciplinary and hybrid forms that, while artistically innovative, do not seek to alter institutional norms or social relations in any meaningful way. In situating my discussion of recent works of performance architecture and performance-

led theatre architecture, I am not attempting to show how these practices exemplify a theoretical position. Similarly, I do not claim that these projects provide solutions to disciplinary, institutional, social or political problems (or, at least, not in any direct way). Rather, I am interested in how, in glancing between the performative, the theatrical and the architectural, these works seem to make manifest some of critical theory's most urgent questions, and to operate materially to reassert architecture's basis in ethics and in what theorist of postdramatic theatre Hans-Thies Lehmann terms 'social response-ability' or, the aesthetic means by which to encourage us as audiences and as users of architecture to reflect upon the social, politico-economic orders in which we are implicated (Lehmann, 2006, p. 185).

Performance architecture and social response-ability

Theories of sociality continually rub up against theories of space since social life, as spatial theorist Henri Lefebvre argues, is both socially and spatially produced. From curator and art critic Nicolas Bourriaud's relational aesthetics to the theories of social interdependence driving business and management studies and economic geography, the ways in which human beings encounter one another inform *and are informed by* questions of space. Domestic space remains one of the most widely theorised yet contentious of such socially produced spaces. For, if there has been a need for a comforting narrative about house and home, this narrative has just as frequently been countered by conflicts and dramas over where, how and with whom we live. As Theodor Adorno argues of Martin Heidegger's treatment of the question of dwelling, attempts to unveil the 'original essence' of dwelling and to reconnect with the 'primacy of being' succeed only by disregarding the issue of actual housing needs caused by social conditions (Adorno, 1973, p. 59). And, for all the cosy appeal of Gaston Bachelard's study of the secret, seductive spaces of the family home or, Christian Norberg-Schulz's emphasis on belonging and rootedness, phenomenological approaches to domestic space have been called into question for their essentialising and nostalgic

tendencies. Indeed, as Marxist and feminist theorists point out, the space of the home has signified differently at key moments throughout history, and domestic space is liable to mean different things to people of different genders, ages, ethnicities, mental and physical abilities, economic classes and more besides (see Bammer, 1992; Colomina, Grosz and Penner in Borden et al. eds., 1999; Leach, 1998; and Miéville, 1998).

One of the ways in which these socio-spatial issues are manifesting is through performance architecture – so called to acknowledge its debt to performance art and distinguish it from technologically-orientated performative architectures. Performance architecture explores the possibilities for 'architect performed buildings' – where the architect becomes a kind of performance artist – in order to scrutinise the relationships between architecture and the social rituals of everyday life. Alex Schweder and Ward Shelley's 2007 *Flatland* provided an opportunity for six performer-inhabitants and their audiences to consider questions of sociality, spatiality, architecture and performance through embodied acts of research. *Flatland* took the form of a tall, very slim inhabitable sculpture. Constructed by its housemate artists – besides Schweder and Shelley: Pelle Brage, Eva La Cour, Douglas Paulson and Maria Petschnig – *Flatland* acted as a diagram of people's lives as they were lived over a three week period at New York's SculptureCenter. With its eight nodes (six individual living spaces and two communal areas) spread over the structure's four storeys, this 'performance of extreme living test[ed] the boundaries of not only its inhabitants but also its viewers, eliciting anything from horrified claustrophobia to a desire to enter the structure' (Cole, 2007, n.p.). Publicly sited and placing its occupants under considerable social and psychological pressure, the project questioned common assumptions about the home as a place of security and a retreat from the world.

By dint of peopling their (largely) transparent 2'-0" x 32'-0" x 24'-0" 'house' and inviting gallery visitors to witness a heightened performance of (often quite fraught) domestic negotiations, Schweder and Shelley highlighted a fundamental aspect of architecture: the reciprocal relationship between

subject and object, between people and buildings. *Flatland* could be said to have staged the key Lefebvrian problematic that ‘space and the political organisation of space express social relationships but also reflect back upon them’ (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 8). Furthermore, it used an explicitly theatrical dynamic — i.e. of performance and spectatorship — to frame the inter-influence between social behaviours and spatial fields in this traditionally most private and, therefore, partly unknowable of arenas. Furthermore, in positioning this domestic space complete with all its messy programmatic complications inside the ‘pristine’ space for the exhibition of fine art, the artists juxtaposed the rhythms and concerns of two contrasting spheres of operation, opening both the repetitive, mundane world of domestica and the high-stakes world of the international art market to critique. For if these two spaces are markedly different in terms of building type, function, programme, scale, cultural values and connotations, they might equally be seen as spaces prone to normativity and tradition — spaces whose cultural meanings, affordances and limitations we fail to fully explore, and to harness in the service of positive change.

Following on from *Flatland*, a triptych of architect-performed buildings, which began with *Stability* (2009) and continued through *Counterweight Roommate* (2011) to *In Orbit* (2014), was conceived as ‘social relationship architecture’ (http://www.alexschweder.com/work/in_orbit.html). These three pieces, which Schweder and Shelley performed as a duo, separately and collectively tested the possibilities and problems of inhabitation, cohabitation, and social interdependency. *Stability* (Lawrimore Project, Seattle), which took the form of an inhabitable beam raised off the ground via a central pivot, caricatured cultural desires and conflicts that attach to sociality and space. Its sea-saw-like form allowed for two self-contained and individually furnished live/work areas to be located at either end of the beam but made the successful use of one occupant’s space dependent on the position and weight of the other occupant. As Shelley and Schweder performed the routine tasks of their daily existence, their actions indexed a range of other actions, inter-actions and consequences that

can ‘tip the balance’ at a variety of different scales and in a multitude of places. In fact, one conscious aim of this project was to demonstrate how, ‘from the intimacy of families to the geopolitics of nation states, our desires for closeness or separation are given form through walls and doors, borders and check points’ and to examine how two artist-occupants might respond to that reality (<http://www.alexschweder.com/work/stability.html>). Negotiations of space are complex, continual, and often fraught with tension. *Stability* asked its occupants, and the ‘audiences’ who came to see the structure performed, to confront this situation and make positive choices about how we share our world with others.

Counterweight Roommate (Scope, Basel) put Schweder and Shelley’s theme of social inter-dependence under additional stress by making each roommate’s movement up and down its tall, thin building dependent on being able to use the body mass of his fellow occupant as a counterweight to his own laborious progress. Tethered to either end of a single rope, Schweder and Shelley’s gruelling five-day experiment in vertical living took *Stability*’s concerns with co-operation and the mutual negotiation of closeness and separation to a new, more urgent level: it suggested that our very survival may hinge on our being able to balance competing claims on available resources and territory. The third piece in the triptych, *In Orbit* (The Boiler, New York) resituated questions about the politics of space and the co-ordination of human needs for, and in, housing both inside *and outside* a twenty-five foot steel and timber wheel, which was suspended from the venue’s ceiling. Over ten whole days and nights, while Schweder lived inside the wheel, Shelley occupied its exterior. As with *Counterweight Roommate*, each artist had to co-ordinate his movements with the other if either was to be able to achieve even the most basic of human functions — a condition of vulnerability that Shelley acknowledged when he told an interviewer: ‘We’ve begun to see that trust is a big issue in this piece. I’m very dependent on Alex’ (Scherer, 2014, n.p.).

Responses to these pieces were, by turns, comedic, disconcerting, and intriguing. But, for all the apparent playfulness of these collaborative

experiments, the works raise questions that are discipline-specific (e.g. how might architects re-think design, fabrication and construction in relation to the social dramaturgy of everyday life?), inter-disciplinary (e.g. what is gained through performing architecture or, for that matter, through architecting the real-life performance of social relations?), and trans-disciplinary (e.g. how might the conceptual and socio-spatial tools afforded us by performance architecture enable constructive approaches to socio-economic, geo-political and other complex realities that range from the housing crises affecting cities and states to territorial disputes of catastrophic international proportions?). In all, ideas about how we (per)form ourselves as subjects in and of architecture looped back into questions about how architecture gives shape to cultural, political and social contexts. Schweder and Shelley's experiments in designing, building, and living in spaces that were at once private and shared, enacted and witnessed undermined the conventional foundations of domesticity, prompting onlookers to wonder what new social, familial or communal dramaturgies may be written through the inter-action of bodies and objects in space and through time. The artists suggest that what might be at stake for architecture and its occupants in these acts of constructing, deconstructing, restructuring and performing habitation are the very concepts of identity, inter-action and dwelling. Certainly, their architect-performed buildings issue a call to us to rethink habitual patterns, conventional methodologies, and practices that unthinkingly reproduce the status quo.

Playing at the edge of architecture

If the performance architecture of Schweder and Shelley makes productive use of performance to explore the effects of architecture on subjectivity and social (and, by extension, geo-political) relations, my second case study — the redevelopment of an arts centre by theatre architects Haworth Tompkins — takes up performance methodologies in order to open architecture to collaborative, project-specific alternatives to standard industry practices and protocols. The reasons I want to focus on this

are three-fold. First, it is a successful model for approaches to theatre architecture at a time when the typology has been called into question (see Hannah, 2007). Second, it reveals how performance can help architecture trouble cherished industry orthodoxies, enabling us to rethink architectural processes, and professional and social relationships across a wide range of building types and contexts. Third, it is subtly subversive of what Adorno, throughout his philosophy, termed 'identity thinking' or, the tendency towards a blind acceptance of the world 'as it is' that prevents people from recognising heterogeneity and exploring the 'as it might be' (see, in particular, Adorno, 1973). In Adorno's thought, the tendency towards identification — the 'obligation to become identical, to become total' — is closely linked to the exchange principle and the commodity structure that dominates our social system since both reduce things (whether human labour or, ways of building or producing theatre) to abstract universals (1973, p. 146). Thus, opposition to the identity or unity principle as it conditions a discrete area of cultural life: theatre architecture, in this case, implies criticism of the exchange principle — even though that may not have been a conscious aim on Haworth Tompkins's part.

Battersea Arts Centre (usually known as BAC) in south London occupies Battersea's former town hall, an 1893 building designed for civic function and ceremony by the architect E. W. Mountford. It was re-tooled as a community arts venue hosting three studio theatres in 1980. From its inauguration until the early years of this century, the centre programmed its black box studios, leaving most of the rest of its seventy-four-room building poorly used. By 2006, BAC's Grade 2* listed building was badly in need of technical upgrades and repair. For financial reasons, the arts centre would have to remain open throughout the redevelopment and this was what provided the immediate impetus for a series of phased architectural interventions. In formulating an appropriate working method for the phased programme of works, Haworth Tompkins looked to BAC's scratch performance techniques, where performance pieces are shown at various stages of their development to an outside audience whose feedback guides the further development of

the work. Translated into an architectural process, scratch performance results in theatre architecture that is both provisional and collaboratively authored. In place of the mainstream architectural scenario, in which a team of very expensive experts rolls out a solution, often to the bewilderment of the client, Haworth Tompkins's work at BAC started involving the theatre makers themselves in an interdisciplinary and iterative approach to redeveloping their building — one in which each testing-of-an-idea-through-doing-it has provided opportunities to modify previous iterations. Changes are made in response to performers' needs by mixed groups of architects and theatre-practitioners, who arrive at decisions through a process the architects associate with fuzzy logic — that is, with ways of seeing and doing that recognise more than simple 'true' and 'false' or, 'right' and 'wrong' values (Haworth Tompkins, 2007). Nothing is treated as fixed or final. While each phase of works has resulted in a new articulation of the space — one that actively shapes the performance work being done in, on and through it — successive seasons of theatre have been allowed to inscribe themselves onto the long-term character of the space.

During the initial stages of the project, which coincided with work by the performance collective Punchdrunk on its immersive, promenade show: *The Masque of the Red Death* (2007–8), Haworth Tompkins adopted ideas that director Felix Barrett had discussed about creating 'sneak routes' around the building. The architects revealed hidden doors and broke through partition walls, leaving these changes in place at the request of other artists and theatre companies. Other temporary alterations made specifically for Punchdrunk, including lowered ceilings and partition walls, have also been retained and, over time, may become indistinguishable from the permanent architecture of BAC. Architect Steve Tompkins explains the improvisatory, cumulative nature of the work:

We make small interventions, feeding into specific performances and these will leave a trace, an accretion, which will gradually accumulate. And, eventually, like a coral reef perhaps, the building will transform into a different space, a different environment [...] but over evolutionary periods of

time. So, even though each intervention might be a day, or a week, or six months, the time period of the project is [...] twenty years, say? [...] Or more? (Tompkins, 2011, interviewed by Brocklehurst and Rufford, n.p.).

Thus, the ad hoc, unpredictable nature of these phased interventions has encouraged theatre and architecture to engage each other in an on-going process of creative re-definition, where theatre is treated as a way of 'doing' architecture, and architecture is treated as a fluid and temporal art — neither as the science of rational space-planning nor as an exercise in arrogant form-making. In contrast to the hi-tech performative architectures of recent decades, Haworth Tompkins's interventions are enabling an alternative architectural performativity — one less interested in the creation of smart surfaces, and the eye-catching metropolitan landmarks beloved of civic authorities than it is in performatively de-essentialising or 'troubling' standardising practices and hierarchies.

As Haworth Tompkins started helping artists make adjustments and additions to enhance the space, it also started returning the arts centre to a more explicitly 'found' state. Whereas the 1980 conversion of the building had tried to expunge all trace of Victorian town hall, Haworth Tompkins's work was aimed at rediscovering the complexity and ambiguity that occurred when the arts organisation first moved in and started using a building not designed for theatre. Through a series of subtractive moves, the team dis-identified spaces that had previously been designated as 'theatres.' And, once the legitimacy of these converted studio spaces had been problematised, it became easier for those involved to see where else in the building 'dramatic architectures' might be unveiled. For instance, at first-floor level, Haworth Tompkins unveiled a sequence of inter-connected domestic-scale rooms, which Barrett used as intimate performance environments before gathering the entire audience for a participatory finale inside the 800-seat Grand Hall. Thus, the theatre architects and performers freed architecture and theatre from the confines of the stage, tearing down the boundaries that separate acting space from

audience space, and front- from back-of-house. More recently, by installing a building-wide system of temporary technical hardware, the architects have enabled theatre practitioners to find, or create, exactly the right spatial context for their work and, as a result, to foster performer-spectator relationships that would be unthinkable inside a conventional auditorium.

What I want to emphasise about this approach is that it arises from the concrete and particular character of the arts organisation, its building, and its circumstances. In fact, if we agree with Adorno that 'other' perspectives are only available once we take account of the specific and contradictory character of concrete phenomena, we will appreciate that attempts to escape the hegemony of the identity or unity principle in order to assert 'nonidentical' ways of being, making and thinking cannot be abstracted and generalised. Were one to posit BAC Playgrounds as a 'readymade' architectural methodology — one that could be straightforwardly applied to any number of redevelopment projects — one would not only suppress the particularity of Haworth Tompkins's interventions at BAC but also risk subsuming it within the very professional (and, by implication, cultural and politico-economic) system it sought to critique. The important point to be taken from this project is that other ways of doing architecture are available to those who are prepared to embrace ambiguity, contingency and risk, and to gear an anti-systematic working method, such as is afforded by rigorous interdisciplinarity, towards the concrete particularities of a project.

Architecture's manipulation at BAC is being undertaken with full consciousness of what Haworth Tompkins is rejecting or transforming in architectural terms: stylistic trademarking certainly but also the idea that the theatre is a fixed typology. While offering longevity and security for artists, BAC Playgrounds absorbs the lessons of found-space experimentation into its workings and is, thus, able to offer a venue that is provisional, versatile, and open to later modification. The project has other consequences that extend beyond the boundaries of theatre architecture. In acknowledging the rigidity with which commercial architecture has operated in

our recent history, and exploring the performative potential of these minimal, on-going moves, Haworth Tompkins is challenging industry norms more broadly. The studio's use of performance techniques to 'devise' architectural solutions and, thus, to de-essentialise accepted ways of doing things might help architecture reinvent itself, not as a giant commodity, but as a critically and socially-turned practice — one that re-thinks what architecture is by concentrating on what it does, who it serves, what it might enable.

Conclusion

Although, I have been at pains to point out some of the dangers of the relationship between theatre and architecture under neoliberal capitalism, I have also suggested how performance techniques and methodologies might change how we understand and practise architecture. Conversely, I have shown how architecture might occasion institutional and political critique by providing alternative spaces, forms and structures within which to rethink social and cultural productions of all kinds. It is because of the possibilities that these two fields hold out to one another that I offer these preliminary thoughts about dramatic architectures.

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