Theatre Architecture and Urban Culture: Project ‘A Theatre in Rio de Janeiro’

Magdalena Kożien-Wozniak 1

1 Politechnika Krakowska im. Tadeusza Kościuszki, ul. Warszawska 24, 30-155 Kraków, Polska

mkozien@pk.edu.pl

Abstract. Social mission of theatre ceased to be limited only to theatre spectacles. Its integral elements are now becoming other events that are to gather, activate, concentrate inhabitants of the city. Aims of theatre as a social event based on the need of building community on direct, real contact of spectators with actors and spectators with themselves, pose new tasks for the architecture of theatres. Architecture could regain the power to create spaces adequate for theatre through realisation of the need of common space in the city. It is a quest for architectural solutions which may reflect the meaning of theatre, express contemporary ideas, or even create the meaning of theatre in our age, quite like it was once done by a box set in the illusionary theatre. Space surrounding a theatre is mostly a broadly accessible space of cultural character. These are squares, streets, parks. One may discern three basic models of shaping relations of theatre space and external public space in a theatrical place: emanation, isolation and interference. In contemporary theatre architecture there are examples which are inscribed into the trend of building the relation of interference. These are structures introducing spatial and functional architectural solutions which give a chance to a special exchange of theatrical and social life. Direct connection of the stage with exterior plaza is a modernist idea of Le Corbusier, used by Oscar Niemayer in his architectural masterpieces. Teatro Popular in Niteroi and Teatro Raul Cortez in Duque de Caxias became an inspiration for the students’ project ‘A Theatre in Rio de Janeiro’. The aim of the project was to show, that dynamic relation of theatre and public spaces could introduce a special value both for the art of theatre and a particular place for an urban community.

1. Introduction
How could contemporary architectural space express the ideas of theatre? The search for an answer began with finding links between the theatre and urban culture - urbaneness of theatre as a place of building social links, community [1]. Social mission of theatre ceased to be limited only to theatre spectacles and its integral elements are now becoming other events that are to gather, activate, concentrate inhabitants of the city. Aims of theatre as a social event based on the need of building community on direct, real contact of spectators with actors and spectators with themselves, pose new tasks for the architecture of theatres. Architecture could regain the power to create spaces adequate for theatre through realisation of the need of common space in the city. It is a quest for architectural solutions which may reflect the meaning of theatre, express contemporary ideas, or even create the meaning of theatre in our age, quite like it was once done by a box set in the illusionary theatre.
2. Theatre and public space
Space surrounding a theatre is mostly a broadly accessible space of cultural character. These are squares, streets, parks. One may discern three basic models of shaping relations of theatre space and external public space in a theatrical place: theatres of emanation, theatres of isolation, theatres of interference.

A – theatre of emanation

B – theatre of isolation

C – theatre of interference

Figure 1. Models of shaping relations of theatre space and external public space in a theatrical site
(drawn by the author)

In the first model a theatre site consists of public space surrounding a building which limits and separates the internal space of a theatre. In this very model a building fulfils the role of a symbol of culture in the surrounding urban space, it is an expression of externalizing of the theatre separated from the world, it announces its existence. Those are above all public buildings based on the 19th century model of a city theatre. Here a border between theatre and the outside world is built like a border between *sacrum* and *profanum*, between every day and holiday. Building a structure that dominates its surroundings is one of the modes of creation of relations of a theatre and everyday life which is called *emanation*.

While in the first model an external public space may be considered a part of a theatrical place, in the second one the very building sets its limits. Theatrical site has a character of a hidden space, set apart from the external world, accessible for a chosen group only. Certain Renaissance and Baroque court theatres, small commercial theatres, ones in non-theatrical places. Theatre-shelter is separated from the external world and protected by walls, buildings, sometimes by urban blocks, as if they were to protect it. Such a relation may be called *isolation*. It is an actual severing of a theatrical metaphor from any outside influences. Passing their border is at the same a passage from a public area into a private one, from an accessible space to a concealed one.

In the third model of a theatrical place an external public space is incorporated into constructing a theatrical space or introduced into the space of theatre itself. That model may be referred to the Classical Greek or medieval theatre. In the antique Greek one an entire hill [of an amphitheatre] was incorporated into the theatrical space, also beyond the very stone auditorium. One may recall here the words of a Polish theatre director and theoretician, Kazimierz Braun: ‘The border could be defined by everybody who came at last, who stood further, at the slope, was not beyond theatre, was inside indeed, as theatre ended only behind him (...) it radiated and included’ [2]. In the medieval theatre mansion stages were placed at public squares or at markets and turned towards any open space (with no concrete location) which was thus becoming a new theatrical site. Theatre buildings whose space may be intertwined with surrounding public spaces are called theatres of *interference*.

In contemporary theatre architecture there are examples which are inscribed into the trend of building the relation of interference. These are structures introducing spatial and functional architectural solutions which give a chance to a special exchange of theatrical and social life. Their new relation could introduce a special value both for the art of theatre and a particular place for an urban community, as a theatre building may or even should be today.
Spaces for the audience, as ones serving the spectacle, were usually linked with the public domain by means of an entrance hall with the box office. This was the only part of a theatre building accessible apart from the hours of the show itself. Theatres of interference, directing themselves towards the real world are opening up much broader areas. These are theatre cafes and restaurants where one may meet the artists. Also galleries are appearing at the theatres and in theatre foyers workshops and artistic meetings are organized. Everyday life touches upon a holiday space. Mutual interference of theatre and public space is not limited to ‘showing’ one world to the other. Interference may lead to their deeper superposition. Spaces for the audience may touch upon the spaces of spectacle itself. Coming out of a theatre from its prepared space into the real world may happen in that part of the building. Its character is not as strongly determined by technological and acoustic conditions as theatre halls. Steady technological equipment is rather limited. Moreover, decidedly lower acoustic demands (separation from external noises) give a chance to seize the opportunity of tying those spaces with the external ones. Then a spectacle may take place both in the theatre hall itself, in the audience and in the external public space which is an integral part of a theatre site.

3. Oscar Niemeyer’s theatres of interference

Interference goes beyond the influence of the theatre building on the environment only as an expression of the theater's manifestation, announcing the presence of an isolated from the world venue. Unlike in a theater-shelter, the world of theatrical metaphor ceases to be cut off from the real world. Interference is to be introduced into the real world in the informal spaces of the theatre, that are temporary and changeable. The way to create these new relationships can be creation of a potential representation of the theatrical space in the public space. These relationships were described as a direct interference, i.e. direct interaction between the theatrical space and public space. Attempts to build such a relationship can be found in modernist architecture. Opening the outer wall of the stage gives the opportunity to perform not only for viewers sitting in the auditorium, but also for the public located outside in the public space. Evelyn Furquim Werneck Lima [3] recalls the idea of opening the back of the stage and creating an open air amphitheatre, presented by Le Corbusier at the International Congress of Architecture and Dramaturgy at the Sorbonne in 1948:

"I think this task is possible: the box of miracles is a cube: everything that is necessary is on the top, lighting and all the necessary equipment to perform the miracles of the scene, maintenance, sound, etc. The interior is empty and you will suggest the imagination, everything you want, like in a Commedia dell'Arte. If you can do this, what was suggested at the back of the stage: a viewing frame that can open up to [...] You can open the back of the stage and have an open-air amphitheatre on clear days "

(Le Corbusier. W: Villiers, Andre (Org.). „Architecture et Dramaturgie”, Paris, Flammarion, 1950, transl. aut.).

Oscar Niemeyer is using this idea in theatres built in the Rio de Janeiro District: Teatro Popular in Niteroi and Teatro Raul Cortez in Duque de Caxias. Niemeyer designed theatres each for 450 spectators, but the opening in the rear wall of the stage increases this number to thousands of non-paying viewers who can also watch performances in the fields adjacent to the buildings. The main motive was social concern. It was the desire to create space for the exchange of societies and make culture more accessible to citizens. Two theatre buildings also show the persistence of modern disciplinary tradition in the Niemeyer architecture.
Figure 2-3. Teatro Popular Oscar Niemayer in Niteroi

Figure 4. Teatro Popular Oscar Niemayer in Niteroi, plans and section, 2014, Archives Laboratório de Estudos do Espaço Teatral e Memória Urbana [3]

Figure 5-6. Teatro Raul Cortez, Duque de Caxias, photo by Edson Santiago, 2009, Archives Laboratório de Estudos do Espaço Teatral e Memória Urbana [3]

Figure 7-8. Teatro Raul Cortez, Duque de Caxias, plans and sections, 2015, Archives Laboratório de Estudos do Espaço Teatral e Memória Urbana [3]
The Teatro Popular Oscar Niemeyer in Niterói, located in the Guanabara Bay and facing Rio de Janeiro, was put into service in 2007. It is one of the works that make up the ‘Niemeyer Way’, a cultural complex with the Museum of Contemporary Art designed by Oscar Niemeyer along the west coast of the bay. Built of reinforced concrete, the building is covered with a white large curved roof. The west façade is covered with yellow ceramic finishes full of drawings of the architect. On the opposite side of the building, the glass wall allows viewers to see the Guanabara Bay in the building, Theatre has a water mirror, ramps and spiral staircases, elements of Niemeyer's work. The building has 3500 square meters of space on two levels. A spiral ramp leads to the building, reaching the foyer upstairs and the main entrance to the auditorium. The backstage with wardrobes and rehearsal rooms are located below the auditorium and the stage. The space below the foyer is left opened, allowing the visitors to walk through. The hall has 400 seats, in a one-direction auditorium with a traditional box stage. However, the stage has a 10-meter-wide gate in the rear wall, which opens to a large square that can accommodate outdoor shows that increase theatre’s maximum capacity to 10,000 places on an area of 17,000 square meters. Evelyn Furquim Werneck Lima [3] recalls that Niemeyer, planning performances at the square, wanted it to be a theatre for residents of Niterói, a place for theatrical pleasure similar to that of the 17th century, when artists and spectators participated in Commedia dell’Arte performances in public spaces, not in specific ones. The building is now a part of a controlled, enclosed area in the bay. It is separated from the bustling nearby city structure by a bus station with its facilities. During the day there are occasional strollers in the area, or young people riding roller skating over large concrete slopes. The area comes alive during major cultural events.

This issue looks completely different in the case of Teatro Raul Cortez in Duque de Caxias. The characteristic, sculptural form of Niemeyer was built on a square in the city centre and is at the moment a dominant feature in the urban space. It was opened in 2006 and is a part of a complex including also a public library, located on the Square of Peace. The geometric form of the building constructed as a white cylinder without openings, with two curvilinear cuts shaping the cover that converge to the central channel already has become a symbol of the city. A huge red opening facing the square reveals cultural function of the building, reminding a cinema screen or theatre curtain. The outside auditorium is nothing but an unchanged public plaza, serving every day’s functions. The place used to shelter an unregulated and uncontrolled trade. Now it has become a space of public artistic and cultural activity. The theatre has a ramp along half of the almost cylindrical facade leading to a small foyer and to an auditorium with 448 seats. The building also has independent access directly from the Square of Peace to the stage facilities. A large metal door on the back outside wall of the stage box, allows viewers to share with the public on the square. In addition, the doors are facilitating entry into large structures for stage design. The shape of the theatre also corresponds to its structure, which satisfies the needs of a specific and complex building program for performing arts, cultural activities, meeting place for groups and popular festivals. In addition to theatrical performances from other municipalities during the day, the theatre houses art schools in the Duque de Caxias, where they perform dance, theatre, art and music. As Evelyn Furquim Werneck Lima [3] underlined, the architectural intervention was entirely taken over by the population, with obvious social and cultural benefits.

4. Project ‘A Theatre in Rio de Janeiro’

The work of Oscar Niemayer, and in particular the theatres built in the Rio-Janeiro District, has become a pretext and inspiration for the Project ‘A Theatre in Rio de Janeiro’. The design task has become the subject of Architectural and Urban Design – Public Use Buildings studio for Master Degree in Architecture in English students organized at the Faculty of Architecture, Cracow University of Technology in the winter semester 2017/2018. The group was led by the didactic Team of Spaces of Culture Design in The Chair of Social and Public Buildings Design composed of: D.Sc. PhD. Eng. Arch. Magdalena Kozień-Woźniak, PhD. Eng. Arch. Paweł Żuk and Eng. Arch. Marcin Gierbienis.
The location was chosen by the Author during a scientific trip to Brazil, in consultation with the academic staff of UniRio, and in particular with the advice of Prof. Evelyn Furquim Werneck Lima. The area located in the District of Centro, once occupied by the building of The Academy of Fine Arts, and now serving as a car park, with an area of about 5,500 sq m, was selected. The place is characterized by the diversity of the scale and character of the surrounding buildings from two-storey narrow tenements from the colonial era to office skyscrapers. In the neighbourhood on Passos Street there is the Catholic Church of the Blessed Sacrament. The Imperatriz Leopoldina Street is leading towards Tirandentes Square and the monument to the emperor of Brazil Dom Pedro I.

The students were to design a theatre building, which, like the theatres of Oscar Niemayer, would give the opportunity to introduce theatre space into the public space. Performances could be available to a wide audience, made up by the residents of the city. Space co-ordination could have the character of direct interference, but also indirect interference, built by using the viewer's spaces in the theatre, such as a foyer or actor's spaces, such as rehearsal rooms. The theatre was to house a hall for 450 spectators. The specific spatial arrangement of the hall was not defined. It could be arranged with a fixed one-way or multi-directional auditorium, as well as a completely flexible space with a variable viewer and actor relationship. The hall was to be accompanied by spaces for spectators and spaces for the actor. The functional program complemented the educational zone with a library and workshops. The whole building was to have an area of about 4,000 m². In the theatre should have been designed space for the site-specific theatre. It could be located outside, in public space, or in a spatial structure of the building. It may have been connected to the main stage or other interior space - e.g. foyer, multifunctional space. The aim of the project was to show, that the dynamic relation of the theatre and the public space could create a special place for an urban community.

At the end of the semester, a students’ competition was organized. Professors were asked to form the Jury Board: Professor Evelyn Furquim Werneck Lima - Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Coord. Lab. Theatrical Spaces and Urban Memory Studies, Professor Ado Franchini – Politecnico Milano, Professor Anna Franta – Cracow University of Technology, The Faculty of Architecture, Professor Kazimierz Butelski – Cracow University of Technology, The Faculty of Architecture. The Jury awarded prizes. 1st prize was awarded by the Jury to Aleksandra Slany, 2nd prize to Paulina Olszowy and Patrycja Sateja, 3rd prize to Zuzanna Kasperczyk and Anna Pawluk. Filip Lipowski got honorable mention for urban solution granted by Professor Anna Franta. Prof. Evelyn Furquim Werneck Lima in her opinion about the winning project of Aleksandra Slany wrote: “The architecture and the implantation of the proposed volumes do not affect negatively the historical urban fabric of the nineteenth-century townhouses. The project provides for four different theatre venues: a classical drama theatre, a traverse theatre, an experimental theatre and a site-specific space. The proposal to embed part of the volumes underground is a successful solution to reduce the impact of the project on the environment. An indication of the flows throughout the complex would be helpful to develop the project”. About Anna Pawluk’s design: “This interesting proposal leaves an open space before the facade which dialogues with the Church of the Blessed Sacrament. The adopted solution privileges a concentration of the architectural volumes along Passos Avenue. Good circulation and distribution of functions with the prediction of space for a prosenium arch theatre, an Elizabethan amphitheatre, a traverse theatre and a space for a site-specific theatre. The proposal clearly indicates flows and functions of the future complex”. The non-prized project of Katarzyna Grzych was also mentioned by the professor from UniRio for” The organic forms of both architecture and landscaping allude to the most renowned Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer’s characteristics, as well as to Burle Marx’s pictorial landscaping. The whole volume of soft curves does not damage the existing urban fabric and the open space facing the Church of the Blessed Sacrament values the church's view. The internal proposal is well resolved with two theatre venues and a space for site-specific theatre. There is no indication of the flows of the proposed architecture.”
Figure 9-14. Project ‘A Theatre in Rio de Janeiro’, Students’ Competition Boards, FA CUT, 2017-2018
5. Results and discussions
Students’ architectural competition ‘A Theatre in Rio de Janeiro’ confirmed that contemporary architecture could operate not only with two, but three types of theatre space. The auditoriums, or black-box interiors are no longer the only ones that are taken into account. A space closely linked with the place, always unique and unrepeatable is the third one. Theatre building, called the theatre of interference, taking over the rules of the surrounding urban structure, transforms it and includes in principle to build the theatre space. Theatre place is created by both the theatre space and public space. This place has the potential of becoming a theatrical space in these both areas. Mutual unbreakable relationship of the theatre and the city can acquire a new dimension.

6. Conclusions
The relation of theatrical space to cultural space is created by means of mediating zones, spaces of a theatrical building which used to separate it. It brings to mind ancient Greek amphitheatres which were open in their landscape or medieval mansion stages set at streets and squares. Piotr Gruszczyński described so the place that Theatre Nowy in Warsaw was to become: ‘open from early morning ill late at night, friendly, intellectual and chilled-out, at the same time demanding and permissive. Imposing its own pace of being, living and experiencing. Yet liberal, not constricting. Perhaps being a subtle hint. That is - a space of artistic freedom’ [4]. Such a place could not be subject to the stiff rules of a theatre structure. Here the same space once belongs to spectators or to actors, it may become a place of their meetings and talks. There are no stiffly defined divisions. Every space may become a site of a spectacle. But social mission of theatre ceased to be limited only to theatre spectacles. Its integral elements are now becoming other events that are to gather, concentrate inhabitants of the city. Aims of theatre as a social event based on the need of building community on direct, real contact pose new tasks for the architecture of theatres.

Acknowledgments
The author is wishing to thank The Dean and The Committee of the Faculty of Architecture CUT for the financial support of the research led in Rio de Janeiro. The Author also would like to thank dr Marta Urbańska for translation.

References
[1] M. Kozien-Woźniak, „Teatry interferencji: współczesna architektura teatealna a nieformalna Przestrzeń teatru”. "Interference theaters: contemporary theater and non-formal theater space" Monografia, Politechnika Krakowska, Kraków 2015
[2] K. Braun, „Przestrzeń teatralna”, PWN, Warszawa 1982
[3] E.F.W. Lima, “O Teatro Popular Oscar Niemeyer em Niterói e o Teatro Raul Cortez em Duque de Caxias”, Arquitextos, São Paulo, ano 18, n. 205.00, Vitruvius, jun. 2017 <http://www.vitruvius.com.br/revistas/read/arquitextos/18.205/6587>
[4] „Nowy Teatr, Nowe Miejsce. Koncepcje architektoniczne siedziby Nowego Teatru”, Catalogue of the exhibition of architectural designs, ‘Nowy Teatr Nowe Miejsce’, Warszawa 15–30 April 2009, Nowy Teatr, Warszawa 2009