

FOOTBRIDGE AUDITORIUM

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Footbridge auditorium

Nowadays, theatre is perhaps the last place with public character where we can experience our emotions and question our true selves. But, are we really able to create a common place where we can be present together at the very moment? As stage has been changing due to technology and its visual convention, I have been wondering if changing the spatial organisation of auditorium will have an impact on the perception of performance?

1. Architecture of auditorium

The main subject of my research is auditorium as a spatial structure and its impact on the sense of perception. In my opinion, the question about a new type of auditorium is very current. What is the next spatial form of the auditorium which may give viewers more freedom in experiencing their own behaviour and participation in performance?

We distinguish between two types of auditoriums which we are mostly familiar with, namely: amphitheatrical auditorium and gallery auditorium. Both are designed in order to hear and see what happens on the stage by taking an advantage of the two senses mentioned above.

Even if our understanding of visual perception has advanced recently, we should remember about the role of other senses in our perception of any performance. We gain more confidence to support it with various senses. Consequently, it is important to realise, how different the way in which a spectator perceives performance today is than it was 100 years ago. I am convinced, that we should shift our focus towards spectator as a main user of theatrical space, who is already aware of relational aesthetics (Bishop, 2004) and participating art (Bishop, 2012).

The sensory impressions that our body receives, related to the reading of space in motion, could be used in theatre. The kinaesthetic sense could be a new tool in creating the spectacle! If viewers are allowed to change their observation point during performance, the question is how spectacle itself, its space and set design should be constructed? Also, auditorium should take on a totally different architectural form.

If performances take place outside the theatrical buildings, the auditoriums are created for a site-specific project and formed according to the effect the creators want to achieve. Unfortunately, there is no permanent architectural record of any different forms of auditoriums.

While conducting my research I have noticed that if performance is played outside theatre, the amphitheatre type of its structure is commonly used and there is little or no interest in experimenting with new forms of the audience architecture. In my view, this subject deserves greater attention because we simply need a new type of auditorium which will go in line with the needs of contemporary viewers.

2. What is going to change for the spectator?

In my opinion auditorium is also a part of public space, where every passer-by becomes a viewer right after exceeding the threshold of theatre. It is a performative moment, but after that, the viewer has to be seated in the dark auditorium, and uses three out of his five senses, except from hearing and seeing.

In this case, the viewer becomes a passive recipient. That is why an active viewer, who becomes aware through using all senses, is in my field of interest.

When reviewing the most of Avant-Garde projects focused on the relations between auditorium and stage, I have realised that they do not present any new idea linked to the perception of performance! Walter Gropius in his Total Theatre (1927) thanks to the mechanical rotating gave us three options of the stage: with audience on one side, stage surrounded by audience from three sides and with a central stage surrounded by audience from all sides (Zuvillaga, 2004).

This idea of mechanical rotating was developed in the project of polish architect Szymon Syrkus in his Simultaneous Theatre (1928) in which the stage got more advanced shape of the two rotate rings (Syrkusowie, 1930).

It is significant that both architects designed amphitheatrical type of auditorium, so viewers become passive in the perception of performance. Even if both projects of theatres include an attractive proposal by bringing film projection inside them or new technology such as hydraulic trapdoors or revolve scenes, unfortunately they have never been built.

Nowadays, technology has advanced, and we are able to build these theatres with modern equipment that will facilitate any theatrical production yet, my question is what might be changed for the spectator as a user of an auditorium? Today's viewers perception has changed, but auditorium reproduces patterns from the past!

It is time we searched for a more up-to-date architecture of it.

My PhD dissertation was entirely devoted to this problem. I entitled it "Inter|auditorium. Architecture of the auditorium and the city" and defended it at the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdańsk in 2013.

My thesis justified that today we should not build the auditorium in the way which is so different from the contemporary needs. I pointed out that we should discover a new form of auditorium. We should use the energy which the passer-by has outside the theatre before he becomes a viewer.

The passer-by can actively observe while moving in space, but the viewer often

becomes passive in this respect. Auditorium space can activate the viewer, but this experience requires a new form of it.

3. New auditorium: footbridge auditorium

I am suggesting a new type of auditorium: footbridge auditorium. In this auditorium viewers can move and change their viewing position during performance due to the spatial system with ramps and platforms. They do not have to sit at one place like at the traditional auditorium and thus use all their senses, especially kinaesthetic one.

How it might work in practice? I have tried to examine this idea in two of my projects.

First one, Inter|Theatre was my architectural proposal of the advanced space of Shakespearean theatre (2005). It is the historical fact that in the 17th century the copy of The Fortune Theatre from London was built in Gdańsk. English actors visited this city to give performance. Unfortunately, there was no theatrical building there at that time, so they probably brought the layout of Elizabethan theatres (Limon, 1989). From this moment on, the building made of wood functioned in Gdańsk as a seasonal theatre for almost 200 years.

Both the shape and size of the galleries were created in accordance with the square plan of The Fortune Theatre. Three-level galleries with seats were the spatial prototype of the gallery auditorium. In my project the observation area was equipped with the additional structure of bridges and ramps. It was my interference in the aforementioned gallery auditorium. This structure allows viewers to participate in any performance and change their viewing position. In my model, this structure is marked in red. I can say that it might be the prototype of footbridge auditorium.

My second project named Cicada was a six meters high spatial installation with ramps and platforms made from scaffoldings. I designed and presented it in South Korea during artistic residency by the invitation of Hooyong Performing Arts Centre (2008). The idea was that only one viewer can take part in the

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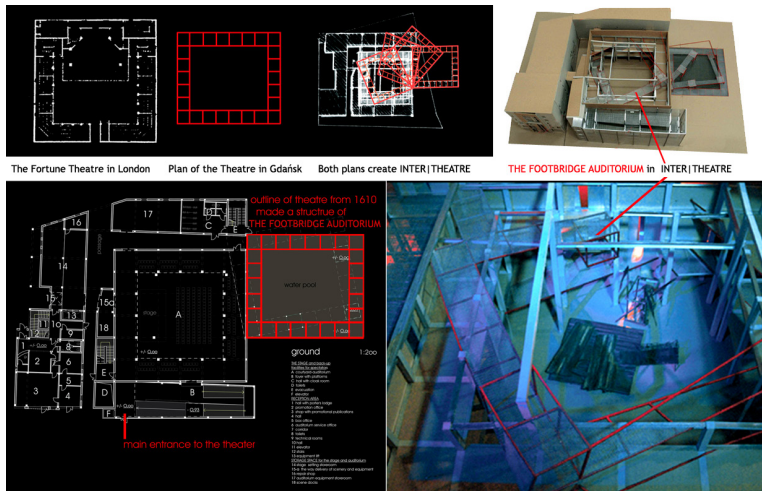


Figure 1. Inter|Theatre was presented during Prague Quadrennial in 2007 on the exhibition connected with 7th OISTAT Theatre Architecture Competition, *organised* by OISTAT Architecture Commission

performance by climbing up the ramps and simultaneously being in the inner space of this installation. The observation area was only from the ramps and platforms. The viewer was moving and observing the ongoing process on the stage when performer thanks to wearing the coat with wings became just like a cicada. The actor and the viewer were able to meet at the last level of the installation.

I think that this experimental installation might be the prototype of footbridge auditorium.

The next question I would like to raise is what the architecture can offer to performing artists today? Perhaps influencing the senses of the recipients is the point at which architecture, both as the art of space creation, and theatre as the art of giving meaning, can inspire each other and look for new solutions in searching for some new forms of the auditorium.

It is interesting how the spatial form of auditorium shapes viewers' behaviour

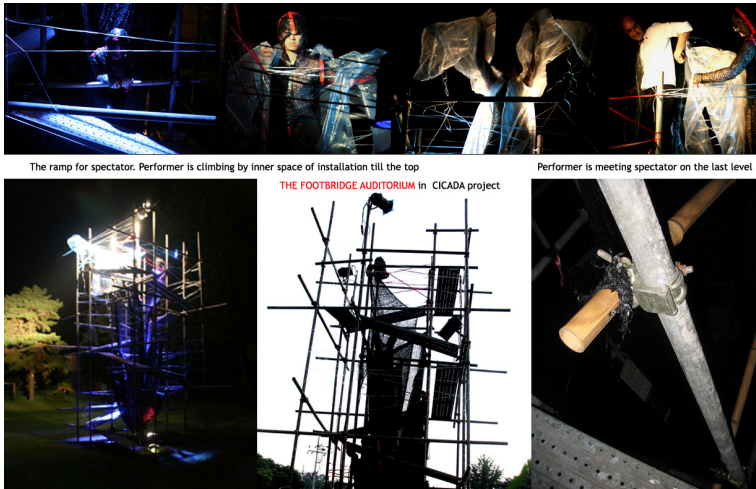


Figure 2. Cicada project was the spatial installation which took place at Hooyong Performing Arts Centre in South Korea in August 2008

because social distancing means something different to everyone due to both cultural and social factors. However, some architectural patterns force us to change our behaviour and act the same way as others.

What is the essence of the spatial relationship between people in the theatre: between actors, spectators and between spectators themselves? Is it shaped only by theatrical architecture? What may happen if viewers do not have to sit in the armchairs, will it make them more involved in the performance?

The variable dynamics of such audience would require a completely different construction of the spectacle's space. I am fascinated with the moment when an actor will be confronted with the situation in which he meets the viewer face to face. It means that the viewer position in an auditorium will be not entirely predictable. Most of theatrical directors wish to keep control over the performance however, I hope that some of them will be open for the new spatial possibilities.

I will quote here the famous and repeatedly cited beginning of Peter Brook's book, "The Empty Space":

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)

In this first sentence I have exchanged the word *stage* for the word *auditorium*: "I can take any empty space and call it a bare (...)" **auditorium**. The rest of sentence remains untouched and may give us an interesting vision: one man observes another one in the auditorium. This observing man is active, and he is the viewer at the same time.

Are we ready to change the paradigm, so far based on active: observed and passive: observer?

4. The typology of auditorium

While I have been working on the theory linked to the topic, I decided to go beyond the binary layout of stage versus auditorium. Every stage is governed by its own rules, staging and specialised requirements connected with technology. Also, we know historical and technological transformation of stage very well. I have decided that stage is not entirely in my fields of interest! Thanks to this division, auditorium will free itself from juxtaposing it with stage, recovering its own autonomy as an architectural part of the interiors which consist of the floor, walls and ceiling. These three elements also create the urban interiors but instead of ceiling we have the sky. This distinction was helpful to create the typology that I have taken an advantage of while doing my research.

I have prepared the formal typology of auditorium, which presents amphitheatrical auditorium and gallery auditorium. In my typology I have compared plan and section of various theatres, which show that amphitheatrical auditorium is a part of the floor. Whereas gallery auditorium is a part of the wall. I have created

spatial models of floors and walls and juxtaposed them together.

Consequently, footbridge auditorium might be a part of ceiling as the system of ramps and bridges. All of them are hanging over scene and auditorium. This footbridge auditorium can bring us behind-the-scenes and show us the hidden infrastructure behind the Fourth Wall.

I am going to present the models and description of amphitheatrical and gallery auditorium that consist of the typology used in my research. In both cases I analysed the same Théâtre de la Ville in Paris as a very interesting example of exchanging auditorium from the gallery to the amphitheatre. Even though the two types of auditoriums exist in our culture they are not sufficient to the contemporary viewer so I am going to take a closer look at the new type of auditorium: **footbridge auditorium** which might better to suit the current needs of the viewers.

4.1. The formal typology of amphitheatre auditorium

The amphitheatre has its origins in the classical Greek theatre, and it is the first example in my formal typology of amphitheatrical auditorium. I have chosen a few examples which are relevant in the history of theatre construction precisely because of the use of amphitheatrical auditorium. In each of them, the amphitheatrical auditorium consists of gradually surpassing rows of seats which is needed to see and hear the action on stage well, but the difference is in the structure of a massif. By using the word – massif – I mean the layout of the rows together which forms the amphitheatrical type of auditorium and resembles a compact group of steps.

The result is a division into the three following categories:

I. Auditorium floor massif integrated with natural ground

- Theatre in Epidauros, Greece / 4th Century before Christ

The classical Greek theatre, *theatron* had no walls, its architectural interior provided only the appropriate shape of the floor. *Theatron* created a place for

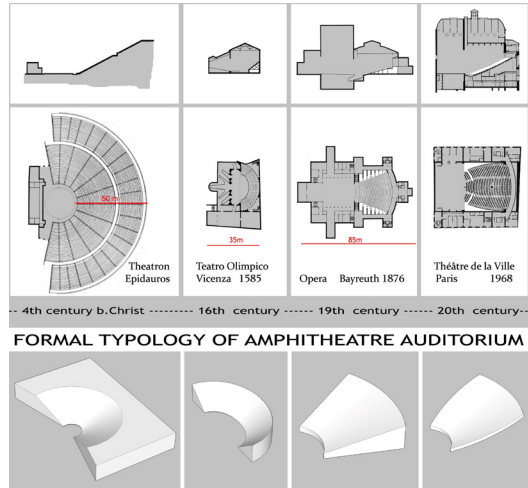


Figure 3. The formal typology of amphitheatre auditorium

viewers where the semi-circular rows of seats were surpassed gradually. It is worth mentioning that all ancient and modern outdoor theatres were built according to the landforms, where the floor massif models of amphitheatrical auditorium, belong to this category.

II. Auditorium floor massif supported by an architectural structure

- Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza, Italy / 16th century

In the classical Roman theatre, amphitheatre auditorium was a part of the floor, but there were walls and pillars instead of the slope of the hill and that is why it was the first free-standing theatrical building. Renaissance Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza was a copy of this kind of building as an independent, wooden construction. But the difference was that this theatrical building had a roof.

- Opera in Bayreuth, Germany/ 19th century

After two centuries of using gallery auditorium, the amphitheatre auditorium was

used in the Opera in Bayreuth at the end of 19th century. The plan of auditorium was constructed as a segment of the circle. This amphitheatre auditorium gently shaped low steps as a part of the floor. The massif of the auditorium was based on the structure belonging to the building. All contemporary amphitheatrical auditoriums from 20th and 21st century belonged to the aforesaid category.

III. Auditorium floor massif suspended in an architectural structure

- Théâtre de la Ville in Paris / exchanging of the auditorium in the 20th century

This theatre was built in the years 1860-1862 in accordance with the design of Gabriel Davioud during the reconstruction of Paris by Georges Haussmann. In 1967-1968 it was rebuilt by two architects Valentin Fabre and Jean Perrottet (Breton, 1990).

The change from the gallery auditorium into the amphitheatrical – more democratic one – took place at the special moment. The social protests and events of 1968 had the far-reaching effects on France's cultural, political, and economic life. In my opinion, the significant question of the types of auditorium in theatrical architecture had to be raised here. Architects overhung the structure of new auditorium to be even above the foyer space. This new structure was visible when looking from outside as a compact group of steps.

4.2. The formal typology of gallery auditorium

The theatres which I have chosen are free-standing buildings with gallery auditorium and flat floor. I am going to start with the London's Elizabethan theatre. In each of them, gallery auditorium was a part of the wall by stacking the rows so the viewer might have seen and heard well what was happening on the stage. In the formal typology of gallery auditorium, I have depicted some differences resulting from placing the wall massif which formed galleries inside theatre building.

The result is a division into two categories:

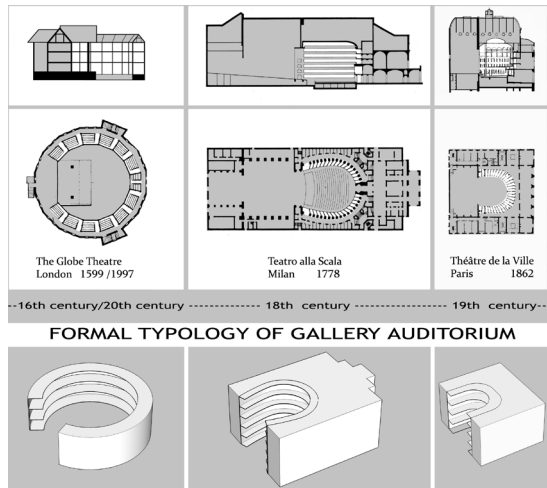


Figure 4. The formal typology of gallery auditorium

I. Auditorium wall massif create the external form of the building

- The Globe Theatre in London, England / 16th century – reconstruction of the building in the end 20th century

The London's Elizabethan theatre is an original solution because auditorium is a massif of wall, which also creates the form of the entire building.

They were free-standing public theatres with flat ground. The gallery auditorium models the wall massif as a three-level structure with its own roofing.

II. Auditorium wall massif immerse inside the building

- Teatro alla Scala in Milano, Italy / 18th century

The gallery auditorium was the part of walls inside the building. Italian Baroque theatre from the 18th century and its variants from the 19th century differently immersed the massif of walls of auditorium in the structure of building. Comparison placement of auditorium of these theatres brought some

interesting conclusions. Theatres immersed their audiences to varying depths as they expanded the viewer's service zone. It depended on the scale of the city or the prestige of the building. In general, the first Italian theatres had more modest cubic capacities compared to later French theatres like Garnier Opera.

- Théâtre de la Ville in Paris, France / the original form of auditorium
19th century

We can compare how this original gallery auditorium from the 19th century looked like because its twin building still exists. It is Chatelet du Théâtre designed by the same architect Gabriel Davioud. This musical theatre is located in front of Théâtre de la Ville.

4.3. Form of the footbridge auditorium. Intertwining ideas

Each type of auditorium models a different part of the architectural interiors of the theatre. Gallery auditorium models the massif of the wall and creates space for viewers, stacking up the rows successively, one above the other.

Amphitheatre auditorium models the floor massif and creates space for viewer surpassing the rows gradually. The third type of auditorium models ceiling or its area. In this way footbridge type of auditorium might be created.

During my research, I have found a few prototypes. One of them is in Teatro Oficina in Sao Paulo made of scaffolds. It was designed by Lina Bo Bardi and Edison Elito (1995) as a system of platforms along very narrow space of the stage. Three levels of platforms allow spectators to observe the action on the stage but still the stage and auditorium are separated.

But my way of reasoning goes more in line with the ideas of Avant-Garde artists such as: Friederich Kiesler and László Moholy-Nagy. Both of them had brilliant ideas of leaving the division for auditorium and stage and as a result an audience could be a part of the spectacle thanks to hanging bridges and mechanisms which allow the change of viewing position.

Kiesler's project of Endless Theatre (1916-1926) captured the elaborate configurations of ramps, lifts and bridges, all inside the surprising enormity of

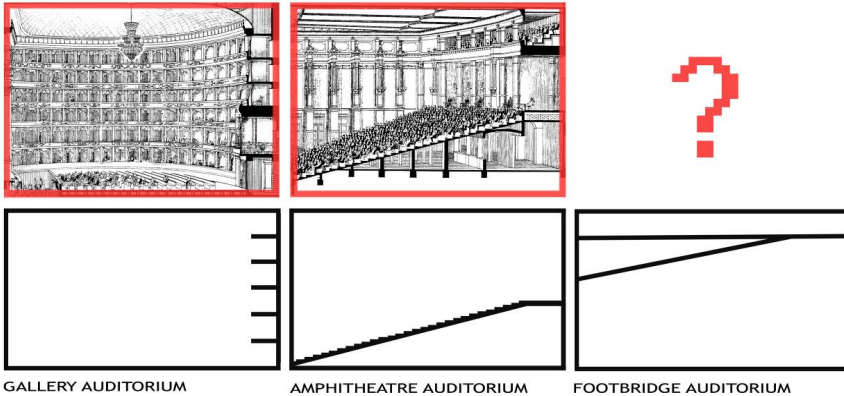


Figure 5. Each of three types of auditorium models a different part of the architectural interior of the theatre. I am still in the process of searching for a good example of the footbridge auditorium

open space for performers and viewers. Unfortunately, he did not prepare any spatial project, only three enigmatic drawings.

Moholy-Nagy left a few of spiral spatial compositions like Kinetic Constructive System (1922-1928) which were supposed to activate to use our kinaesthetic sense. This construction consisted of a conical structure of three ramps which were rising up as spirals and the lifts which facilitated the viewer going up and down. Even if both of them had basically the utopian idea, in my opinion, they could bring a new form for theatrical architecture in which the space between the viewer and performer is unified due to the usage of new technology and materials. Also, auditorium, as a public part of theatre is going to belong to the city. Its form can acquire the obligation to be in the specific place in the city and in its local spatial structure. My intention is to give a fresh look to the problem of auditorium in its complexity. To sum up, I believe that footbridge auditorium could be the most suitable type of auditorium for a contemporary viewer.

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