Placeness and the performative production of space.

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Introduction: From Place to Placeness

Casa di Giulietta

From a bridge, Ponte Delle Navi, you enter the ancient centre of Verona. Going through the set of small streets towards via Nizza, you turn into a very narrow street, via Stella. Once you enter via Stella, you immediately encounter a huge queue of people in front of a passageway leading to a medieval house with a Casa di Giulietta plaque. Google Maps labels the attraction as 'Juliette's House – Stone Balcony of Shakespeare's Juliette'. In an orderly queue, tourists worldwide await to enter a courtyard through an archway with a Juliette statue and a balcony above. The walls are covered in visitors' messages who leave their love notes. In a courtyard, you are facing a life-size bronze statue of young Juliette, and high above her is a balcony, prominently sticking out on a very flat and even surfaced façade. In a courtyard, phones take photos, selfies and in groups, focusing on the balcony where Juliette supposedly was when Romeo wooed her from below (see plate 1). They wait to take a photo with a statue of Juliette, as it is believed that touching her right breast will bring you luck in love. Images are instantly posted on social media platforms. In Shakespeare's tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*, the balcony is referred to in Act 2 Scene 2, known as the balcony scene. As the tourist narrative suggests, this was a place where the character of Juliet delivered her monologues from a balcony, and that balcony inspired Shakespeare. The most famous Shakespeare monologue, next to Hamlet's 'To be or not to be', is Juliet's 'O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo? Deny thy father and refuse thy name', supposedly delivered from that balcony in that very courtyard. The House of Juliette is an example of a performative production of space. The excitement of people in Juliette's House is similar to any other major tourist historical attraction, such as seeing

artefacts, the wall painting of da Vinci's *The Last Supper* in Milan or *The Mona Lisa* in the Louvre Museum in Paris.

However, the experience in Casa di Giulietta has no historical authenticity; it is fictionalized and reimagined, and as a placeness, it is an evocation of a space from a theatre play. Initially, in the First Folio published in 1623, seven years after Shakespeare died in 1616, the play did not have a balcony scene. It was only added to later adaptations of the play. Juliet is at a window, and she does not see Romeo, who is hidden behind a wall, so this is not addressed to him but, as in Shakespeare's soliloquy, to her herself as an inner monologue. That house, or any house, could not inspire Shakespeare as he did not know the medieval city of Verona. Probably the freest interpretation of the play that the narrative of the Casa di Giulietta place creates is of leaving love messages and touching the right breast of Juliette statue as actions that would bring luck in love to the audience and participants in the site performance. The play is the world's most famous love tragedy, ending in death, in accidental suicide by both lovers having bad luck misunderstanding each other messages and misinterpreting the situation. Shakespeare's fiction is appropriated as urban fictionalized reality, a constructed space identity from the play's indication of scenography. It is then re-presented for the outside world, the narrative of the house that the locals embrace as their own identity of space that created placeness. It is reminiscent of a locality in a play, the performativity of space conceived in the tourist gaze as much as the audience's willingness to immerse in the site where fictional space is materialized.

Why are we now discussing the multiple aspects of the performative production of space in the contemporary hybrid digital and live arts and culture? What forces invite responses to redefine notions of place within the performative placeness in a specific location's cultural and historical context and unique characteristics? In our changing world, many places are undergoing a process of identity transition based on perception and engagement from the users or audiences. How do we understand these transitions? The contemporary shift from fixed to fluid structures from place to performative placeness with a plurality of possible narratives allows a plurality of interactivity with a place. In the digital world, with artificial intelligence (AI) configuration of space and characters, performative placeness is affected by various influences: a digital revolution, the impact of new technology on everyday life, changes in production

(post-industrial locations), conflicting post-globalism, migration processes, international wars, a new balance of world powers, or just mass tourism and movement of people. The local places are experiencing a transformation, and the communities linked to them need to find resources and methodologies to recover those spaces. We propose that we go to the roots, the origins of the historical and cultural context of physical placeness and ways of placemaking, the themes and stories created by place, and those stories that create a sense of place. Because of this connection between events and space, architecture and design are testimony to performative placeness and can be established as physical and digital spaces with their own identity. We will propose a hybrid approach to placemaking based on performativity that spans from physical to digital space and provide examples in practice for these transitional stages of the production of place. Our explorations of placeness in this book will take us from physical space and original civitas in ancient Greece to the digital world and cyberspace.

Embodying performativity of place

In this book, we argue that performativity is always involved in generating meaning and distinctiveness of a place. Historically, every community develops social narratives and performance rituals that configure everyday spaces for communal use. For example, civic space has been defined by a narrative of public and social events to be performed in that place. To understand the phenomena of performativity of place, we have established an interdisciplinary enquiry from methods in performance studies and architecture. We argue that performativity is at the root of every lived space. Every community develops its own social narratives and rituals that configure their everyday life spaces. However, *Placeness* refers to how performativity defines space and how space and architecture define performance, for example, in site-specific and immersive performance. Javier Ruiz Sánchez observes that: 'Geometrical and physical space are no more than a structure, but placeness has to do with performance. A structure permits a number of rituals, but what creates placeness is when these rituals are performed by transforming and orienting the evolution of the structure.'[1]

The Oxford English Dictionary defines placeness as 'the quality of having or occupying a place', the condition of being in a place, and points that it can be 'the quality reminiscent of a particular locality or place' or being reminded of something else, as a recollection of a significant place that is remembered, as an act of retrieving a place from memory.[2] Whether physically in a place or recollection of place (that mentally projects you in a location), placeness points to two impactful forces that define it – outline of space and human experience and engagement within that space. Ted Relph, explains that placeness is a useful term that allows him 'to consider everything to do with the diverse qualities, interpretations, uses and experiences of *place*, from place cells in the hippocampus to a global sense of place'.[3] Placeness can also refer to the importance of a specific location in shaping historical and cultural events and how location impacts on human action and its significance that can have geographical and urban relevance. Places with physical features (mountains, rivers, forests, coastline) can impact trade patterns, settlement organization, and even conflict and war. In addition, within the context of a significant location, performance actions also understand symbolic meaning in a space narrative. Placeness has a role in shaping historical and cultural importance and the value that society gives to a specific location or structure (the Acropolis of Athens as a symbol of Western civilization or the Palace in Versailles as a neoclassical spirit of France and Europe).

Charles Jencks, architect and scholar, redefines the concept of postmodernism concerning architecture as an evolving cultural phenomenon, a provocation in response to the limitations of modernism and its lack of historical and cultural references. For Jencks, postmodern architecture is pluralistic and double-coded, eclectic and playful, drawing from elements of the past and incorporating contemporary interpretations. His seminal book *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*, published in 1977, reflects his critical method of constantly analysing architecture from a multidisciplinary perspective, of symbolism, meaning and cultural values, and responding to the fast contemporary cultural and socio-economic context in which the built environment exists. Jencks connects architecture with people, how it inspires them, and the contribution it makes to the life of a community, effectively relating space (where architecture exists) to the exploration of aesthetics and identity, not only its pure functionality. Following Jencks' postmodern thought on space and design, we can say that placeness, as particular qualities and characteristics of a place, embodies

symbolism, stories and cultural references, and that it is performative as it also establishes relation with people and a connection on a deeper level, evoking identity and belonging. The performative production of space from a postmodern perspective aligns with the idea that space is not passive but actively shaped through historical, social and cultural interactions. Place is not pre-existing, it is made though human action that is performative.

Henri Lefebvre, French sociologist and urban studies scholar, established in his seminal book *The Production of Space* a critique of postmodernism, which was, for him, consumerism that emphasizes spectacle and false plurality, over people's individual experiences and social practices. People are disempowered as individuals in space, reflecting capital's dominance. Lefebvre articulates his spatial theory with a spatial triad: the representation of space, the representational space and spatial practices. Lefebvre argues that each society generates its own space. Each of the components of the spatial triad can be approached from a performative perspective, especially if we understand that performance and performative actions are at the essence of the origins of our civilization and determine the way in which the spaces where we develop our everyday lives are conceived (*the representational space*). Social interactions are determined by role models performed within a space (*spatial practice*); they follow codes, abstract representations and symbols (*the represented space*).

One of the objectives of this book is to give a wider research context and set up a theoretical framework for the concept of architectural script, a cartography presenting our everyday life as a version of the dramaturgical score that shapes architecture and urban spaces.[4] In the same way, this book argues that the origins of civic and urban spaces are based on performative actions and the nature of the actions that generated them. It proposes that the creation of place through placemaking of placeness can be closely linked to the contextualization and development of performative actions. Performative actions in space impact the quality of feelings related to a place and its unique characteristics and atmosphere that make sense of a place: its meaning, identity and presence. They all create the layout and ambience of a place, a resonance that can evoke emotions. It is not a production of specific structures that relate to people, but emotions and atmospheres that specific spaces evoke in people and how they relate to that place and are made to feel in it. Heritage, cultural, and social

significance are also important factors in creating the meaning of place. What space holds in collective heritage and memory is an important part of the performative production of space, its identity and relevance, contributing to the overall sense of a place. The connection with a local or international community is enhanced and fostered through performativity engaging and connecting people to its sorroundings.

Space is tightly connected to performance studies, especially from the second half of the twentieth century. From the 1960s onwards, theatre space had a profound inspiration on theatre performance and how performance dramaturgy was developed and presented for the audience. The dramaturgy of space from performance authors such as Schechner's The Performance Group, later Wooster Group, Robert Lepage and Punchdrunk established that *space is performance*. Discussing Lefebvre's understanding of space that does not exist but is produced by interrelated social and historical forces represented in a particular culture, John Lutterbie proclaimed that space (thinking about theatre) is a performative act that is not fixed but 'the effect of a performance'.[5] This book explores the idea of placeness as identity and belonging, the interaction of people with the place as a lived experience and the representation through the performative production of space. Using performance, we look at performative aspects of urban spaces as relevant in constructing and producing placeness.

The direct connection between space and the making of a story came from Chilean playwright Ramon Griffero. He provides the concept of dramaturgy that occurs in a space, inserting his philosophy of aesthetic approach to artistic creation, demonstrating how space can become the dramaturgical material through group interaction and performativity. Traditionally, in Western theatre, theatre space has always provided a framing for the dramatic textual content. It is a common understanding that space in live theatre is the platform for performance. In that way, drama (as a text being produced) would correspond to the space's outlines that contain and embody its presence. The dramaturgy of Greek theatre, Medieval plays, Elizabethan, French Neoclassic and Fourth Wall realism all necessitated dramatic text and staging that would utilize the space as a place of embodiment for dramaturgy. Replacing dramaturgy founded in the drama text and aligning it with space was essential for the contemporaneity of theatre. Interactive and participatory performance,

performance art, installation art, visual arts and site-specific production all have different central relationships with space, and, subsequently, audiences have also had an impact on the performative understanding of urban spaces. Technological developments with new media have introduced totally different relations with digital space, where performance establishes a new set of meanings in a digital environment.

Performative space is relevant to human action and community interactivity in gathering, both coming together within established structures and through dissent by breaking from structures within urban spaces. The relationships between performance and human space, whether in the city, the stage, shopping or place of work, means of transport, political or religious centres, the sacred or cultural space and, of course, the virtual space, generated an exceptional place. In the same way that the contemporary urban place is generated, the place where the community expresses itself is a place that accommodates and, at the same time, influences that expression.

Architecture can be interpreted as a set of performance events in space through the design of a space where space and audience experience can be interconnected. Performance can be brought into architecture through scenographic elements such as the space layout, lighting and engaging relations between performers and the audience. We can see performative space linked to architecture in site-specific theatre, immersive performance and audience interaction. The architectural space can be designed to blur the boundaries between performers and the audience, creating an interactive experience. The space does not have to be only physical it can also be digital, with audience interactivity as in computer video games. For example, in 1964, the architectural design for *Fun Palace* by Cedric Price, visionary architect and promoter of new thinking about space as an interactive entity with people, was an outcome of an interdisciplinary collaboration between performance practitioner and pedagogue Joan Littlewood and cybernetician and computer developer Gordon Pask (see plate 2). It was a new idea about a flexible and adaptable multi-purpose place for the community to engage in various arts, culture and educational activities envisioned by architects, theatre artists and cyberneticians. Price's placeness came from intermedial connections between space, body and computer in a temporary, movable structure (walls and floors)

and assembled in different locations, in urban settings at the heart of the community.

> . . . *Fun Palace* was supposed to be a transformative art space for the educational and cultural activities of the ordinary people in the community who may not have access to education in Britain in the 1960s. It was a proposal for hybridisation as the first interdisciplinary and interactive venue bringing together theater, architecture and computer technology.[6]

The visionary project *Fun Palace* was a utopian concept of placeness that has yet to materialize, or not, in present-day dystopian urban reality. It is an inspirational vision for the time to come. It envisages a culturally complex community and empowers people to create and use art in a utopian society based on equality and access to well-being for all people.

Our work builds on the research developed by the Theatre Architecture Working Group of the International Federation for Theatre Research. Juliet Rufford and Andrew Filmer (eds.) published in 2018 the book *Performing Architectures*, which 'seeks to speak across disciplines and conventions',[7] highlighting the cross-overs between disciplines where 'discourses of performance are increasingly used in architecture to describe the use of interactive systems, surfaces and interfaces' and the way in which digital tools have expanded the possibilities of architectural design.[8] In theatre performance, placeness can be seen as what Joslin McKinney calls 'scenographic spectacle', which observes space from the spectator's point of view and its appeal to the body responding to scenography. So, placeness can be audience immersion and participation within the location of the spectacle, and placeness is the physical involvement of the audience in a space.[9]

Thinking about interdisciplinary methodology

The research undertaken in this book combines a qualitative research methodology – interviews with practitioners – with a Practice as a research methodological model and observation of one's own practice and relevant thinking about the influence of performance on place. Over half of the book, around 60 per cent, are transcriptions of interviews/conversations we have

had with relevant practitioners on the object of study. However, the questions came from an initial discussion we had with each of the artists interviewed. We have reflected on several projects and interviewed artists from different geographical locations – the UK, Brazil, India, the Czech Republic, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Spain.

The rationale behind the choice of practitioners and collaborative companies is aligned with the particular area of research that we are exploring. They develop hybrid practices in between performance, installation art, architecture and placemaking, and their work has had an impact in the spatial practices of communities and groups they have been working with. We wanted to discuss with them their methods of practice to be able to understand the outcomes. The research presented in this book follows the methodological model of the Practice as Research in the Arts (PAR) established by Robin Nelson. As Nelson affirms, the PAR model 'might function equally for any discipline where research is primarily undertaken through a practice (beyond writing)'.[10] Interviews constitute a qualitative research method, which has been at the core of our work. As Nelson states, a key requirement of the PAR model is 'reflexivity, a principle beneficial to all research, requiring us to be aware of where we are situated and where we are coming from, to be open to the discursive positions of others and to engage dialogically (and not just in words) with others.'[11]

The interviews present practitioners' artistic and professional practices. We have induced reflection on the practice through the framework we set up in each conversation and the questions asked. In this sense, we designed a set of questions – presented below – that have guided our conversations. These questions, articulated in four sections, have allowed us to extract and analyse the different parameters that each practitioner articulates concerning performative space, the creation of place and social sustainability. We were especially interested in the afterlife of the projects and how they have impacted spaces and their communities.

Block 1 – Background
Could you describe the project? What was your main objective?
How do you define your practice and which discipline/s do you feel most connected to? What is your artistic background and what are your influences?

What triggered your intervention in that space? Why there? What was your personal relation with the space?

Block 2 – Intervention/Practice
Explain the process involved in transforming the place. What are the key stages in the development of your practice?
What elements do you use for intervening in a space?
What was your artistic proposition/provocation for the project?
Could you describe the location before developing your project? Could you describe the location of your project?
What were your strategies/methodologies to create a place in the urban environment?
How has your work influenced the community/citizens?

Block 3 – Impact
How has your practice impacted the transformation process and change of place?
How has this place/project impacted your own practice?
Can you identify the change/awareness/recognition that you wanted to achieve?

Block 4 – Sustainability
Was your intervention sustainable? What happened after you finished?
In which way can your artistic practice be sustainable?
In which way did your project contribute to the cultural narrative? (Subverting, reconfirming, educating)
Who are your stakeholders (communities, policymakers, funding bodies, etc.), and what was their role in the project's sustainability?

The research presented in this book emerges from articulating the three elements stated by Nelson, namely, the theoretical framework, case studies of practitioners and our practice. In the chapters, we introduce our practice work, which has emerged from performance creation, and the theoretical framework we analysed combined with the observation of some of the practitioners presented in the book, with whom we have had a longer-term dialogue and collaboration. The articulation of the theoretical framework (*Know that*), practices of other professionals (*Know what*), and our practice (*Know how*), has allowed us to scaffold a robust and innovative research methodology that outlines the new approaches to space and performativity presented in this book.[12]

The outline

Chapter 1 *The Performative Origins of Civitas* explores the genesis of the politically organized community in public spaces in the West using case studies. The methodology followed analyses the performative aspects of the events in civic spaces and defines their role in the design and configuration of those spaces. This chapter introduces urban curating as a performative tool. The practice projects presented in this chapter show performative urban interventions that sit within the area of urban curating and can transform spaces through collective narratives. The first practitioner is Sodja Lotker, artistic director of Prague Quadrennial between 2008 and 2015. The Prague Quadrennial constitutes a transformative event for the city, which owes much of its current identity to this festival. Established in 1967, the Prague Quadrennial brings together performance designers worldwide, creating a festival placeness. The second practitioner is Dr Jenny Peevers, a curator who applies curatorial practices to placemaking. *Re:connections* was a spatial dialogical art project situated within Lee Bank, a regenerated inner-city residential area in Birmingham, UK. *Re:connections* aimed to facilitate embodied art dialogues through a creative process of being embodied in a place. The embodied art dialogues were activated through artist-led wandering and exploring with residents of Lee Bank.

Chapter 2 *Spatial Dramaturgies*, explores the influence of theatre spaces in the configuration of performance narratives and looks at the spirit of place in the philosophical concept of *genius loci*. This chapter sets up the basis to understand the role of place in site-specific performances, the dramaturgy of space and how space shapes and creates the narrative. This chapter examines the relationships between the structure of space and the structure of the text (either written text, visual or mediated). The practitioners interviewed have developed their work in alternative non-theatre spaces. The practitioners reflect on how the characteristics of space play a key role in the way communities perceive space and how the exploration through different practices can transform it. The first interview presents the work of La Fura dels Baus, a collaborative theatre company from Catalonia (Spain). La Fura dels Baus is known for its radical practices in space. They started working in the late 1970s and are one of Spain's most influential theatre

companies in the use of performative space. The second practitioner interviewed is Rodolfo García Vázquez, artistic director of the theatre company Os Satyros (São Paulo, Brazil). Os Satyros played a fundamental role in the regeneration of Praça Roosevelt from the 2000s onwards through community engagement and theatre programmes. After settling in the area, it was transformed due to the programme they developed with the local communities.

Chapter 3, *Placemaking and Performative Urban Pedagogies*, explores the role of performance practices in the configuration of place, spatial justice and community identity. This chapter highlights pedagogical tools as essential in performative placemaking to ensure social sustainability. Interdisciplinary performative art practices within placemaking processes are the focus of the case studies developed by the authors in collaboration with other practitioners presented in this chapter: *Airplace* (2023), *Ceramics, memory and site* (2023) and *Urban Dramaturgies* (2017). The first interview is with Zuloark, a collective of architects and designers who develop participatory design practices with communities. The collective members founded it in 2001 at the School of Architecture of Madrid, and they are an international reference point for placemaking and co-design. The project they discuss, *Campo de la Cebada*, was developed in Madrid and started as a design workshop with the local community to develop and redesign a public space. The second interview is with Anna Francis, Associate Professor of Fine Art and Social Practice at Staffordshire University, UK and artistic director of the Portland Inn Project. The Portland Inn Project (PiP) is based in Stoke-on-Trent (UK), and it is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation (2023–6). The PiP is an arts-based community project that aims to achieve community cohesion, economic, social and cultural development by involving the community in the development of a pioneering community space, cultural hub and social enterprise.

Finally, Chapter 4, *Digital Placeness*, engages with now and what's imminently coming to our human reality in the future with the shaping of place through new smart technology. It looks at the role of digital technologies in the construction of space. This chapter considers human existence as represented within the physical, hybrid and virtual worlds in the arts. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, digital technologies have become a focal point of human

interactions. Performative actions move from live into digital, where digital space becomes the central preoccupation as a social networking platform, communication tools such as Zoom or Teams, and new connections in the metaverse. This chapter's case studies explore technology as the main medium in performance, suggesting new encounters in virtual spaces for global communities. The first interview is with Sumit Lai Roy, the artistic director of The Red Curtain International (Kolkata, India). Through digital live theatre, The Red Curtain International has developed its practice, bringing communities worldwide together through traditional Indian art forms, breaking the geographical boundaries of performance practices. The interview discusses the award-winning international live digital theatre production involving thirty performers from four continents *The Art of Facing Fear* and its ability to create trans-geographical digital placeness. The second interview is with Vladimir Vanja Vlačina, a leading scenographer and installation artist based in Bosnia and Herzegovina. His project *I Remember*, digitalizes the experience of place as heritage and remembrance. The socio-political context of the project located in Prijedor (Republika Serpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina) engages with the conflicted past and present; it transforms an abandoned structure of a socialist shopping mall awaiting its new identity into a site for remembering his family heritage.

This book has no conclusion, or not in the traditional sense of closing an argument. The Conclusion: Post Placeness looks into the future of digital and physical production of performative place and presents a dialogue between the authors. As internationally awarded performance practitioners, Dundjerović, performance deviser and director, and Martínez Sánchez, architect, performance designer and scenographer, interview each other, referring to material in the book from their own creative experience and their engagement (observational and practical) with the practitioners interviewed. Observations on theories, practice and interviews give a new understanding of the spaces where we develop our everyday lives. Our analysis and case studies can influence how researchers and practitioners work in hybrid performance, placemaking or co-design. We see the work as a conversation, a work in progress in a verbatim style, an open field that looks at possibilities of creating placeness through the performative production of space. It is a reflection and discussion by the authors on the material, the book's key findings and possible

future implications. We engage here with various practices of making placeness as tools and mechanisms for entering a place and engaging performativity in finding the meaning of the space through theatre and urban interventions within physical and digital reality.