Life is Serious;
ART SERENE

Biography

Filip Jovanovski (b.1979), is a professional associate at the Faculty of Architecture UKIM - Skopje and teaches Scenography as an expert from practice at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts - "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" in Skopje. Jovanovski graduated from Faculty of Architecture, University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" in Skopje, and obtained his Master's degree from the Faculty of Fine Arts at "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" in Skopje in 2019 with the project "If Buildings Could talk".

With his pronounced interdisciplinary approach, Jovanovski explores different media and their interdisciplinary connection - architecture, visual art, theater, video, film and spatial installations. The most common means of artistic expression are spatial - performative interventions in public space. He explores artistic expression and potential in the field of scenography, thus far creating about 30 scenographies for theater projects. Jovanovski has had over 15 solo exhibitions and presentations in the country and abroad, and participated in over 40 group exhibitions.

He creates long-term socially engaged art projects, which are based on research and often in collaboration with different communities. In his projects, he tries to expose the hidden mechanisms of dominant positions of power, which lead to the destruction of public space and the public in general, while deconstructing and encouraging different alternatives to capitalist living. His works are transformations of political and social categories into spatial images. He often uses public space for his works or creates it, in addition to unconventional and alternative exhibition spaces.

His project "This building talks (truly)" curated by Ivana Vaseva, which represented the Republic of North Macedonia at the Prague Quadrennial for Performance, Design and Space in 2019, was awarded the main prize "Golden Triga."

Slobodan Velevski (b.1976) is a tenure professor at the Faculty of Architecture, University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" in Skopje, where he lectures on urban design and co-leads master design studio in architectural-urbanism entitled Growth 2.0. In 2007 he completed his master studies at Dessau Institute of Architecture in Germany and in 2013 he finished his PhD in Skopje which aims to decode the utopian narrative of contemporary cities.

His experience in practice (2005-2007) ranges from engagement at architectural offices such as Shigery Ban Arhitects Paris, David Chipperfield Architects Berlin, and research institute Space Syntax Lab in London. In 2018 he co-curated F*reenigspac*e, an exhibition representing the Republic of Macedonia at the 16th International Architecture Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia entitled Freespace.

He is also a co-author of several publications including *Conversations*, a book that embodies series of interviews with eminent architects and educators. He regularly participates in conferences and various scientific research networks and programs.

SUPERIMPOSING ARCHITECTURAL SPACE AND THEATRICAL ACTIVITY: FROM 'FOURTH' WALL TO 'DIALECTICAL' WALL

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Abstract

With its power to delineate and encapsulate space, the wall signifies one of the anchoring elements in architectural discourse. As such, the wall is an interface between various spatial conditions and processes that define cultural production in any societal context: from basic definition of community and the meaning of primary shelter, to complex relationships within the network of various socio-economic constraints that bring forth the rhizomatic nature of contemporary urban conditions.

According to Gottfried Semper, the most valuable aspect of the wall, as an enclosing element, is not its tectonic and constructive power to sustain the structural totality of space, but its value as a liminal entity that operates between various conditions on its both sides simultaneously. Namely, this condition of embracing parallel programmatic protocols reflects the plethora and the multitude of relations that correspond with the dynamic human nature which constantly produces different social encounters.

This paper aims to focus on the impetus that the liminal condition of the wall has in the process of instigating narratives within the physical context. It follows a research project conducted in Zentrum für Kunst und Urbanistik (ZK/U) in Berlin, where the generic space of a newly constructed rooftop becomes a specific place of activity (a 10 seconds theatre). The research departs from changing the basic notion of the 'fourth' wall as a dividing element between the 'world of imagination' (the stage) and the 'real world' (the audience), and introducing a 'performative' wall which becomes a dialectical element every time when the position of the

stage and the audience is subverted. Namely, the work showcases how the scenic and narrative content of everyday life always emerge as a form of theatrical activity when the architecture of the rooftop and the city shift their position around the dynamic nature of the dialectical wall and communicate with its content, performance, materiality, and appearance.

Would the dialectical wall be the ideal symbolical and political space for action, transforming a city into a stage? How thick is that wall? The dialectical wall in our research is a machine that generates actions by establishing a dynamic relationship of generic (abstract) versus active (place) space in the city, posing the question of the relation between the audience and the performers. The wall is a stage itself, a space that dialectically involves the audience in the action, reactivates the city in the creation of the actions (events) and thus, transform it into a performative city/scene?

Keywords: 'fourth' wall, architecture, theatre, performance

1. INTRODUCTION

The research presented in this paper started as a wider collaborative project initiated by the Prague Quadrennial for Performance Design and Space and its partners.

The overall collaboration was entitled "Active City(zens)". Three partners working with challenging urban localities in Prague, Berlin, and as well as a fourth partner located in Ukraine, developed innovative urban stage performances geared towards new audience development.

The title of the project tried to put in active relation the term city and its performers (citizens) - participants in creating their urban surrounding and transforming it into performative space.

Architecture and drama students, experts, citizens, artists, and researchers, developed prototypes for performances in public space that transform the city into a stage using an interdisciplinary research approach. These prototypes represent tools, instructions and recommendations on how rare experiences of a city can create the possibility of a new, extraordinary, radical reality as a process in building a better future.

The project intended to develop innovative audience - building approaches that support community engagement, while preserving local cultural values and developing methods of cross-cultural programming. The wide range of interventions into public spaces include areas with limited cultural reach, such as train and bus stops, marketplaces, abandoned heritage sites and more.

The general idea aims to develop prototypes for interventions that will exhaust the full potential of the city as an invisible resource. By creating new prototypes of culture programming, performative activities and interventions will redirect some of the attention the public is currently giving to advertising and commerce, to rediscover unique public spaces and create new forms of vibrant short performance bites.

There were several key points guiding the project:

- Activating people and places for new forms and prototypes of cultural production and engaging community through artistic production
- Creating innovative urban stage performances. Spinning on processes that instigate new audience development
- Providing spatial and programmatic infrastructure for establishing artistic creation (theatre) in existing (complex) urban settings

The project also relies on contemporary artistic performative and urban research practices close to the field of scene design, extending the field of scenography and its wider role in the society. One of the major challenges was how to use performative (scene) tools to transform non-places within the urban context in order to create performative (active) and engaged space (place) ready to grasp and embrace any action.

As dramaturg and artistic director of the Prague Quadrennial (PQ) 2015, Sodja Lotker, would note in her curatorial text for the PQ2015 edition:

PQ2015 explores scenography as a strong and sometimes invisible force of performance; a power that influences us just like music, weather and politics influence us. Theatre is a place where people gather and

where important socio-political relations are created. The Shared Space title points to scenography´s social function, providing a space for sharing, relating, and also for being in conflict – a place of connection and of difference.

The difficulty of orienting one's self in the fast changing world makes scenography's social function very important: here politicians use imagination and fiction while paradoxically artists are often obsessed with the authentic.

So, what is to be done? (Lotker, 2015)

2. THEORETICAL DISCOURSES AND REFERENCES: THE CONCEPTOF THE WALL IN ARCHITECTURE AND THEATRE

2.1 On some meanings of the wall in architecture

Architecture is a projective discipline usually seen as synonymous with progress because the (projective) outcomes it creates are perceived as strongly related with establishing new development strategies. This condition is especially present from the XIX century onwards and reflects the demands related to our ever-growing urbanization in which cities simultaneously became places of prosperity and challenges where many socio-political contradictions and complexities emerged. On the other hand, it could be argued that although the nature of architecture initiates change and not an entirely predictable new reality, the spatial tools that serve architecture in the process of building our cities and societies are actually mechanisms restricting possibilities. When the built (architecture) supplements the unbuilt, and therefore the unrestricted, it actually reduces liberty because it imposes decision-making, organizational structure, and order which by default is restrictive to freedom of choice. On ideological level, such condition marks each of the architectural elements as resources of subjugation. This paper argues that although architecture and its techniques based on specific relationship established by spatial elements (walls, columns, platforms, stairs, corridors, etc.) are based on creating a condition of control in which functions are determined with the purpose to construct order, they are also tools disrupting that very same order because they could instigate differences. On conceptual level, each of the architectural elements could serve as entities of a final state of certain structure of order, but the same ones could compositionally defer and create an 'open-end' structure in which the practice of order is re-codified as a practice of unlimited choices that produce freedom. Moreover, such condition further develops by introducing programmatic diversity that goes beyond functional correlation between form and content, and produces a condition of architecture as social condenser.

The work presented in this paper aims to reveal the double nature of architectural elements by focusing on the meaning of the wall as one of the most prolific architectural entities. With its power to delineate and encapsulate space, the wall signifies one of the anchoring elements in architectural discourse. As such, the wall is an interface between various spatial conditions and processes that define cultural production in any societal context: from basic definition of community and the meaning of primary shelter, to complex relationships within the network of various socio-economic constraints that bring afore the rhizomatic nature of contemporary urban conditions. The paper questions the power of the wall to simultaneously establish order, but also to create multiple and diverse non-hierarchical situations. One of the most striking examples of the former is the case of the Berlin Wall built during the Cold War era, which resembles the concept of intended order, restraint, division and exclusion, while the latter could be exemplified by the Kowloon Walled City in Hong Kong, as a place that has continually grown and perpetually changed for more than four decades until the mid-1990s when it was demolished. (Bock, 2015 pp. 33-84) Although both examples are an outcome of strongly politicized contexts, they could be seen as case studies that resemble three major aspects of the wall that were used as a conceptual strategy in the design work conducted for the rooftop of the ZK/U cultural center in Berlin, and were part of the collaboration within the "Active City(zens)" project. Namely, as will be discussed in more detail later, the project presented in this paper argues that the delineating aspect of the wall establishes the possibilities for dichotomy between various parties and their dynamics that are being delineated. Second, the wall is a generic element the size of which allows it to be programmatically populated almost on the level of total self-organization (Kowloon in Hong Kong).And last, the aspect of temporality that provokes a condition of accidental and involuntary behaviour, a state of perpetual performance that creates

multiple situations.

The first one could be traced back to the XIX century through a theory in the book *The Four Elements of Architecture* (Semper, 1851), in which the author, the German architect Gottfried Semper, argues the origin of architecture and the meaning of its elements. According to him, the most valuable aspect of the wall is its enclosing capacity. That means that Semper does not apply the tectonic and constructive power to sustain the structural totality of space as the major strength of the wall, but its value as a liminal entity that operates between various conditions on its both sides simultaneously. Thus, by delineating the space inside and outside the wall, he is introducing the idea of dichotomy. Namely, this condition allows embracing parallel programmatic protocols (from both sides) and creates a plethora which reflects the multitude of relations that correspond with the dynamic human nature which constantly produces different social encounters in the process.

In 1972, inspired by his thesis research on the Berlin Wall and for the purposes of a competition entitled "The City as a Meaningful Environment" organized by the Italian architecture magazine Casabella, Rem Koolhaas and his partners in the early days of the OMA collective proposed a dystopian reality for the city of London as a critique on the ongoing planning of the cities. The project "Exodus, or the Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture" is a polemical response to the multifaceted challenges of contemporary cities (Schaik & Macel, 2005, pp.236-276). Although its complex nature could be discussed through various social, spatial, as well as political constraints, the project is mainly based on proliferation of different programmatic entities limited within the thickness of the walled structure that operates as autonomous stripe which is sunken within the existing city. The decision to place the new city within the confines of the existing one, something that was avoided by many other architectural collectives in the 1960sand 1970s, shows that although the OMA proposal radically delineates its city from the existing one, it still needs it in order to establish dichotomy on the level of socio-spatial (urban) continuity. Thus, the programmes involved in the 'new' city should simultaneously present the critique of the contemporary society and its passive response to the ever-growing needs of its citizens, but also to position the non-spatial seeding of maximizing programmatic diversity of the urban territory (an approach that was years later developed by OMA as a concept of 'programmatic lava') as a way to sustain and to further develop the disciplinary frame of urban planning. The intention of this new paradigm is to go beyond the planning based on typological forms with predetermined functions and substitute them by embracing the city as an operational field of overlapping activities that correspond with the fluidity of global reality.

The third aspect that was researched for the purposes of the ZK/U rooftop intervention refers on flexibility of space. In that regard, flexibility of walls should be seen as part of the active spatial condition in which the dichotomy of the liminal and the programmatically less-determined conditions juxtapose and create an environment of performance. Perhaps one of the most profound examples of such juxtaposition is the Fun Palace, a 1964 project developed by architect Cedric Price in collaboration with avant-garde theatre director and producer Joan Littlewood. This project represents an evolving and adaptive open-end structure in which everyday life is understood as a cultural production that embraces emancipation, education, and leisure for people. The walls (and floors and all other architectural elements) are movable panels that are part of the scaffolding structure in which the movement, and the actions taken, are merged in multiple programmatic activities that imply performing situations. In such spatial disposition (scaffolding), and an actual condition of perpetual change (movement), the wall becomes an element of indeterminacy in which the practice of personal and collective freedom is instigated. The idea of the project is not to become a building, not more than the OMA project for London was intended to become an actual city, but rather those concepts aim to transform the top-down techniques of architecture in which order is imposed, in socio-spatial interactive machines that are capable to reinvent the dynamics of everyday life and grasp the novelty that comes with the growing societal complexities derived from accumulation of new knowledge. Moreover, the Fun Palace project derives from the strength of theatre performance. In terms of ideology, this project sees contemporary life as layers of various narratives that create numerous situations, and thus architecture should be capable to constantly re-adapt itself in order to sustain 'a theatrical stage' that provides an interactive backdrop to the varying needs and desires of the individual within the collective (Mathews, 2005, p. 73).

2.2 The wall as an element in theatre performance

Architecture is a space of reconciliation, scenography is a space of conflict. (Hocevar, 2003)

If we have to explain the definition of traditional theatre, regarding its already précised protocols of theatre produced in an institution (building, black box), with all elements that help producing an illusion of a play, we can simplify it and say that the key elements defining this illusion are: dark (light), theatre curtain (an imaginary 'fourth' wall in front of the proscenium) and (the shape of) the auditorium. Having these elements provides the starting position for creating a theatre theatre illusion as part of a theatre event within a building. Following these expected conventions, we can conclude that everything (performers / scenography / objects) positioned in the dark and not under the spotlight is not part of the performance, or at least it is not in the focus of the drama space in which the narrative takes the play.

In the traditional theatre, the positions of light and dark, actors and audience are very precisely defined. Actor and viewer are not allowed to mix their spaces (Sekner. R, 1992, pp 17). The space of the audience and the space of the actor are separated by the (imaginary) 'fourth' wall embodied in the form of a (red) theatre curtain.

There were several important historical efforts in the 20th century aimed to improve and redefine the relation between the architectural space (the building) and the performance (the theatrical space). One of the most important examples is the Total Theatre project by architect Walter Gropius and theatre director Erwin Piscator. Gropius builds a conception of an object in which *designed technical equipment enables the director to use perspective stage, proscenium and round arena, i.e. all of them simultaneously, inside of one play*, which actually establishes a new type of a stage - auditorium into one space of a *theatre-machine*. (Dinulovic, 2009)

On the other hand, Meta Hocevar claims that the paradox of the relationship between the spatial elements of the theatre (stage and audience) is that theatre architecture begins to live when the light goes off, when it finds itself in darkness. It lives in its absence, in the absence of form, when form fades away. (Hocevar, 2003)

The dynamics of the space, in the concept of Total Theatre**,** somehow redefined the traditional position of theatre protocols, so the theatre curtain (in front of the proscenium), the position of the auditorium (in relation with the viewer/audience) and the opportunities of using light/dark (through projections) on the stage, were radically redefined. This modernistic concept of redefining the positions of the viewer/audience and performers/actors were later established as one of the main aesthetic approaches of Bertolt Brecht's dialectical theatre practice. Brecht broke the (imaginary) 'fourth' wall in his theatrical methodology putting the light on the audience, so they had an opportunity to see each other (Sekner. R. 1992, pp18). but also see the architecture of the building, as a role in his plays. So, does this mean that the theatre (as building) became a kind of site-specific place to perform a play? The 'fourth' wall is no longer only a wall, the light is no longer focused on the actors, the audience is no longer in the dark listening to the play of the actors. All these elements are in an active relation creating one continuing performing space (architecture), where illusion is broken and exchanged. In his approach, the audience is in an active position of taking critical a decision towards the main narrative of the drama. Following this Brechtian tradition where theatre architecture can be seen as a role in a play, our project for the ZK/U rooftop transgress the traditional theatre protocol and its elements ('fourth' wall – curtain, relation of the audience and the performers in the space), aiming to create one total performative experience.

The scenographic approach is focused on deconstruction of the 'fourth' wall by intervention with scenography elements that are later transformed into different stage settings for performance and occupy the architecture of the theatre building.

3. RESEARCH OUTCOMES: NARRATING THE PERFORMATIVE WALL OF ZK/U BERLIN

This paper stems from a project that was conducted within the premises of the Centre for Art and Urbanistics (ZK/U) in Berlin, a cultural centre that operates as an independent creative hub. Its main objective is to host numerous artistic residences aimed at exchanging knowledge between international parties and the local community. One of its most distinctive qualities is the use of culture as an instigator of community development, an aspect that juxtaposes social, spatial (urban) and creative experiences. Thus, the understanding of complex socio-political and other contemporary urban dynamics is embedded within the very essence of this organization and represents its core value.

The research project presented in this paper is part of this cultural exchange format, where six researchers

with a timeframe of one month conducted their residency and worked on a particular theme. The participants were using spatial elements and the disciplinary discourse of architecture to develop a structural prototype that will invigorate new forms of cultural production. The task was very site-specific, focusing on a newly constructed rooftop of 600sqm that covers the new semi-detached building of the ZK/U.

The research originates from the idea of transforming the generic space of the rooftop into a specific place of activity. In order to enrich the notion of the rooftop as an active place, the team decided to use theatrical elements of stage, as a podium, a place that attracts the performance focus, and audience as a place from which we observe the scenic activity. Moreover, the research conducted onsite provided a new possibility in which, following the idea of 'total theatre' and the breaking of the fourth wall, the rooftop will be a place of shifting dynamics. This means that its role would not be perceived as a stage or as an audience, but both, depending on the activity that takes place on the rooftop or in its nearby surroundings. Namely, the hypothesis implies that the newly emerged activities on the rooftop are only a part of the narrative content of the everyday life that takes its place around the building. For instance, the rooftop is a stage when certain performance like a party, a concert, a theatrical play or cinema is taking place on the top of the building positioning the nearby streets, balconies, courtyard park or trains passing by as places for audience. On the other hand, the rooftop could become a place from which the 'theatre of everyday life' is being observed, a platform from where the city skyline is experienced, but also a place from which various spontaneous, yet scenic (daily) activities are being watched. In order for this interchange to occur and the shift of the rooftop as a stage or as an audience to take place, the notion of the theatrical 'forth' wall as a performative item was introduced. By changing the basic notion of the 'fourth' wall as a dividing element between the 'world of imagination' (the stage) and the 'real world' (the audience), new possibilities occur. Namely, the dialectical relationship of the rooftop and its surroundings in which the spatial experience of stage as a place of activity and the audience as a space for observation will be perpetually subverted and amalgamated, is achieved by a new element (the wall) that has performative capacities. At the same time, this means that the wall becomes a dialectical entity that is responsive to various activities and serves as an interface creating contextually specific narratives. Namely, the work showcases how the scenic and narrative content of everyday life always emerges as a form of theatrical activity when the architecture of the rooftop and the city shift their position around the dynamic nature of the dialectical wall and communicate with its content, performance, materiality and appearance.

To achieve such 'performance' and to negotiate the nature of the rooftop (as a stage or as a place for the audience), the wall must retain its spatial autonomy as a distinctive object. The research for the ZK/U project identifies the wall as a flexible element that could change its position on the rooftop, as well as its length, height and thickness, in order to be ablee to operate as an instigator for various 'performances', on a conceptual level. Therefore, the project uses the prefabricated elements of industrial scaffolding to became the basic 'wall infrastructure'. Hence, the rooftop is perceived as a perpetual 'construction site' and reinvigorates the idea of an 'open-end' structure in which the plane, the plateau of the rooftop, and the verticality of the wall create conditions ready to embrace various spatial and programmatic conditions.

The scaffolding works as an interface, an element that changes its spatiality and its form according to the performative requirements denoting its presence in multiple ways: as a 'colonnade wall' with predominantly vertical elements (becoming a barcode representing a series of messages, texts or images, continuous row of flags insisting on the multicultural nature of the cultural centre, embracing a row of trees within its depth, presenting the rooftop as an elevated garden/forest). It could also become a 'surface wall', appearing through various kinds of its 'façade', now becoming a theatrical curtain that opens and encloses the space between the rooftop and its surroundings, thus curating the ongoing performances, a billboard that communicate messages from/to the citizens, or a 'silver screen' for various projections. This treatment of the wall intensely extends the programmatic possibilities of the rooftop and the whole dynamics of the cultural centre, creating activities that span from stage setting infrastructure, artistic encounters (open gallery, dance and theatre performances), social events, like presenting the crafts of the local artisans, or various citizen workshops, up to entertainment that involves pop up bars and canteens, music festivals, or even provisional accommodation facilities within the demanding reality of Berlin when the wall setting on the rooftop provides a small scale short-stay camp site.

It is important to mention that the concept of the 'performative wall' could be sustained only through ongoing

curatorial practice that will continuously develop this spatial infrastructure as a prototype for new performing activities. Only by doing so, the artistic activities will activate a relationship between the audience and (artistic) performance, and will bring (artistic) practice as part of production of the city as social space. Thus, the wall will provide a setting which promotes a 'learning situations environment' that looks on existing problems such as creating social cohesion and current ecological issues (climate, waste disposal, urban green, etc.). Only by addressing this challenges that activate people and places, and connect artistic production that engages community, the process of social emancipation will continue.

Fig. 1. The 'fourth' wall prototype; Visualisation by Tamara Djerkov for the conference Life is Serious; Art Serene: architectural scenic research, Novi Sad, October 2024.
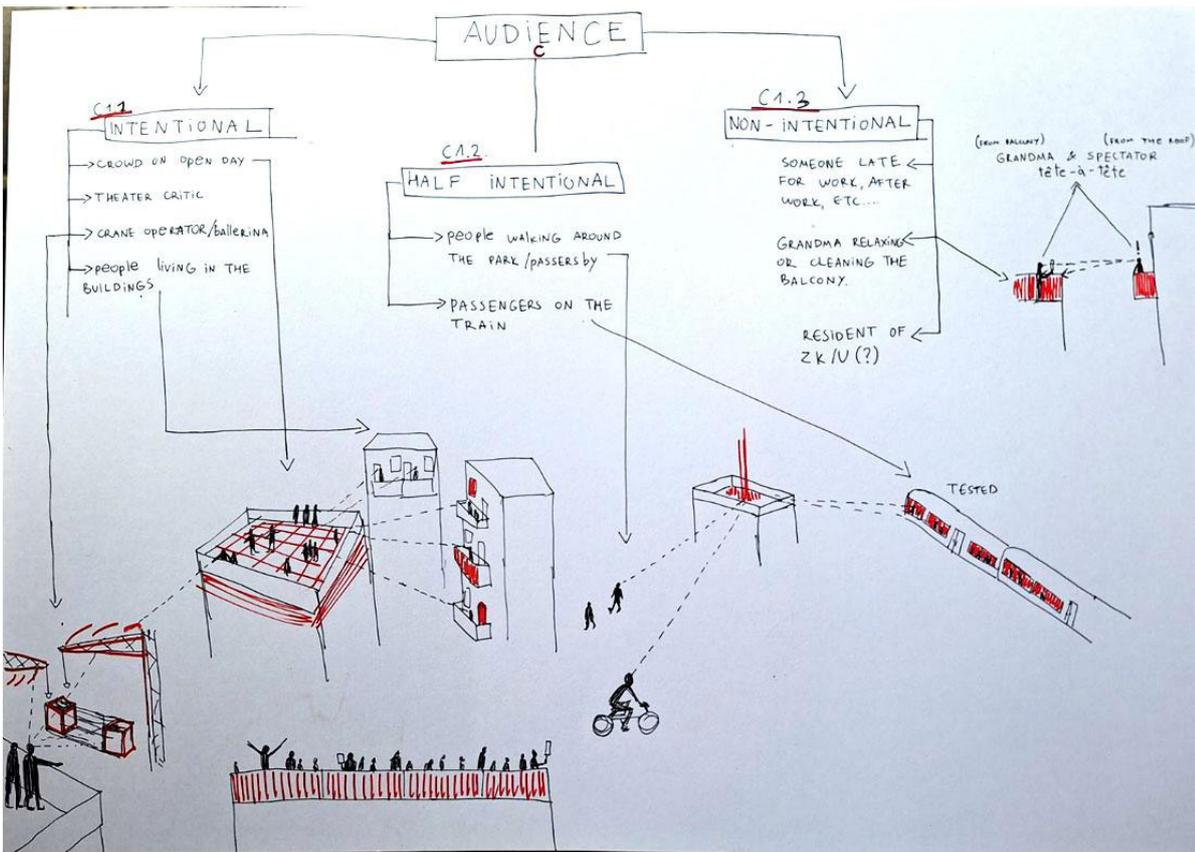
Fig. 2. Working diagrams for the ZK/U rooftop case study by Miodrag Kuč, Dimitar Milev, Ivana Samandova; produced during the residency at ZK/U,Berlin, July 2024.
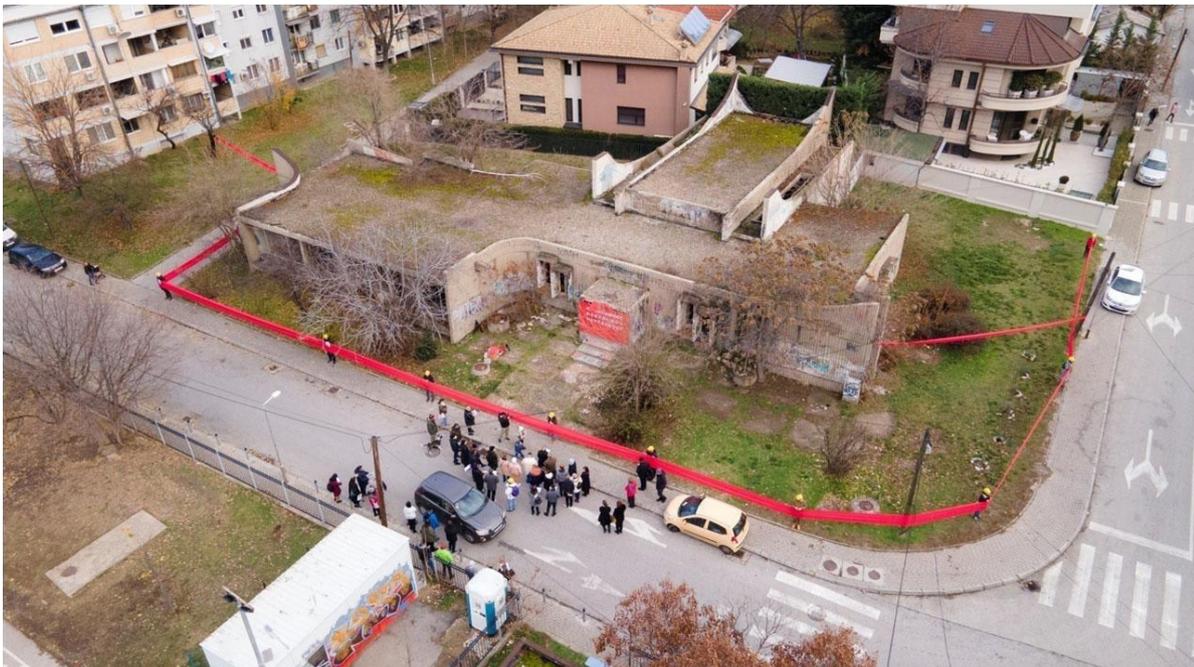

Fig. 3. Lost Modernistic Utopias, performative intervention in public space. Collaborative project by Filip Jovanovski and Miodrag Kuč, 16 Th AKTO Festival for Contemporary Arts, Skopje, December 2021. Photo credit: KOKOS production.

Fig. 4. Writing Urban Places,New Narratives of the European City, Skopje Brutalism Trail, COST Action 18126 at the Faculty of Architecture, University Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Skopje. September 2021. Photo credit: Mila Gavrilovska

Fig. 5. This building talks truly, Pavilion of the Republic of North Macedonia at the Prague Quadrennial for Performance Design and Space, author: Filip Jovanovski, curator: Ivana Vaseva, Performer: Kristina Lelovac Rehearsals at the Universall Hall, Skopje, May 2019. Photo credit: Dragica Nikolovska.

Fig. 6. They Shoot Horses, Don't They?, Production National Theatre Bitola, directed by: Martin Kocovski, Scenography: Filip Jovanovski, March 2020. Photo credit: Aleksandar Bunevski.

Active City (zens) project: Superimposing architectural space and theatrical activity: from 'fourth' wall to 'dialectical' wall. authors: Filip Jovanovski, Slobodan Velevski, collaborators: Miodrag Kuč, Dimitar Milev, Ivana Samandova, Tamara Djerkov, Martina Peneva.

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