

MAPPING MEMORIES. EXPLORING INTANGIBLE HERITAGE THROUGH PLAYWRITING: AN ARCHITEXTURAL APPROACH

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In this paper I will share some early findings from my Practice-as-Research PhD, *Play/writing histories: Navigating the Personal, Public and Institutional stories of theatre space: An Architextural study of the Citizens Theatre*. My research seeks to model a methodology for architexting: a mode of playwriting that reveals the hidden histories of buildings by exploring the dramaturgy of their architecture¹. I propose that playwriting can be utilised in this way as a tool for historiography and the aim of my study is to devise, define and develop a methodology for this practice. Playwriting offers the potential to juxtapose, entwine and layer stories to reveal connections, commonalities and contrasts between seemingly disparate events, people and moments. It can engage with a collision of worlds and temporal planes, ideas and phenomenological affects. Therefore, I suggest, it is the ideal tool for investigating embodied, palimpsestic spaces by responding to both the materiality of a site, and the events that did, do and will happen in it.

¹ The word 'architext' has previously been utilised in several other contexts. In the field of literary theory, and specifically, poetics, Gérard Genette uses the term, as explained by Robert Schole in a Foreward to categorise texts by their 'durable links between particular modes and themes' (Schole, 1992, p.ix). Mary Ann Caws describes 'architexture' as 'the surface texture of the construction made by reading... the structure of the connecting passage, bridge or corridor between elements as it relates to the material of the text, or that stretching between two texts' (Caws, 1981, p.xiv).

Through architextural practice, I identify and utilise commonalities in the purposes and processes of playwriting and architecture to discover how these practices may illuminate each other. By harnessing methodologies employed by architects to create and depict potential spaces, and using these to explore how layers of history in existing spaces may interrelate, architexting investigates how spaces, and specifically buildings, are shared through time creating diachronic communities.

My subject site is the Citizens Theatre, and, in particular, its non-performance spaces. In these spaces, shared by staff, patrons and artists, layers of public, personal and institutional stories coalesce to form a rich, alternative archive of this Victorian theatre. While the theatre's artistic legacy is frequently lauded, examining the social, political, cultural and emotional connections to the theatre is, I believe, vital to a comprehensive understanding of its history and its potential future impact. The narrative of the materiality of the building itself, through its various alterations and repurposing of space, betrays a rich cultural and social history. Not only is the Citizens Theatre an internationally-renowned producing theatre, and a highly significant example of theatre architecture², but, as the last remaining building of a once bustling community, it will function as the keystone of the ongoing regeneration of the Gorbals³ locale in which it resides. The theatre building itself is currently undergoing the largest redevelopment in its history, giving impetus to this study and meaning that many of its spaces will soon be repurposed yet again, or lost entirely. I propose that through architextural practice I can mine the layers of these sited, often hidden, histories of the building, navigating diachronic relationships between

² The Citizens Theatre is a grade B listed building and is described as 'one of the most important remaining pieces of theatrical fabric in the British Isle' TheatreSearch, 'The Citizens Theatre: A Conservation Management Plan' (2012).

https://issuu.com/citizenstheatre/docs/citizen_theatre_conservation_management_plan

³ Historically a densely populated and deprived area of the city of Glasgow, the Gorbals is currently undergoing a large scale regeneration project involving the demolition of many of its residential, public, and privately owned buildings.

individuals, communities and sites to explore, reveal and preserve these untold stories.

Architecture and dramaturgy

The rich relationship between architecture and dramaturgy offers the potential for new approaches to each through an exchange, or overlap, of methodologies and philosophies. For the purposes of this study I am interested in both architecture as a concept and the tangible processes that architects undertake. The term ‘architecture’ is perhaps as indefinable as ‘dramaturgy’, yet useful to this study is its frequent association with culture, rather than just material structures (Ballantyne, 2002, p.31). In *Event Cities*, architect and academic Bernard Tschumi writes: ‘architecture is as much about the events that take place inside buildings as it is about the building themselves’ (Tschumi, 1994, p.13). For Tschumi, architecture is not merely a material structure but a continuous process of interactions. He states in ‘Six Concepts’ that architecture is ‘a combination of spaces, movements and events’ (Tschumi, 2000, p.176) suggesting that it is in the relationship between these elements that architecture exists. Just as Tschumi advocates the inseparability of events and spaces in architecture, architect Tony Fretton defines architecture as being ‘completed by events’ (Fretton, 1999, p.15). Juliet Rufford describes Tschumi’s approach to architecture as a process which ‘continue(s) indefinitely as users interact with buildings’ (Rufford, 2015, p.33). In this way, she suggests that these processes ‘are analogous to performance processes, since both are time based and dynamic’ (Rufford, p.33). In *Theatre/ Archaeology: Disciplinary Dialogues*, Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks describe dramaturgy as ‘an assemblage, the process of ordering or patterning the different elements into a performance structure’ (Pearson & Shanks, 2001, p.55). While Cathy Turner and Synne Behrndt acknowledge that a conclusive, or even agreed, definition of the term dramaturgy is somewhat elusive (Turner & Behrndt, 2008, p.6) they propose that it, too, can be understood as ‘the combination of narratives or strata (which) produces new meanings that are not inherent

in any of the elements if viewed singly' (Turner & Behrndt, p.32) and suggest that 'it is in the transitions that the dramaturgy is discovered'. Like architecture, dramaturgy is constituted of a combination of elements that are in constant dialogue with each other. Turner and Behrndt suggest 'dramaturgy... allows, like architecture, a new space, if a fragile one' (Turner & Behrndt, p.4).

Yet while many scholars have explored the overlaps between the conceptual notions of architecture and dramaturgy, focus is often placed on abstract ideas of space, place and structure. My research seeks to expand this investigation of the relationship between architecture and dramaturgy to consider how it may function in practical and specific terms. Rather than constructing a general spatiality through writing, my study seeks to explore how elements of architectural processes may be applied to the work of the playwright in constructing a dramaturgical framework. To do this I am creating three 'architexts' each of which investigate the potential of a different aspect of the architectural design process as prompt for scriptwriting.

Unlike other forms of creative writing, a playscript harbors an inherent duality: it is both a creative offering in its own right whilst constantly pointing to an event beyond itself, i.e. a performance. In 'Playscripts as Knowledge Objects', Dallas J. Baker recognises the participatory nature of performance, yet also notes that '(T)he script on the page is also a participatory space' that is activated by the reader (Baker, 2018, p.176). This inherent duality is also true of architectural drawings. Both the playscript and the architectural drawing point towards communal, embodied experiences beyond themselves. As Schaller writes in *The Art of Architectural Drawing*, 'architecture can act as a place for the collective experience than can, it is hoped, uplift, inspire, and thereby connect one human spirit to another' (Schaller, 1997, p.18). Theatre, too, is almost uniquely in the arts world, contingent on collective experience. However, while the participants in a theatre context, more often than not, share a temporal plane, in architecture it is space that is the point of unity between communities that may be separated by hours, months, or decades. Both the architectural drawing and the playscript

precede these acts of community. In terms of architectural drawings, while two-dimensional renderings of future sites are created, and understood, within the context of the three-dimensional buildings they point towards, it is important to remember that, like the playscript, the architectural drawing is a product and producer of knowledge in and of itself (Robbins, 1994, p.116).

Narrativity of space

Architexting is specifically intended to be utilised in the exploration of 'hidden histories'. By hidden histories I mean stories and experiences that fall out with institutional or 'official' narratives of a particular building, but rather encompass the everyday, situated happenings as lived and recounted by the people who interact with the building on a regular basis. It seeks, therefore, to expand existing institutional narratives. In my bid to reveal, explore and celebrate hidden histories of the Citizens Theatre, it is important that my primary data consists of stories that have not been previously recorded or available in the public domain. Over the course of several months I conducted oral histories and workshops with people who are, or have been, connected to the theatre. I interviewed 42 adults and held three workshops involving a total of 24 children and young people. I sought contributions from all facets of the theatre's operations to garner as many different perspectives and experiences as possible, including past and present staff members, artists, patrons, community collective members, Nightschool participants, Young Company members and kids@citz attendees. My participants ranged in age from six to 99 years.

As a practice that seeks to celebrate plurality, multiple perspectives and co-existence, oral history, as a 'democratising approach' (Jordanova, 2006, p.55), not only satisfies the research needs of this methodology, but also its political and ethical framework. As an embodied process, oral history challenges ideas of teleological histories through its ability to bring the past into the present and vice versa and invites dynamic overlaps and correlations between ideas of space, history, performance and everyday experiences. Where possible,

my interviews took place in the Citizens Theatre itself. Interviewees were encouraged to lead me in a walk around the building, permitting me to both witness and experience their own regular routes⁴. Walking through the building not only provoked memories and sensory reactions such as smell and touch that may not have been unearthed through a static interview, but also, in the case of interviewees who had known the building in its previous configurations, allowed us to explore previously lost and repurposed spaces by physically tracing their absence in the current building. While the architexts I create take their dramaturgical framework from architectural drawing processes and examine a particular area of the building through this lens, the content of these playscripts is drawn from this archive of oral histories created specifically for this project. Oral histories are, by their very nature, subjective and personal. Rather than a strictly factual account of the theatre's history, if such a thing were possible, architexting seeks to explore these personal experiences of the building. In doing so, they consider, following Coates, the 'narrativity' of these spaces, rather than a necessarily historically accurate version. As Lynn Abrams writes in *Oral History Theory*, 'Memory stories are not repositories of an objective truth about the past, they are creative narratives shaped in part by the personal relationship that facilitates the telling' (Abrams, 2016, p.68). Architexting is a methodology for investigating the relationship between these personal experiences and how they may overlap, connect or contrast with each other. It offers, therefore, a way of understanding how buildings can facilitate both synchronic and diachronic community-building and belonging. Through our connections to the buildings we use, we become part of a community that spans the lifetime of that built space.

The oral histories gathered betray a rich tapestry of lived experiences including

⁴ There is a wealth of literature pertaining to peripatetic interviews which informed this element of my process. However, as conducting interviews while walking was contingent on the geographical location, physical ability, and inclination of my interviewees, rather than a fundamental strand of my methodology, it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore in detail in what ways this practice informed my oral histories.

fires, bomb scares, deaths, births, playing, parties and protests. In many cases, several generations of the same family, including my own, had worked in the theatre, providing a genealogical dimension to the building's palimpsestic nature. While many interviewees spoke of a deep, and sometimes singular, sense of belonging they felt as part of the Citizens community, one attendee of the theatre's extensive outreach programme stated that they believed the theatre had saved their life. These memories and experiences simultaneously integral to, and yet removed from, the theatre's acclaimed creative output demonstrate its social, cultural and political significance. My interviews sought to actively solicit memories and experiences of spaces that lay beyond, or even in direct contrast with, their intended use or function in an attempt to explore their narrative potential. Architect Nigel Coates, recognising the potency of the stories of space, writes in *Narrative Architecture*:

The various physical parts of a space signify as a result of the actions – and experiences – of the participant, who assembles them into a personal construct. The narrative coefficient resides in a system of triggers that signify poetically, above and in addition to functionality. Narrative means that the object contains some 'other' existence in parallel with its function. This object has been invested with a fictional plane of signification that renders it fugitive, mercurial and subject to interpretation. (Coates, 2012, p.15)

Coates' preoccupation with the narrativity of space celebrates its multifaceted significance and makes room for numerous, overlapping and contrasting experiences, exploring the convergence of architecture, contemporary culture and the lives of real people. His notion of space is, like geographer Doreen Massey's, subjective, unstable and 'under construction' (Massey, 2005, p.9). From a performance perspective, similar investigations of space and site have notably been explored by scholar and practitioner Mike Pearson. He describes his 2006 publication *In Comes I* as being 'topophilic in attitude' (Pearson, 2006,

p.4) in reference to its preoccupation with every element that makes a place a place. This builds on his work on ‘deep mapping’ with Michael Shanks as expressed in *Theatre/Archaeology* which, he states:

(...) attempts to record and represent the grain and patina of a location – juxtapositions and interpenetrations of the historical and the contemporary, the political and the poetic, the factual and the fictional, the discursive and the sensual; the conflation of oral testimony, anthology, memoir, biography, natural history and everything you might ever want to say about a place.
(Pearson & Shanks, 2001, p.64)

As a creative, historiographical tool, my use of architexting embraces subjective, fluid and poetic experiences of space, utilising architectural processes to create pieces that express space as a lively tapestry of experiences, events and materiality. There is a tension in the temporal relationship between architexts and architectural drawings that provides some fruitful avenues for exploration. Architecture as a practice is inherently prospective in nature. Architectural drawings depict a space that does not yet exist. As Rendow Yee writes in *Architectural drawing – a visual compendium of types and methods*, ‘They are a form of drawing the future’ (Yee, 2013, p.227). At the time of creation, the building only exists on the page and in the imagination of the architect. In contrast, architexting is inherently retrospective. It is a practice that investigates how spaces are and have been inhabited. Its purpose is ultimately to understand the ways in which spaces are shared over time and how diachronic communities, connected by space, are formed.

As philosopher and academic Edward S. Casey writes:

Sites are prospective in character; they are sites for building, exploring, surveying etc. Places, in contrast, are retrospectively tinged: we ‘build up’ memories there, are moved by them in nostalgic spells, are exhilarated or

get 'stuck' in them. In short, it is thanks to places, not to sites, that we are inhabitants of the world. (Casey, 2000, p.195)

While architectural drawings depict imagined, prospective sites, architexts tell us something about the places they become.

Blueprint

In my first architext, *Blueprint*, I consider the dramaturgical potential of floorplans. As a tool for understanding the 'movement of people through space' (Schaller, 1997, p.118), the floorplan presents an opportunity to map sited histories onto the building's footprint to explore how these experiences of space relate to each other. In *Blueprint*, lines denoting the walls, doorways and staircases of the theatre building are replaced with verbatim text selected from the gathered oral histories pertaining to memories and events connected to the space they depict. The result is an alternative blueprint of the building that simultaneously represents both the tangible and intangible elements of the building. While the physical shape of the building is portrayed by formation of the words on the page, the content of these words reveals something of the incorporeal fabric of the building by presenting stories and memories attached to specific sites within it. Here, architect's Bernard Tschumi's definition of architecture as being 'the space and what happens in it' (Khan & Hannah, 2008, p.52) is expressed pictorially.

A key element of architexting is that it facilitates as a spatial historiography. By 'spatial historiography' I mean that precedence is given to spatial rather than temporal factors, encouraging creative, non-teleological approaches to exploring the plurality and simultaneity of multiple histories within a single building. *Blueprint* enables a spatial approach to historiography which takes space and site as its structuring principle, allowing moments and events recorded in a particular space to sit alongside each other temporally, as they do geographically, out with the bonds of chronology. With space as the holding point for a plethora of stories

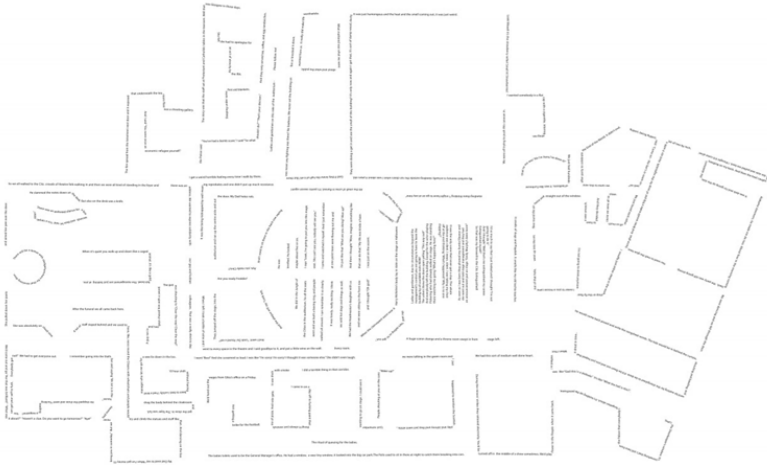


Figure 1. *Blueprint: Ground Floor*

as events, we can examine, weave, connect and collide experiences that share a location if not a temporal plane. In this practice, factors which may, aesthetically and creatively, appear as constraints, work to underpin this historiographic methodology. For example, the incredibly restricted space on the page with which to fill with text, means that the text included is necessarily fragmentary. As one observes the assemblage of quotes on the page, it is impossible to draw from them any dominant narrative. It is the building itself, or rather its blueprint, which is the only structuring principle of these disparate fragments, having determined which spaces, and therefore, stories, meet each other, and how much space is available on the page to tell each tale. Even within individual quotes, the incomplete nature of each prevents a 'full' disclosure of the story it refers to. At each point, *Blueprint* resists any totalizing view of the theatre's history and encourages a non-hierarchical approach by not prioritizing any particular memory or narrative, but rather the connections between different experiences,

celebrating their simultaneity and multiplicity. This leaves room for a multiple of routes through the script, allowing space for each microhistory and infinite readings of the text that will offer new insights and connections each time. This impossibility of gleaning a ‘full’ account of any experience represents the countless stories that have not, and will never be, heard, reminding the beholder that they are witnessing a sample of inevitably incomplete experiences and not a comprehensive account of the building’s history.

As a script, *Blueprint* invites the performer/director/audience to ‘treat it differently’ (Turner, 2013, p.115). Each line may be spoken as dialogue or performed as a stage direction, but with no stipulation on sequence, tempo, duration, character number or plot, the text offers opportunities for countless readings and relies on the performer/director/actors to ‘activate’ or ‘complete’ it. This inherent incompleteness is purposeful and represents a key intersection between architecture and dramaturgy as explored above, particularly in relation to Tschumi and Fretton’s concept of architecture as a continuous process that is temporarily ‘completed’ over and over again as users interact with buildings.

Conclusion

By exploiting the overlaps in purpose and process of playwriting and architectural practice, I propose that architexting can offer new ways to explore layers of history within buildings. Drawn from oral histories conducted with members of the Citizens Theatre community including artists, patrons and staff, these architexts perform as creative archives, capturing embodied and subjective experiences of spaces which are soon to be repurposed or lost entirely. By facilitating a spatial approach to historiography, architexting seeks to shake off the shackles of chronology and undertake diachronic explorations of spaces, allowing events, people and moments to collide and illuminate each other in a manner that would be impossible in a teleological historiographic approach. In my continued investigations of the scope and efficacy of this approach I will consider how this methodology can utilise architectural concepts to inform the

dramaturgy of new playscripts that explore, reveal and celebrate the hidden histories of the Citizens Theatre.

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