

# Theatre Architecture Mapping: Catalogue of Berlin Performing Spaces

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## Abstract

The digital reproduction of the theatre architecture collection of the Technische Universität Berlin provides extensive documentation for research and contextualisation. With more than 10,000 photographs, drawings and other materials, it offers a unique insight into the panorama of 20th century Central European theatre construction.

Based on these sources, we are creating a theatre mapping of Berlin, along with a catalogue featuring about 250 venues, both historical and still existing. In eight time periods the dynamic change of the performing spaces of the German capital is shown, allowing a comparison of the architectural, scenic and technical structure, as well as analysing it in the context of urban development.

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**Keywords:** theatre architecture, digitalisation, performing spaces

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## Theatre Architecture Mapping: Catalogue of Berlin Performing Spaces

The digital reproduction of the theatre architecture collection of the Technische Universität in Berlin (Laube et al., 2016-2018) provides extensive documentation for research into and contextualisation of the mapping and chronology of theatres in the Berlin and German urban field. With more than 10,000 photographs, drawings and other materials, it offers a unique insight into the panorama of 20th century Central European theatre construction.

Based on these sources, we are creating a theatre mapping of Berlin, along with a catalogue featuring about 250 venues, vanished, transformed, existing and active. In eight time periods the dynamic change of the performing spaces of the German capital is shown, allowing a comparison of the architectural, scenic and technical structure, as well as analysing it in the context of urban development.

### **Online: The Theatre Architecture Collection of the Technische Universität Berlin**

An important first step has been taken: the theatre architecture collection is available online in the database of the Architekturmuseum: <https://architekturmuseum.ub.tu-berlin.de>

The collection contains materials from the period 1939-1969 on more than 500 theatre buildings located in Germany, Austria, France, Slovenia, Poland, the Czech Republic and Russia. The graphic sources provide a well-founded view of the location, scope and state of the cultural buildings. The quality of the documents and their availability open new avenues of research.

At the same time, the collection provides a valuable insight into the contributions of modern architecture using as an example Gerhard Graubner,<sup>1</sup> one of Germany's pioneering theatre architects. He was responsible for the theatres in Bochum and Wuppertal, two major examples of the theatre

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1. Gerhard Graubner (1899-1970) was a German theatre architect and teacher.

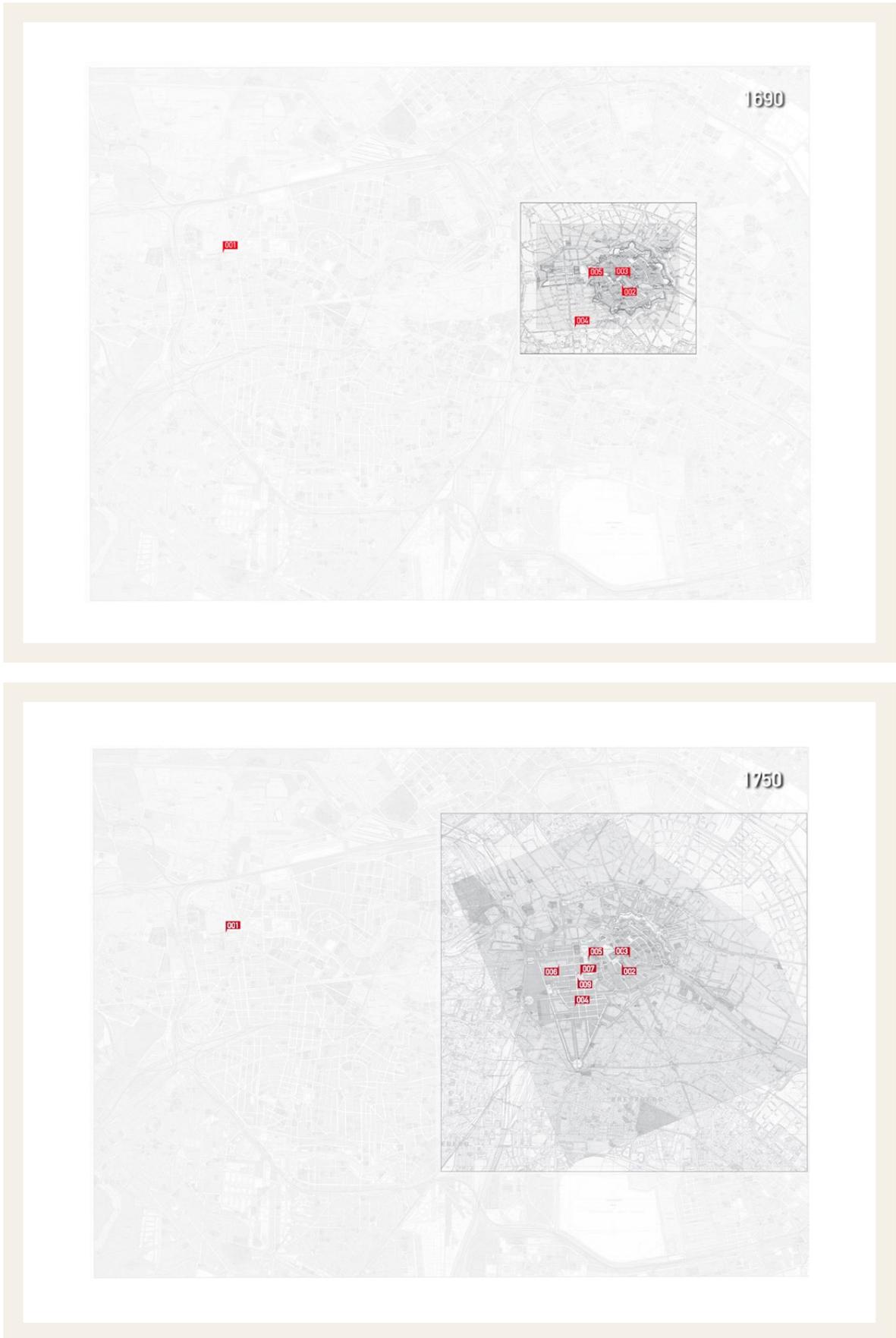


Figure 1. Map of the city of Berlin in 1690 and 1750.

architecture of post-war modernism and urban reconstruction. The main focus of the theatre architecture collection is on a collection that Albert Speer<sup>2</sup> commissioned in 1939 in his capacity as General Building Inspector for the capital of the Reich: a complete manual was planned entitled *Das Deutsche Theater (German Theatre)*.

The material in this manual contains detailed architectural and set design descriptions of all the existing theatre buildings in the old German “Great Reich”. The development of this project was entrusted to a Berlin team of architects and art historians, several draughtsmen and other external consultants who were experts in scenic science and technology. Despite the ongoing war, between 1939 and 1944 more than 500 theatres were recorded in a photographic and graphic format and with a standardised questionnaire.

The *Das Deutsches Theater* manual remains unpublished. At the end of the war 319 theatre dossiers were recovered. In 1947, for the first time the collection reached the Institute of Theatre Studies in Hanover, where Friedrich Kranich,<sup>3</sup> who had previously been involved in the project as technical consultant, used the material for his later research, but the manual itself remained unpublished (Zielske, 1971).

The theatre architecture collection is not only a historical collection but also – particularly in its now digitalised format – culturally and institutionally very significant documentation. Working with auratic and original objects enables us to bring to light the “present of the past” and, in the best of cases, recover the *genius loci*. However, the historical distance and the great concern with documents during the scanning process enable a brand new approach, so today the documentation tells its own story.

### New Perspectives

The objective of our research is to evaluate and contextualise the data collected and re-evaluate it in the current theoretical and technological framework. The starting point is the certainty that theatre and set design architectures (their materialisation, order and location) are related in many respects to 20th century political, cultural and artistic upheavals. The materials, forms and practices and the visual and acoustic impact of theatre as a form of representation of society are in constant tension with the structures of the respective political systems under construction.

On the one hand, the collection takes stock of the visionary and modernist evolution of the 1920s and 1930s and, on the other, the objects document the stagnation of this modernity, as well as the reconstruction during the Third Reich, from 1933 to 1945. Architecture and theatre, as the public art forms they are, have always been of outstanding political importance, and also have an impact on the urban space.

2. Albert Speer (1905-1981) was a German architect, Minister of Armaments and War Production of the Third Reich during the Second World War. Speer was chief architect to Adolf Hitler before taking up ministerial office.

3. Friedrich Kranich (1880-1964) was a German technical director (Bayreuther Festspiele), teacher and writer. In 1929 he wrote *Bühnentechnik der Gegenwart I* and in 1933 *Bühnentechnik der Gegenwart II*.



Figure 2. Map of the city of Berlin in 1800 and 1880.

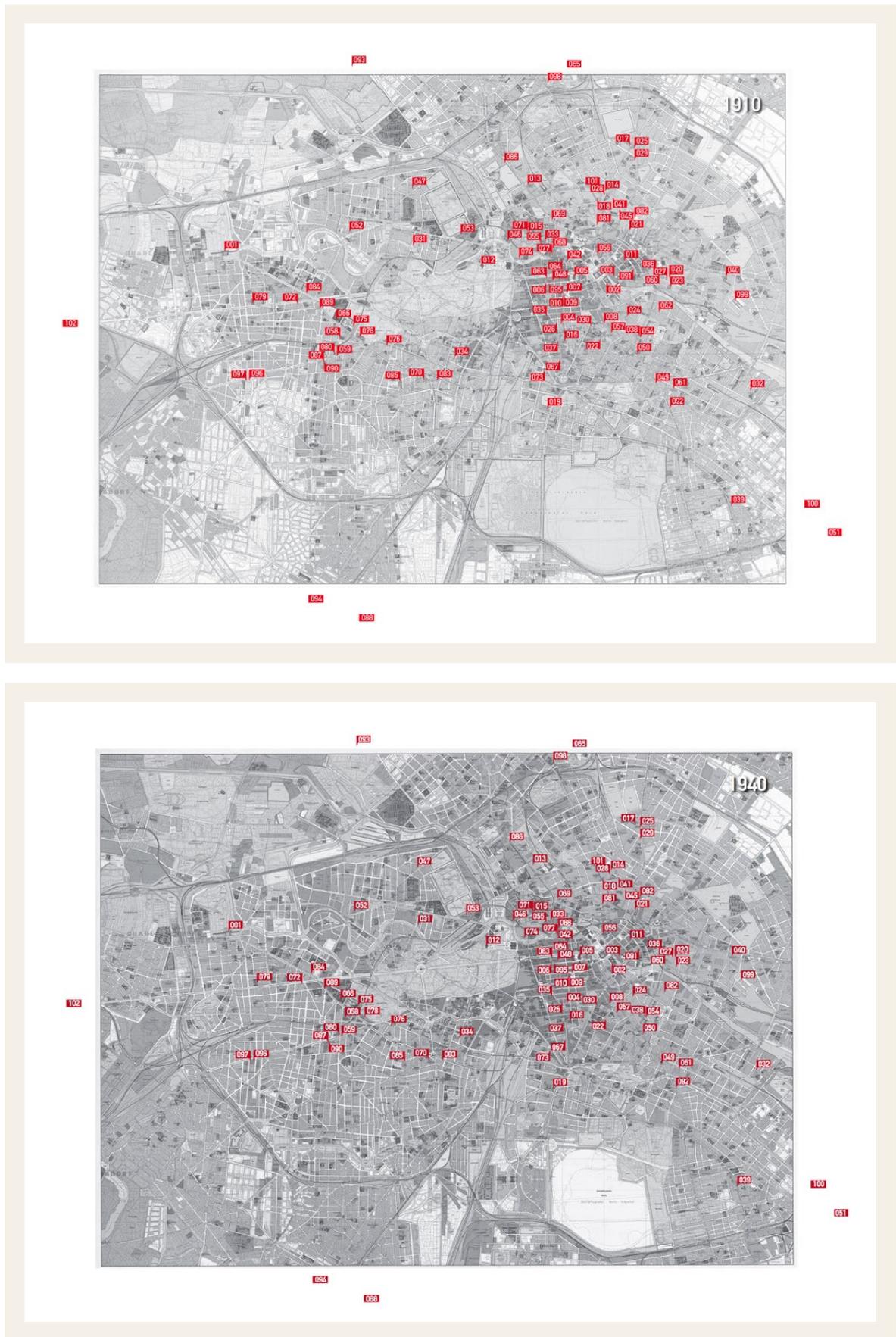
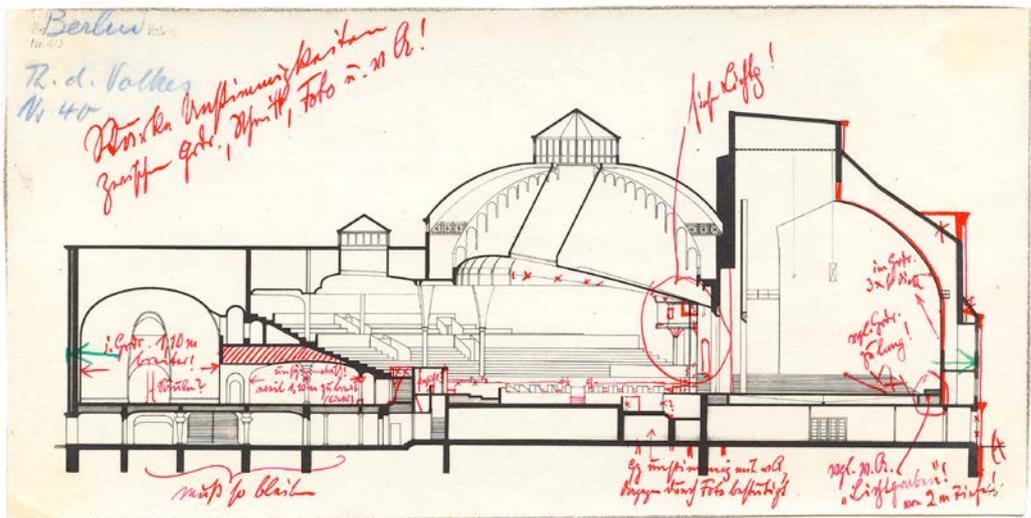
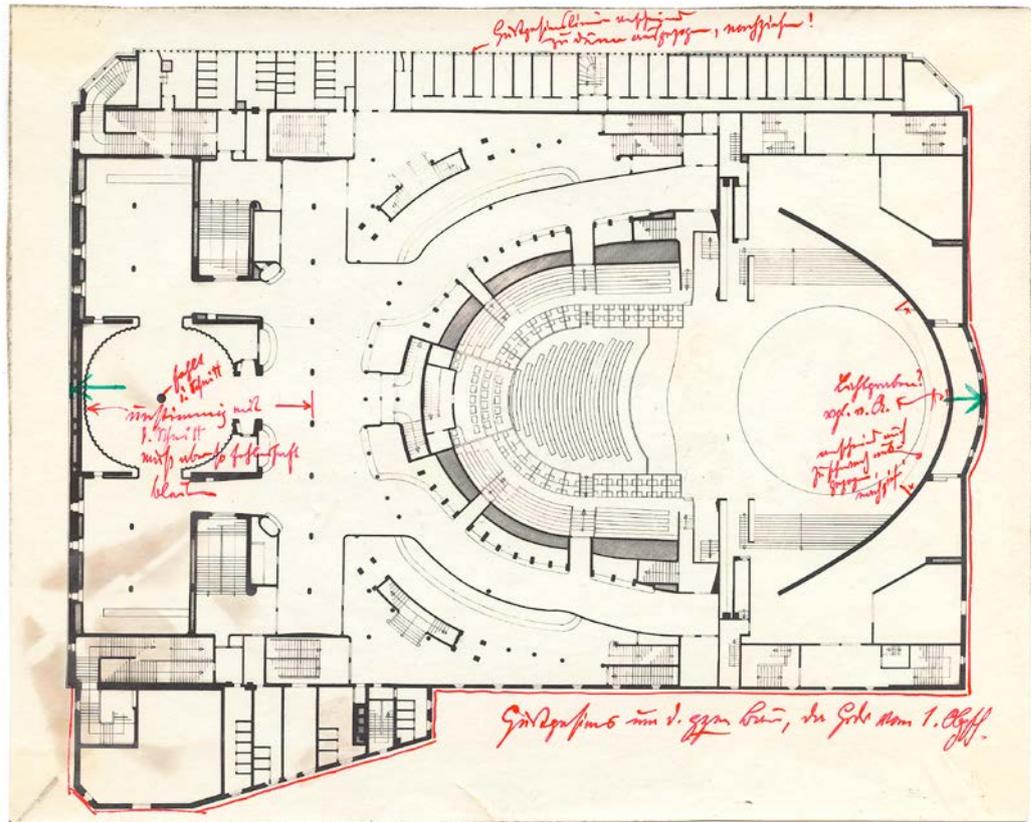


Figure 3. Map of the city of Berlin in 1910 and 1940.



Figures 4 and 5. Ground floor and cross section of the Grosses Schauspielhaus Berlin, Architekturmuseum Berlin.

The rulers of the Nazi era sought to make architecture one of the most effective propaganda instruments for the manipulation of the masses. In the case of theatre, however, this mainly involved its content and interior space, since surprisingly few new theatres were built during the Nazi regime, such as the Dessau Theater, the Saarbrücken Theater, opened with the name Gau-theater Westmark, and the Apollo Theater in Cologne.

For propaganda purposes, the theatres were renamed. The Grosse Schauspielhaus Berlin became Theater des Volkes and some others were re-named “bordering territory theatres” (Zittau, Bautzen, Flensburg, Klagenfurt

and Ratibor, among others). In many places interventions were carried out to install a personal box for Adolf Hitler, an element that makes direct reference to the royal box of the Age of Absolutism.

### **Theatre Architecture Mapping: Catalogue of Berlin Performing Spaces**

With more than 10,000 photographs, drawings and other materials, it offers a unique insight into the panorama of 20th century Central European theatre construction (Laube et al., 2018).

Based on these sources, we are creating a theatre mapping of Berlin, along with a catalogue featuring about 250 venues, both historical and still existing.

The catalogue of performing spaces examines the diversity of theatre and performative places – also in public spaces – and presents them as conceptual maps of physical cultural sites and intangible theatre works in relation to the performing arts, architecture and urban planning. In eight time periods the dynamic change of the performing spaces of the German capital is shown, allowing a comparison of the architectural, scenic and technical structure, as well as analysing it in the context of urban development.

A new comparative analytical inventory, developed for this purpose, produces a multi-layered picture of the Berlin theatre landscape, which in the medium term will be available in full detail. With the help of specially developed signalling systems, a form of visual communication is established that uses architectural design tools and makes the results of the research available to the public in a unified and easily readable way (Danilsen et al., 2017).

The complex preparation of the historical material will advance understanding of the future debate on, evaluation and conception concerning theatre buildings. Using geo-referencing as a tool, the urban development of theatre buildings of the metropolis is examined historiographically and analysed through an interdisciplinary approach.

The city of Berlin constantly changes, expands, renews and is destroyed by war; it is rebuilt, the streets are renamed, and the centre and outskirts reversed by the building and effect of the Berlin Wall; it grows, is renamed, rebuilt and changed again: it is an ongoing process. Therefore, the geo-reference point and its insertion in the historical and current mapping material provides information on the basic urban conditions for the construction, operation or fitting of theatre spaces.

Theatre as intangible cultural heritage, whether visible or not and recognisable by the type of construction as such, is conveyed didactically as a value, thus strengthening the creative economy and the cultural and tourism sector (Bürkle, 2013). Assuming that the construction of theatres and the development of a theatre climate are necessarily linked to the development of regional urban and social structures, theatre buildings are analysed first chronologically and then listed within the framework of Berlin's urban history (Schäche, 2013).

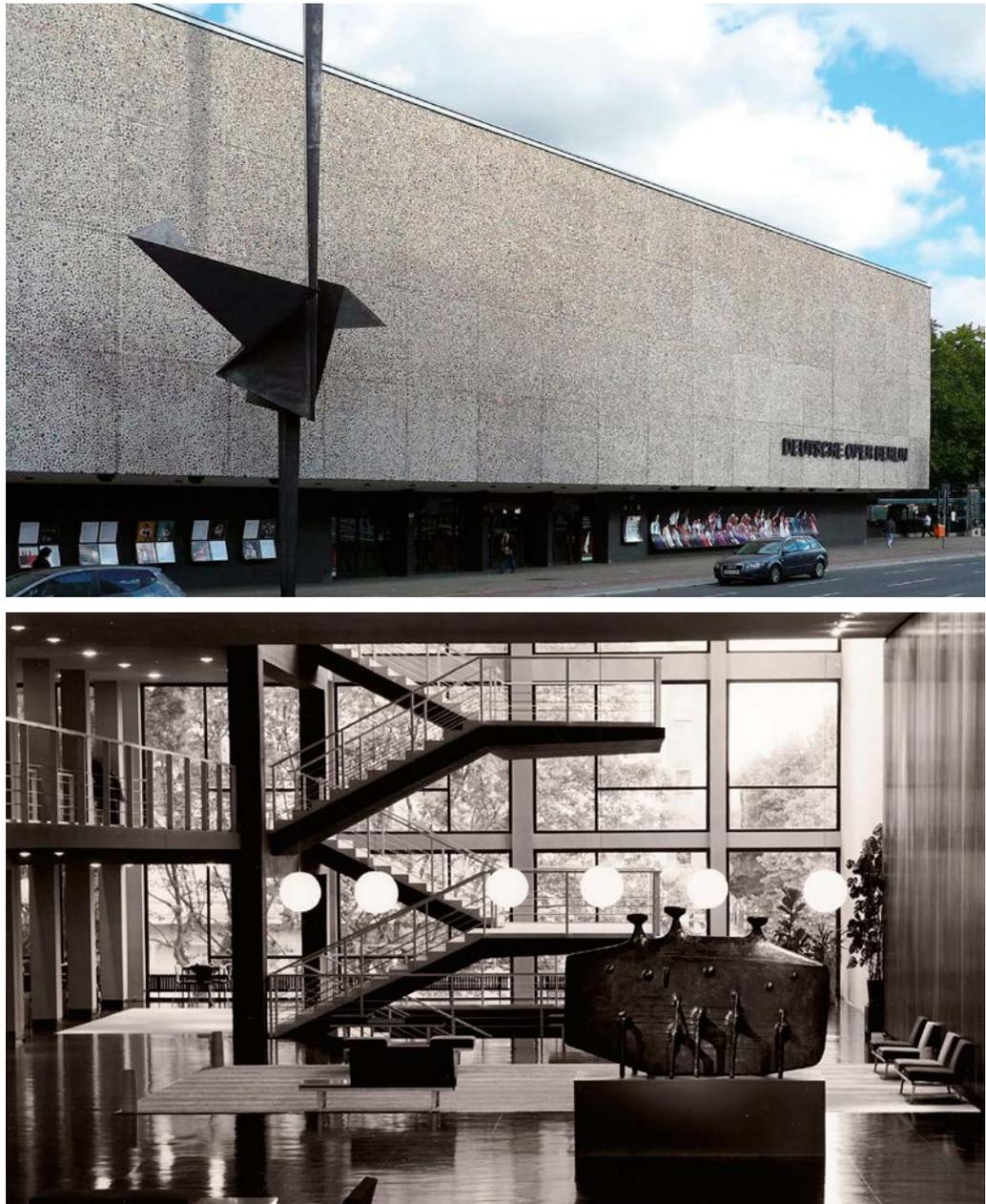


Figure 6. Deutsche Oper Berlin.

The comparison is possible thanks to a timeline, the same scale for the drawings, the same colour system for the ground floor of the stage and auditorium and the same localisation system, the geo-referencing data of the so-called central point (Kranich, 1929-1933, Archive of the Technische Universität Berlin; and Ferrera, 2009), as well as the exact analysis and graphic visualisation of the technical data. By listing the architects and stage planners, technical innovations can be located and reconstructions and renovations tracked. Using the same timeline, the same scale for the drawings and the same colour system, the buildings are directly comparable. For a more detailed analysis of the ground floor plans of theatre buildings, an approach has been established based on the drawings made using an agreed and certified representation methodology.

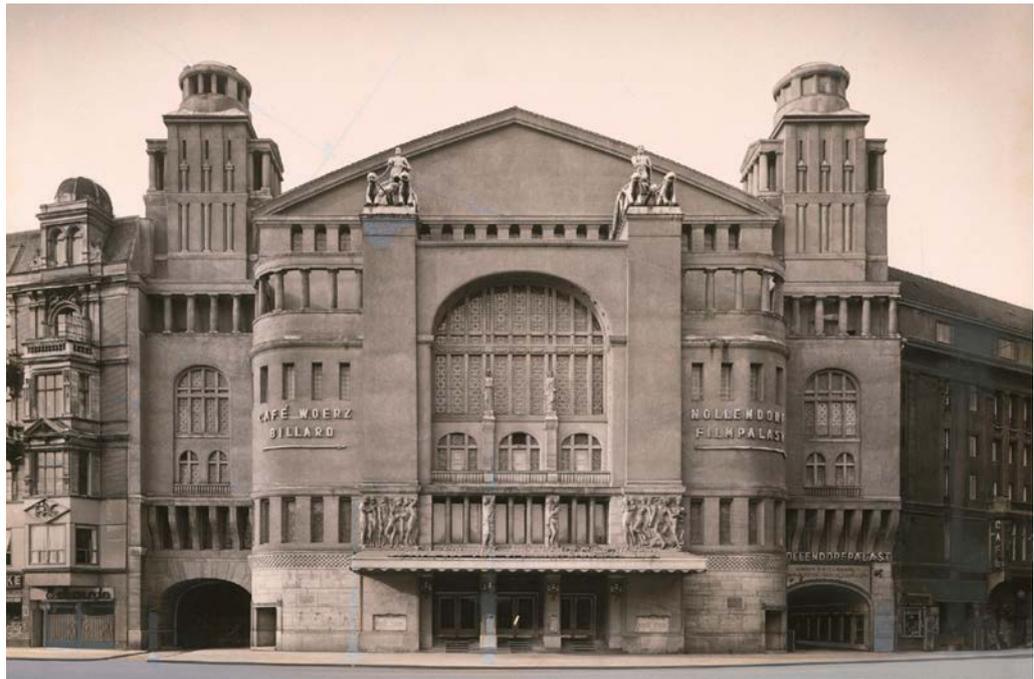


Figure 7. Theater am Nollendorfpfatz.

A scheme of differentiated colours characterises the various structural arrangements and basic spatial schemes of the theatre building: on the one hand, there are internal non-public areas, which are used, for example, by technicians and actors (in red and yellow tones); on the other, there are the public areas (in blue tones) accessible to the audience. This creates an additional visual comparison option. For example, it is clear that, in most of the theatres in Kreuzberg now destroyed, the entrance to the foyer and the auditorium was through the entrances of the courtyard of the apartment buildings and the stage was in the second or third rear courtyard. Outside, the flows of spectators gravitate towards the city's public space before and after the event. Thus, the analysis shows how theatres are created as transitional spaces and as urban nodes through the flow of their users.

Comparing this with the tools prior to the project, this schematisation provides a much more detailed picture of the theatre auditoria. In this way, the spatial arrangement, location and accessibility of the auditoria become visible; they even re-reflect the size of the entrances and sanitary facilities.

The definition of standardised and normative methods to describe theatre architecture is an essential instrument of analysis. This standardisation of formats, methods and mapping possibilities is the focus of the *Catalogue of Berlin Performing Spaces* project as an interface for future research.

### **Ephemeral Architecture, Transitory Spaces, Cultural Tools**

The cultural history of European theatre shows that, since Greek times, performing on a stage in front of an audience has been a great social value that, combined with interruptions, changes of meaning and intermittency of the activity, has endured to this day. Places not linked to religion had to first obtain authorisation as public spaces.

Parallel to Friedrich Schiller's presentation on "Theatre as a Moral Institution" in 1784, many theatres were created in German-speaking countries, which partly explains the current concentration of state and urban theatres. This proliferation is also reflected in the diversity of the existing theatre architecture. Often modernised, repeatedly burned, rebuilt and renovated or restructured, theatre buildings are witnesses to aesthetic and cultural currents inherent to their time. The widely used proscenium arch transmits the typical longitudinal orientation of the auditorium and its arrangement with a view to the proscenium.

Theatre is mainly developed in the dialectic of acting and observing. It is a temporary space of increasing attention, condensation and intensification of experiences and imagination that can generate knowledge and create awareness. The preservation of difference, that is, the distinction between play and observation, assures theatre its utopian dimension.

With the early 20th century technical, artistic and social changes, spatial arrangements other than the principle of confrontation were possible. That is why directors, even more than architects, were the driving force behind the changes in the theatre space. Their projects show a great variety of arrangements: from the inspiration for the huge arena with a changing proscenium, such as the Grosses Schauspielhaus, to the small auditorium without a proscenium arch as a multipurpose hall (Huesmann, 1983).

### The Grosses Schauspielhaus Berlin

In the next section, the focus is on the historical theatre spaces in the city of Berlin, with their reconstructions, destructions, adaptations and conversions during and after the Second World War, as well as the construction and fall of the Berlin Wall. This is perfectly exemplified in the Grosses Schauspielhaus in combination with other aspects such as the ideas of director Max Reinhardt,<sup>4</sup> other visionary theatre projects by Hans Poelzig, or the highly diverse history of the construction of the Am Zirkus 1.<sup>5</sup>

In 1919, the Grosses Schauspielhaus was opened in Berlin, which later became the Friedrichstadtpalast,<sup>6</sup> and which the director and founder of Austrian theatre Max Reinhardt had built according Hans Poelzig's<sup>7</sup> plans for the old circus Renz. Above all, a new dimension for theatre was developed here: the new management style for the masses with elaborate stage

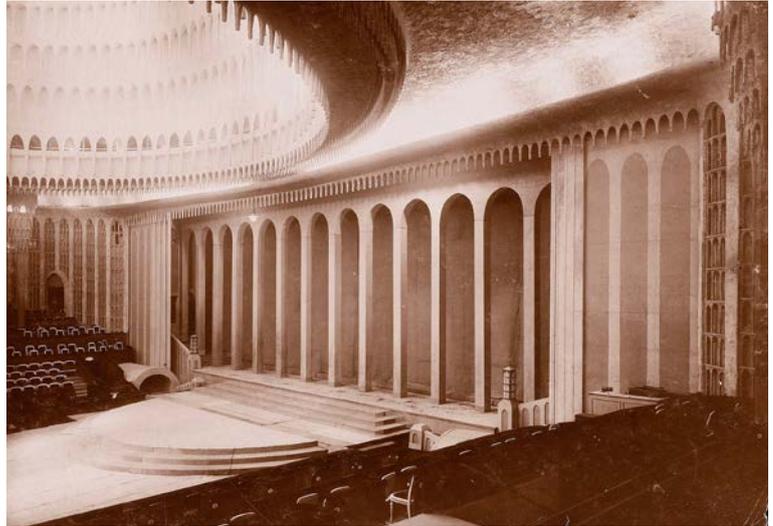
4. Max Reinhardt (1873-1943). Austrian, Jewish, exiled, was a film producer and theatre and film director of great importance in the renewal of modern theatre. Opposed to naturalism, he produced and directed plays and films with spectacular sets, mass scenes and music.

5. See the digitalised map portfolio no. 42 Theater d. Volkes of the Grosses Schauspielhaus Berlin, 3.2.41 (Technische Universität Berlin) and the book of searches of the General Building Inspector for the imperial capital, inventory R 4606, register no. 1590.

6. The Friedrichstadt-Palast is a theatre in Berlin, one of the symbols of the nightlife of the German capital. It was built on the circus Renz theatre from 1873 the Grosses Schauspielhaus from 1919, with capacity for 3,000 people, and which closed definitively in 1980. That venue, used as a variety theatre and circus was converted into a performance centre by Max Reinhardt. It reopened in 1984 and is a gigantic venue for variety, ice skating and various types of shows with a capacity for 1,895 people.

7. Hans Poelzig (1869-1936). He was a German architect, painter and set designer, exiled, aligned with expressionism. In 1919 he designed the Grosses Schauspielhaus Berlin.

Figure 8. Grosses Schauspielhaus Berlin.



machinery and the intensive use of the revolving stage in powerful productions, as well as a coordinated and streamlined interaction in the shows: set design, language, music and dance. Max Reinhardt was much more interested in the cinematographic medium than most theatre people of his time. In the Grosses Schauspielhaus, with 5,000 seats, the audience was impressed with its circular seat arrangement and stage arena.

This shows that architecture does not function as just a physical space but also as a materialisation of history, or rather experience. From this perspective, buildings begin to speak a completely different language as soon as theatre creators use them. The debate about what theatre should be and should represent, today and in the future, also reflects the use of the architectural and spatial concepts of existing old buildings.

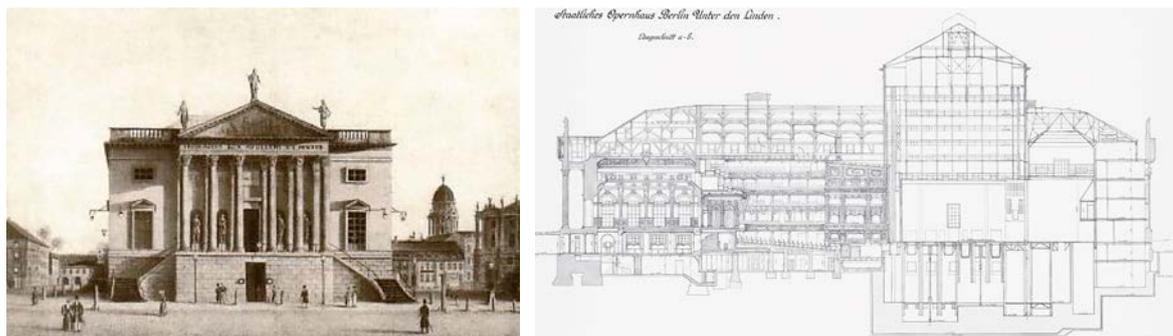


Figure 9. Staatsoper Unter den Linden.

The stages, even after they are built, must be able to adapt to the process of constant change to remain technically usable, as the example of the oldest theatre that still exists in Berlin, the Staatsoper Unter den Linden of 1742, shows.

### The Schaubuehne am Lehniner Platzw

An outstanding example of architectural adaptation to theatre use is the old cinema Universum in Kurfürstendamm, built in 1928 by Erich Mendelsohn.<sup>8</sup> The architectural site of the Kino Universum, with dwellings, shops and a small square on the outskirts, designed as a new urban centre, established Kurfürstendamm as an avenue of leisure, with a wide range of theatres and cinemas, comparable to the Paral·lel in Barcelona in the 1920s. The building was seriously damaged during the Second World War. Later it was rebuilt and used as a cinema; and from 1969 as a disco. From 1978 to 1981, the interior was completely remodelled when the Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz<sup>9</sup> opened as a multifunctional venue with separable auditoria. The new spatial distribution, which could be arranged in variable rooms without fixed separation of auditorium and stage, was introduced when the Schaubühne company, under its main director, Peter Stein,<sup>10</sup> which usually performed in Hallesches Ufer in Kreuzberg, was looking for a new site (Dördelmann, 2015).

On the other hand, logistical restrictions and overcrowded conditions are often tolerated during reforms in order to maintain the historical location in the urban structure. Each adaptation or expansion stage, even after completion, must be adapted to a constant process of change so that the performing space remains technically usable. The transformation processes in

8. Erich Mendelsohn (1887-1953) was a renowned 20th century German architect, the greatest exponent of expressionist architecture, who would suffer exile because he was a Jew. Between 1925 and 1931 he created the Woga-Komplex and the cinema Universum in Berlin.

9. The Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz is a theatre in Berlin that occupies the old and renovated cinema Universum, built in the 1920s by Erich Mendelsohn in a consistent rationalist style. Since 1982 it has been the headquarters of the Schaubühne am Halleschen Ufer company created in 1970 by a group of actors with director Peter Stein and that acquired international fame throughout that decade, becoming one of the most prestigious theatres in Germany at the beginning of the 21st century.

10. Peter Stein (b. 1937) is a German theatre director who founded the Schaubühne am Halleschen Ufer in West Berlin, a theatre company that was one of the main focuses of the theatre renewal of the 1960s and 1970s and was inspired by the student protest movement.



Figure 10. Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz.

the old building have proved almost more difficult than the construction of a new theatre. When the existing building on the old sites is enlarged and adapted to the spatial and functional needs of a modern cultural industry, we face a challenge of creativity. This issue is also noted in the mapping.

### Berlin, the Capital of Theatre

About a quarter of the almost 250 venues researched no longer exist as theatres; another quarter are now used with functions other than the original, for example, cinemas, discos, police stations or warehouses; about a quarter are made up of buildings that were originally intended for activities such as factories, churches or pumping stations; and the last quarter includes auditoria built as theatres and still used as such, often rebuilt, renovated and adapted to the current requirements demanded by building law and theatre technology.

The research also shows to what extent theatres function as drivers of urban development (Ramon, 2014). It can be seen that until the beginning of the Second World War there were districts in the city with a high concentration of theatres. Among others, the Kroll-Oper in Platz der Republik, the Walhalla-Theater in Charlottenstrasse, the Schiller-Theater (Nord) in Chausseestrasse and the Schiller-Theater (Ost) in Wallnertheaterstrasse left their mark on the 20th century. Something similar happened with the Belle-Alliance-Theater in the current Mehringdamm, the Orpheus-Theater in Friedrichstrasse and the Central-Theater in Alte-Jakob-Strasse. None of them exist today.

## The City in the 21st Century

The significance of the role of the urban fabric in which the theatre is developed is an integral part of the exploration of urban space as a communicative platform of the city. It interprets urban and theatre culture as an important part of the spatial and social interaction taking into account the superimposition of very different and diverse phenomena (Bauert, 2013; Fischer-Lichte et al. (Ed.), 1998; Freydank, 1988; Hofmann, 1985; Ihering, 1948; Kleihues, 1987; Kranz, 1990; Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin (Ed.), 2015).

Theatre developments become visible on the city maps prepared with chronological data. The numbers on the red flags correspond to the places inventoried and completed with more information, drawings and figures within the catalogue. We began our theatre mapping analogously to the history of the city of Berlin in 1690, with historical maps of the city, and we have worked on the following years due to a major urban development in each of the stages analysed: 1750, 1800, 1880, 1910, 1940 and until 1945, with the city destroyed by bombs, marked in blue (Architekten- und Ingenieur-Verein, 1877, 1896 and 1983).

In densely-populated industrial and working-class districts, very small venues were built —mainly backyard theatres and small variety theatres — while, from 1900, renowned concert halls were built in the city's bourgeois centre. Until 1939, almost all the objects of study were new buildings constructed for theatre purposes. These theatres were largely destroyed during

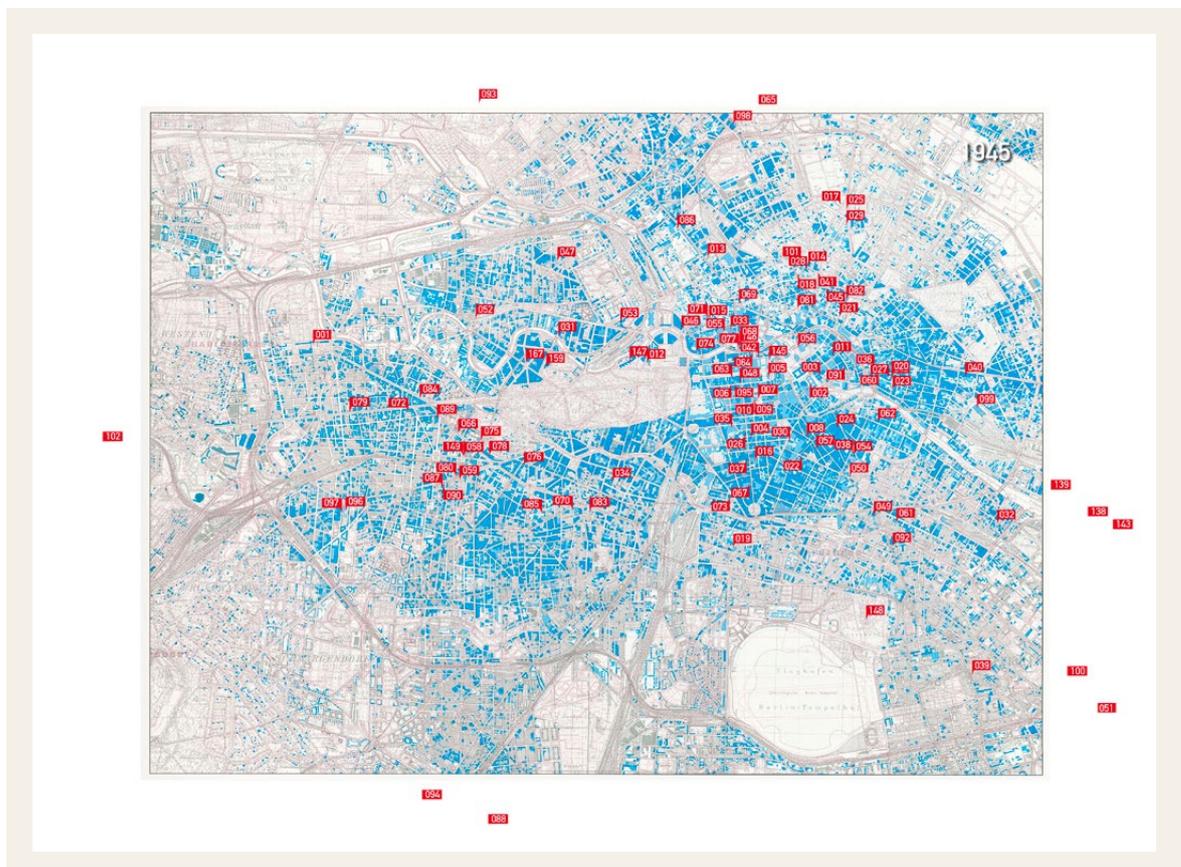


Figure 11. Map of the city of Berlin from 1945.

the Second World War, as were almost all the buildings in the city centre (Danilsen, 2016).

This makes the three new buildings built after the war even more amazing. Their unusual architectural forms found their place in the western centre of the city, where the war had left open spaces: the Philharmonie, the Haus der Kulturen der Welt and the Akademie der Künste (West). These new buildings not only had a cultural purpose but, like many representative buildings, served as a political declaration during the Cold War, within the divided city, with a neighbouring and visible location with respect to the Berlin Wall.

A constant trend since the 1960s has been the (re)use of existing auditoria and structures of buildings for performing purposes, which explains why the current theatre space is characterised by a high degree of variety. Although the construction of new theatres has almost stopped, the city is still in a period of theatre growth. This approach to the “found spaces” aims to capture the architecture of the place as set design, although these spaces lack the technical infrastructure of a traditional theatre. In recent years in particular, many performing spaces inserted in pre-existing structures have been created in which the character of the original building contributes significantly to the special atmosphere and creates a sense of continuity with the past.

### Theatre as Tangible Architecture and Intangible Structure

Factors such as early 20th century cinema, television and now the internet cannot replace the need for local interaction. Modern forms of theatre are experimenting today more than ever to recall their origin in Greek etymology: the *théatron*, the physical place from where one can see (really and virtually), must be heard and must perform.

Meanwhile, the boundaries of classical theatre formats are dissolving into other disciplines, their borders are extending to other performing and visual arts, and the concept of theatre can be can become complementary: new lifestyles, new sensibilities, new technologies, new horizons. 21st century cities require different artistic and social practices, and the methods we know change, so the relevance of theatre as a manifestation and relationship among the population is progressively and simultaneously renewed (Freydefont, 2014).

In this respect, we approach the issue that architecture works not only as a physical space but as a materialisation of history or rather of experience. Theatre, as a form of art but also of construction, is constantly changing, in interaction with the urban structure. The issue of the location of theatre, combined with the forms of the European city, has historically grown in relation to public space. To what extent is theatre today in a position to interact with the city as an artistic expression and as a physical place, as a public service and social practice? To what extent is it able to affirm its uniqueness as an essential factor?

The theatre buildings built in Berlin today increasingly reveal the possibilities offered by performance to the development of theatre. Theatre technology machinery underlines the performing nature of space through scenic transformations. As a concept of ephemeral architecture, the stage functions as a moving space within the temporal space of the theatre (Braulich, 1966).

“Posterity weaves no garlands for imitators.” This often cited line from the prologue of Schiller’s *Wallenstein* addresses a phenomenon that has shaped history and the perception of theatre to this day: it is the story of a fleeting art that finds it difficult to leave its mark.

### Liquid Spaces, Time Factor, Utopian Dimension

Contemporary theatre, with its creative processes, its connection networks and all the intangible factors that it activates and with which it interacts, is difficult to grasp in its entirety and complexity. It is linked to the physicality of the theatre space and interacts on many levels to show mutual visibility, commitment and interfaces between creation centres and creators, companies and festivals, performers and institutions (Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2003).

The theatre city of Berlin, with its diverse settings and the numerous performing arts groups and institutions reflect this, especially in the examination of current theatre construction and its ongoing development. Nowhere else in the Federal Republic of Germany can we find theatres with this density and wide range of aesthetics and styles (Bauert, 2014).

In addition to the major state and private theatres, around 400 independent groups, performers and producers of all genres and disciplines work in the city, presenting their productions in places as diverse as Hebbel am Ufer, Ballhaus Ost, Dock 11, Sophiensaele, Theaterdiscounter and Uferstudios.

The issues of the city, urban planning and public space are under debate and have always been negotiated from an ideal-typical vision of the stage. The city can thus be compared to an unstoppable mosaic of theatre places, all of which have left their mark and survived in one way or another to this day. Some of them are being rebuilt virtually, with the help of augmented reality, in order to record the rich cultural landscape that existed before National Socialism. This interaction of the performing space, pre-existing architecture and urban planning as a backdrop for scenes and discussions leaves the scenography behind and also begins to play its independent role in the theatre space.



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