

# A Performative understanding of spatial design, learning from exhibitions

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**Abstract.** The terms ‘Performative’ and ‘Performance’ are more and more emerging in the spatial design discourses, from exhibition, to interior, arriving to urban design. These notions are not clearly defined yet. They are characterized by a semantic width and multiple applicative possibilities. Between the different interpretations and uses of ‘performance’ and ‘performative’ in architectural discourses, this paper will focus on two main dimensions of a particular importance: The first refers to the concepts of the scenic, the narrative, and the theatrical qualities in architecture. The second relates to the ‘event-character’ of spatial interventions, and the relation between event, and soft intervention, which tackles the concept of the ‘transformative power of the performative’, which indicates to the capacity of architecture to activate spaces and processes.

Exhibitions, pavilions and installations are all concerned with changing the performance of the existing space, and therefore they are able to illustrate what a ‘performative-oriented architecture’ could be or mean. The Italian architect and thinker Andrea Branzi, in his essay “L’Allestimento come metafora di una nuova modernità” (exhibitions as a metaphor of a new modernity) (Lotus, n.115, December 2002), invites architecture to learn from the sub-categories of architecture. Architecture can learn from the practice of exhibition (displaying and installing). Architecture is invited to learn design approaches and strategies from performance-oriented spatial disciplines such as exhibition design, scenography, art-installations, and events, with a particular focus – in this paper – on: 1) Soft interventions and the transformative power of the event-intervention, 2) The aesthetic of experiencing and the narrative approach. Therefore, it is in the sub-disciplines of architecture that we can ‘rehearse’ a ‘performative understanding’ of the spatial project, in the sense of studying and designing spaces basing on performative criteria, and performance perspectives. The repertoire of the performative is large; it includes the concepts of the flexible, the event, the transformative, the theatrical, the narrative, etc. The aim of this paper is to explore and rehearse this kind of performative analytical tool for the architectural project (taking the case of Nevicata14, a project of refurbishment of the pedestrian Piazza Castello in Milan, 2015). A performative understanding of architecture is proposed as an alternative to a general theory, and as a new dramaturgy to analyse and design spaces.

## 1 The space as the performer

The terms 'Performance', 'event', 'to an audience' are key-concepts that can be directly exported to the architectural and the spatial discourse. 'Event' and 'Performance' also relate to the notions of the 'spectacular', and the 'temporary'. In the field of exhibitions, the 'spectacular' effect is exploited for communicative, commercial and entertainment motivations: 'Performing a spectacular experience', a 'memorable experience', are often the key-concepts for the so-called memory-design and experience-design [1]. To clarify how the terms 'performative' and 'performance' can be attributed to space; we definitely should study the space as the 'performer', and to differentiate between 'the performance of spaces', and 'the performance in the spaces'. In terms of terminology, many publications (in exhibitions, interior and urban design) used a performance-belonging lexicon, as metaphors and analogies with the world of performance, using all the related terminology. For example, in *'Mettere in scena, Mettere in mostra'* (2014) (in English: 'Exhibiting and displaying'), different contributors used a range of terms belonging to the world of performance to discuss architectural and spatial issues such as: architectural dramaturgy of the urban space, the event city, the urban scene, creative city, living architecture, media-tic space, urban dramaturgy, scenography of architects, media architecture scene, etc. [2]. Pier Luigi Salvadeo, one of the contributors, indicated that these kinds of analogies are necessary to understand the contemporary city, expressing that: "*A new performative reality, broad and inclusive, take on the contemporary city today. Space, time and action, the typical characters of the spectacle, contribute today to the formation of the spaces in the city, becoming dramaturgical places of constant change [...] a dramaturgy of the urban space that includes everything, where unlike the traditional dramaturgy, in close relation with the narrative theater, the scene is set as a condition of priorities and the dramaturgy becomes a peculiar feature of the space.*" [3] 'Performance' and 'Dramaturgy' can therefore be used as a metaphor, to illustrate and clarify some ideas, but they also function as analytical tools to study a spatial situation with all its spatial, social, and cultural dimensions.

## 2 Performance studies and the Performative turn

The notion of performance started to emerge in the humanities and social sciences and the philosophy of linguistics, in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Theorizing about performance appeared in the 1940s and 1950s, when an intellectual movement known as The Performative Turn took shape. The performative turn in the humanities and social sciences consists on theorizing about performance as a social and cultural element [4]. Performance, as the central concept of this movement, was used as a metaphor and an analytical tool, employed to understand human behavior. Performance provides a perspective for framing and analyzing social and cultural phenomena [5]. Contributed to the movement the works of Victor Witter Turner, Erving Goffman and Richard Schechner, who focused on the elaboration of a dramaturgical paradigm to be applied to culture at large to view all culture as performance. Schechner understood performance as a continuum, where not everything is meant to be a performance, but everything, from performing arts to politics and economics, can be studied as performance [6]. In the same intellectual atmosphere, it could be mentioned also 'Dramaturgy' as a term that belongs to the world of performing arts, that also entered the world of humanities and social science, before entering the world of architecture. In relation with architecture, Pedro Gadanho understands by The Performative Turn, as the influence of performance over other artistic media and disciplines such as architecture. In the sense of "*reconnecting architecture with traditions of performance art*" [7], where architecture is

inspiring and borrowing from the performative practices (and the world of performance) new dynamics and mechanisms. The performative aspects appear as: the participatory in and with architecture, ephemeral spatial practices, the use of flexible structures, the emphasis on the scenic and the spectacular, the emphasis on the experience, etc.

### 3 The Speech Act theories. Performative and transformative

*"[...]Performance is intentional, if successful, it does cultural work in the world [...] As a transformational force, behavior performance has the power to restructure social order through the persuasive power of rhetoric and through the redefinition of both audience and context [...]" [8] (Carlson Marvin, 2008)*

The philosophy of language, and with John Austin in the 1950s, introduced the concept of the 'performative utterance', arguing that 'to say something is to do something'. For Austin, the speech constitutes an active practice that can affect and transform realities therefore language is performative [9]. 'Performative' that refers to a situation in which a new reality is created [10]. Therefore, the performative has a transformative power. Judith Butler also considers that gestures and behavior are performative because they can generate the identities they express [11]. The 'speech act theory' is practically the central theory behind the notion of 'performance'. Performativity is the political aspect of performance and its manifestation of power [12]. What can transform a reality is therefore performative. In spatial design practice, the concept of the performative is relevant to analyze the constituents of a situation that can transform or be transformed with the design (the intervention, the architecture): communication, life forms, economy, the cultural, the architectonic, the social, the urban, etc. For Erika Fischer Lichte, the 'Transformative power' means also that architecture changes according to uses. The situation will influence and change the people involved. So even if spaces are created to serve certain purposes but that does not mean that they must only be used in this function [13]. The transformational force is in the power to restructure the social and the spatial order, through the transforming the audience, the context, and the users.

## 4 Spatial performances

### 4.1 Performative, narratives and the scenic potential

For Sophie Wolfrum, scenic, situationism, psychogeography and the psychosocial are the necessary concepts in the shaping of a city. She bases on Baudrillard's quote: *"[...] scenic space, without which [...] buildings would only be structures and the city merely an agglomeration."* [14]. 'Performative' refers to the execution of an action giving meaning to a situation in which a new reality is created or experienced. For Alban Janson, this new reality could be an experience lived on an internal individual level. Janson sees that scenic and theatrical situations could exist in architecture and urban spaces, and they can be intended or not by the planners or the designers. Architecture is a complex of intended and unintended scenic situations. He refers to the experience of ascending the Balthasar Neumann's staircase in the Bruchsal Palace, using it as an example to explain the performative as the scenic potential of a spatial situation. Janson narrates the spatial experience as below:

*"[...]an initial approach to the staircase leads into darkness; at the same time ,we are confronted with an alternative to the cave-like atmosphere below in the form of ascending to the right or to the left, guided upwards by light, sweeping outward in an almost dance-like*

*manner between dark depths and bright natural light , with no indication as yet of where the staircase ultimately lead[...]until we reach an oval platform that seems to be suspended in space, detached from the walls[...]vaulted over by the colorful , mysteriously illuminated depiction of the heavens on the ceiling, which serves as an antipode to the darkness below. Anyone ascending this staircase becomes a decisive part of a complete situation [...] essence of this architecture.” [15]*

It is a psychological, and perceptual experience, lived on an inner level, individually. The scenic, the theatrical and the narrative characters of the spatial situation were performed on the user while moving and experiencing the space (ascending a dramatic staircase). The user was part of the show, and that show is between him and his internal perceptual consciousness. Janson sees that *“Performances in architecture [...] surpass its mere practical use [...] The act of climbing a staircase, for instance, by a constructive arrangement according to a dramaturgical consideration into scenic experience without audience, so that we follow our movements through space as if it were a performance”* [16]. It is a self-reflexive experience. A special design/arrangement could enhance an experience of a pure functional movement, making it acquire more drama. And this when the user feels transformed into another reality. Such transformations should be called performative. It is the performative power of architectural situations [17]. Therefore, a performative understanding of architecture seeks to enhance these latent scenic potentials and narratives in spatial situation.

## **5 Exhibitions as performance-oriented architectures**

Exhibitions are required to be more and more performative. Architect and exhibition designer Uwe Brueckner has attributed terms to spaces that are directly related to the world of performance and scenography, such as “choreographed space”, “spatial potentials”, “dramatized space” and “making spaces talk”. He spoke about spatial potentials and parameters that allow the dramatization of space, creating choreographed spaces. Different strategies and tools can be employed to make a space perform. A performative space is a space stimulated to perform in different ways. To note that the expression *“making a space perform”* is in resonance with the title of the book *“Scenography- Making spaces talk, projects 2002-2010”*, Atelier Bruckner (2011). Bruckner underlines the design the space through scenography aspects [18]. For instance, creating immersive and suggestive atmospheres can be achieved through the manipulation of the interior environmental factors, in order to provoke a certain sensory experience. The communication of content is made through the lived spatial experience, and that approach underlines the shift from the design of space, toward the design of experience, where the aesthetic of perceiving becomes the aesthetic of experiencing. David Dernie differentiated describes a narrative space as the exhibition that is conceived as a story teller that adopts different styles of contextualization, rhythms, and levels of intensity and patterns of movements [19]. The approach of narrative design emphasizes the importance of visitors’ experience, creating powerful spatial experiences, evoking emotional engagement, and creating memorable experiences [20].]. Unfolding narratives and sceneries are increasing interest in architecture in general, and in urban spaces in particular in order to enrich the experience of public architectures as not just containers of functions, sifting away from the pure functionalistic approaches.

## **6 Making spaces perform**

‘The performative understanding of spatial interventions’ is proposed as a design approach and analytical tool. This understanding could be acquired through analogizing and studying the similarities between lightweight architectural interventions, exhibition design and art installations. A spatial intervention can be studied and analyzed in terms of performance/behavior, and in terms of interaction between the new (the inserted intervention) and the existing (the space). A spatial intervention aims at changing the performance of the existing. In this regard, we can define a gradient of strategies for spatial interventions, from solid and surgical interventions, to lightweight and even immaterial interventions. The architectural intervention can be studied in terms of theatricality, in this sense the architectural intervention can be seen as a sculpture, or as an installation that could be dramatic, narrative, scandalous, unnoticeable, spectacular, scenic, etc. Spatial interventions are also in a close relation with the notion of event. A spatial project can be studied and analyzed as ‘as an event’, ‘provoker of an event’ or ‘hosting events’.

### **6.1 Art in spatial interventions. The collaboration art-architecture**

The late version of modernism was incapable of providing successful domestic urban architecture, because of the pure functionalistic approaches. Art practices were called to participate in the formation of urban centers, to compensate for the cultural sterility of functionally determined solutions [21]. The use of art in buildings and public spaces became more and more popular as a response to tendencies and needs for the spectacular, the performative, the sophisticated, the entertaining, and the cultural image of the city or the institutions. The popularity of artistic interventions in architecture is increasing. Art-installations are used to experiment a manipulation of the environmental factors such as light, sound, and temperature. Altering the sensory experience in spaces induces different physiological and psychological reactions in people. Such spatial installations demonstrate how the physical characteristics of objects and environments act on people to influence the meaning making of spaces and objects [22]. Olafur Eliasson sees that architecture is more involved in problem-solving and nurturing collectivity and social values, and therefore art could do the same when collaborating with architecture [23]. Therefore, the collaboration serves the art by making it dedicated to the collective in real-life situations, outside museums, by calling artists for interventions in urban and architectural projects. In return, such collaborations give the architecture more sophisticated performative qualities, and enrich the perception of architecture as not just a shell of functions. Art in spatial sceneries is related to the interest in the unfolding narratives in space. Since the 1960s and 1970s, artists, writers and filmmakers were interested in this story-telling in motion [24]. In the space design disciplines, the attention is given to the engagement with places and objects, creating narrative paths and changing our common perception of daily spatial scenes. A kind of intrusion to break the order and continuity of the perception by creating new rhythms. Art is becoming more and more included in adaptive architectural projects, especially when we are dealing with public or semi-public spaces and institutions.

## 6.2 From solid, to soft, to immaterial interventions

In the field of preservation and spatial interventions, the tendencies are toward leaving the existing structures intact, and transforming the spaces through lighter and softer conceptual strategies, that are convenient to the cultural and economic limitations. Bryon Roberts believes the newer practices are more and more influenced by minimalism and conceptual art, operating between art, architecture, and preservation to make new spatial experiences [25]. In the same regard, Graeme Brooker and Sally Stone defined three categories of remodeling: Intervention, Insertion and installation: Intervention, is the most surgical and hardcore version of remodeling, while an insertion is defined as the introduction of a new element into, between or beside an existing structure. The softest version of interventions or remodeling is “the installation”. It is defined when the elements of remodeling exist independently from the building, and therefore the two simply touch each other. Some installations can be ephemeral or temporary, and they generate a symbiotic relationship between a building and the new elements [26]. Pam Locker also spoke about the similarities between a display installation and an art-installation since art-installation and exhibition design are both site specific, usually interior and three-dimensional, and involve the transformation of the perception of space. They can use a variety of media including film, sound and light. They are both concerned with time and space, the sensory experiences of the audience and the idea of art as theatre [27]. An intervention, an exhibition display or an art-installation could perform in similar ways within an existing space and transform it. They are detectable as they stay independent from the hosting space, but at the same time, they have a transformative power (as they are able to induce momentary or even long-term changes in the spatial qualities of the existing). Some kind of interventions can be described as immaterial as a very soft version of interventions, which aims to give the existing space a new performance with less architectural tools, where dramatic lighting, tactile and textured displays, changing temperatures, and low-tech audio environments are used in exhibitions to create emotional engagement between visitors and the event [28]. Making the space perform is achieved through a quasi-immaterial intervention.

## 6.3 The relation: Event, Performativity, Intervention

*“[...] performativity is the capacity of architecture to become an event, to participate in a world which is more and more often defined in terms of occurrences rather than as a collection of objects and relations [...] What does it imply for architecture to be more and more often defined through performative criteria, from energy consumption to more qualitative characteristics like the capacity to generate affects?” [29] (A.Picon, 2012)*

As a performance, an exhibition, or art-installation, a spatial intervention can also be ephemeral, temporal and reversible. This temporality gives the intervention or the making of it, the character of ‘event’. An ‘Event’ that can induce transformations in the space through time. The temporality, the scenic factor, the transformative power, the theatricality are the performative characteristics of an ‘event’. ‘Intervention as an event’, ‘architecture as event’, or ‘event-architecture’, are expressions that are usually used to indicate to the kind of architecture that comes to life for a certain period of use, or as Sylvia Lavin stated “*when the lights are on*” [30]. Furthermore, some spatial situations hold in themselves some scenic potentials as spaces ‘born’ to host events. The term ‘*Eventmental*’, a word that does not exist in the English language, was suggested by D. Leatherbarrow to discuss the performative character of architecture, as the character that unfolds beyond the scripted program, in the

unpredictable singularity of situations. Leatherbarrow stresses on the relation between the *'eventmental'* character, the unpredictable and the unfolding: *"So the performance of a space is not revealed only in given occasion but also in 'indifferent emptiness' between various events [...] There are unexpected qualities as an unforeseen character [...] We could ask if this auditorium is working in certain occasion, if its 'generally adequate, but not until the event [...]"* [31]. A planned event in the space could unfold beyond the planned schedule of the event, revealing more about the performance of the space. So in other words, the space is seen as an event, and as an arrangement of factors and circumstances. Noting that the term 'unfold' is a keyword that is very present in many publications that discussed performativity. It is also used by artists who practice performance-art, where they prefer to describe their performances as *'an unfolding situation'* [32]. Therefore, beyond the performance of the physical qualities of the space, there is the performance of the setting, including the unpredictable factors. The event-character is also connected connects itself to the notions of openness, the participatory and the transformative. The event is open for participation, to transform and to be transformed; therefore, the event unfolds in space and time.

#### **6.4 Installing and intervening as event, The before, the unfolding, the after**

As in a performance, the installation animates this space. Sibylle Omlin reflected on the transformation of performance into spatial installation and vice versa, and on how a performance transformed into an installation can leave behind spatial relationships [33]. In the following case study (The case of Nevicata14, a project of refurbishment of the pedestrian Piazza Castello in Milan), we will examine the relation event-performance intervention. We will be analyzing and describing the design, the practice and the unfolding of the intervention. Therefore, the case-study will be dissected in three phases: the before, the during and the after. In other words, we will study the project as an event in space and time: the before, the during or the unfolding, and the after. This kind of dissected- analytical work, allows us to differentiate between: 1) Architecture as the event, 2) Architecture as a host for events, 3) Architecture as a generator of events. As well as the participation of architecture, and participation in architecture.

#### **6.5 The case of Nevicata14, A project of refurbishment of the pedestrian Piazza Castello in Milan**

Following the decision to pedestrianize the Piazza Castello in Milan, and after the construction of the Expo Gate (two temporary pavilions built for the Expo period), the Administration of Milan decided to try to solve the morphological arrangement of the Castello square, that became pedestrianized, but it was still left without a clear strategy, and without any specific criteria of use. Moreover, the decision for this project came also as a result of a series of pressures from the local residents, who complained about the not adequate use of this square, seeing its historical character, location and its urban quality. Under the name of 'Atelier Castello', and during the month of July 2014, Guidarini & Salvadeo associate architects (the winner firm), and other eleven architectural firms, were called for consultations, and to present for the citizens in the Expo Gate their proposals of possible future scenarios for the piazza. On behalf of the Municipality, the TRIENNALE of Milan was given the privilege in making decisions. The ultimate goal of the consultations was that, on one hand to propose a provisory solution to be implemented only for the period of the upcoming EXPO. On the other hand, this temporary

accommodation/arrangement of the Piazza Castello had to be a testing ground to develop consciously the criteria for a final arrangement of the square, which will occur in the future, as a result of another international competition in two phases in progress [34].

## 6.6 A flexible proposal

From the initial competition call, the requests of the municipality and Triennale were not at all clear, and it was not yet clear the character that the project would have to have. All of these uncertainties had normally put the architects in a state of confusion. And thus, the winner studio claimed that at this point they decided to use this uncertainty as a positive condition for the project, from which to start. And so they had express their proposal through a different character of the project, that does not stop at its physical forms, but to imagine a flexible life of this future project, in which everything had to be fluid leaving behind any pretense definiteness. Therefore, it could be said that the confusion in the ‘call’ required a flexibility within the proposal to make [35].

## 6.7 Participation and Co-design

Through the public space of Piazza Castello, the architects wanted to think of a smart city, where the material hardware of urban territories could work in symbiosis with the immaterial software of social networks and the real city. A city where everyone is connected and where everything is linked together, as expressed by Salvadeo, basing on his reading of Carlo Ratti [36]. This ‘participatory’ concept is in the use and processes of formation of the city, which differentiates it from the classic notion of participation, as in the cases of the seventies, where it took the form of interviews, but where the architect was still fully controlling every stage of the design process till the final construction. And so maybe today ‘participation’ is more and more a kind of collective practice [37]. The inclusiveness in the design approach was expressed in the participatory mode of planning, the use of collaborative design software, and the resulting transparent use of city. The result should be hybrid spaces, material and digital. The Internet and the network not only changed the way in which people relate to one another, but this medium has allowed the emergence of practices like crowd-funding, capable of involving a large public, allowing each person to contribute to the definition of specific aspects of the project.

And therefore, if we go back to the notions of ‘openness’, ‘performance-oriented’, and ‘participation’, we will be able to differentiate-in architecture- between:

The participation of the project in its context: open, responsive to the context as a non-discreet architecture<sup>39</sup>.

The participation in the architecture (of the users/the public): interaction and flexible uses.

The participation in the design process: co-design.

## 6.8 The proposal

As expressed by the architects of the project, the proposal consisted on a non-invasive project respecting the historical and monumental context, but without being totally intimidated by it. The Nevicata14 expresses a vision that can become reality. As during a snowfall, the space changes in an instant, and so how you see and use this space also change. The project proposal aims to empty space, rather than to add to it [38]. The project rearranges the space to make room for uses, therefore it avoids a delimitation of the space. The project thought about a

geography of space's uses, offering a wide public pedestrian use of the space through providing public facilities that support the square (seating and benches of various types arranged freely in space, sun and rain shelters, distributors of fresh vapors, Wi-Fi, technology points, facilities for recreational activities, etc.). The idea was to continue with the calcite paving that was already present in the park next to the square, and to install under it a power/technological network to circulate and provide light and water. Nevicata14 seeks a hidden geography that is configured from time to time depending on the conditions of use. The vision regarding the castle is to be totally immersed in a vast new public space. And this public space will be an ideal continuation of the Sempione Park nearby [39].

## 6.9 The before

The use of social networks and the co-authorships were essential since the first moments of the project. Through an extensive use of social networks, the project has had for some of its phases, more than 400 authors. Experts and nonexperts, residents and citizens of Milan have contributed to the design process with their ideas, proposals and their actions online and on social networks, but also offline. More than 800,000 people have been intercepted in just over three months of work. During the consultation phases (the phases of 'Atelier Castello'), the presentations took different forms: from the exhibition of drawings, the organization of workshops, the involvement of citizens through debates and participatory activities, to the organization of demonstrative performances of possible new ideas [40]. All the works of consultations, presentations took place near the site at the Expo Gate. Later on, an exhibition of the design proposals was held at the Triennale. Various presentations were made for the council, the municipality. It is during that period that the debates about the destiny of the Castello were the most intensified. The Council also decided to launch an online consultation to check the approval ratings of the various project proposals. At this point the Triennale appointed a panel of experts, and asked the designers to submit a proposal at very short notice and a draft adapted to a low budget – finally declared – of 200,000€. The main requirement is that the project had to be completely and quickly reversible. The committee decided that the project to be realized is Nevicata14 [41]. Crowdfunding, social enterprise, and sharing economy, were also features of social innovative initiatives. As a result, imagining a new architecture of the square that will invert the usual logics of the construction of a space. And instead of moving from the space to the uses, it is the other way around, from the uses to the space, as noted by the architect. In other words, the uses and practices will participate in shaping the space [42].

## 6.10 The during

The project consisted of a series of circular areas in granular rubber of 1 cm thick, white and soft to the decking, which host a variety of structures of use, as expected from the earliest proposals. Metal structures/shelters for shade, facilities for punctual lighting, devices issuing fresh vapors, plants, signals poles that inform the public on how to use the square and its structures, etc. A team of 10 people was handling the social networks, and the communication part, to manage the processes of participations and proposed initiatives, and promoting the project, inviting the citizens to propose activities and events. Nevicata14, that began with '400 authors' now shifts its action from the co-design to the testing and the promotion of the uses of space. And this is how the concept of *Nevicata Lab* was born. Nevicata14 promoted a regulation of its uses, tried to define new models of coexistence and participation in a way that the public space could be self-sustaining [43].

## 6.11 The after

So a number of initiatives took place at Piazza Castello's Nevicata14, both profit and non-profit aimed at strengthening the civic fabric. The project also contributed to the creation of "community" and events, such as the 'Dinner in White', and 'the Critical mass bike' [44]. Therefore, it is a project that hosted events, encouraged events, but also generated events. It is a case of a performative intervention (urban scale), with emphasis on the character of event. "*Nevicata14 is an exportable model, not for its architectural forms, but for the fact that it triggers processes, procedures, of its conditions of use, and encouraging the formation of a community capable of producing proposals*"[45]. This statement of the architect, translates the concept of "transformative power of the performative". A performative spatial project, which embedded most of the repertoire of the performative: the event-character, the social, the flexible, the openness, the reversible, the participatory, the experimental aspect, the performativity of the process. Therefore, in this case of study, we were able to extract and detect the different 'dimensions of uses' of the notions 'performance' and 'performative'. The analysis, and the pure narrative description of this kind of projects, gave the possibility to dissect the 'before, after, during/unfolding' of the project in space and in time in which all the city was involved. We 'case studied' a project, basing on performance criteria and performative dramaturgy. Exhibitions, installations and interventions are spatial events that unfold in space and time. They all consist of a spatial intervention in which the designer or the artist employ different conceptual and nuanced strategies to make the existing space perform or to change its performance (temporary or permanent, short-term or long-term). This 'performative understanding of interventions' provides architecture with more nuanced, lightweight, performance-oriented strategies and curatorial attitudes towards urban design. Events/installations represent the lightest version of spatial interventions. They teach the architect how to intervene with almost an immaterial intervention.

## 7 Conclusion

### A new dramaturgy for a new contemporaneity

Through our re-reading of Branzi's essay '*Exhibitions as a metaphor for a new modernity*' (Lotus 115, 2011) [46], we tried to demonstrate and propose what and how architecture can learn from performative practices such as exhibition design. We also tried to respond to another more recent essay by him, '*Towards a new dramaturgy of the project*' (2015) [47], in which he asks for a new 'dramaturgy' for the spatial project. 'Dramaturgy', which usually means the study of dramatic composition of the main elements that constitute a show. And therefore, we will use Dramaturgy as an 'understanding' of the series of internal/external connections that exist between the different agents that constitute the spatial situation when designing or studying a space. It is a metaphor and an analytical tool combined. Performative criteria and Performance perspectives come here to shape this proposed new dramaturgy for the architectural project. As stated by S. Lavin "*With the performative dimensions, architecture can try out new performative strategies developed by and for performance [...] to be distinct from the modern architecture*" [48]. Interior and exhibition design started emerging in parallel with the growth of commercial exhibitions, events, expos, and the tendencies for the performative, the spectacular, the polyfunctional, but since they are usually temporary, and reversible, these disciplines were considered as minor architecture as stated by Branzi who explains what and why the architecture of the city can learn from exhibitions:

*“In the category of the design of displays [...] there are in fact all the genetic elements typical of a new modernity, which we shall call “light” and “diffuse” [...] (exhibition design) is superstructural and transitory, however, the sector is not a subcategory of architecture but on the contrary today plays a new and central disciplinary role in urban transformations. In other words, when an exhibition, a stand or a showroom is prepared, or when work or living spaces are fitted out, when a play or an opera or a ballet is staged, what is constructed is a piece of city. A piece of city [...] responding to the logic of reversibility, adaptation and re-functionalization of the constructed world. This evolutionary space, which can also be seasonal or promotional, is the one that most precisely differentiates the city of the twenty-first century [...]” [49]*

Branzi, in his statement, used a vocabulary, or a lexicon, that belongs to theatre, exhibitions, and the world of performances, not just to ‘metaphorize’, nor to simply make an analogy between theatre and the city, between exhibition design and architecture, but he utilized this ‘performance-belonging vocabulary’ to expand in his analytical tool from the scale of installations and exhibitions towards the scale of architecture and the city. Architecture may borrow logics and strategies from the other minor subcategories of architecture, such as scenography, installations and exhibitions. New performative strategies and practices can be learned from these performative disciplines in order to handle a new complicated modernity and complex spatial conditions. Exhibition design is concerned with the transformation of existing spaces, in order to make them able to respond to new functions, and therefore architecture can learn a soft curatorial flexible approach to spatial interventions, in order to update the existing spaces with flexible spatial solutions and with nuanced performative interventions. The architect is challenged to choreograph spatial interventions that generate events, activate processes, and animate spaces, and lead to long term transformations. Architecture and urban design can also import from exhibition design the scenic, the narrative and the interactive approaches when creating spatial qualities and staging atmospheres. The design of the city is shifting from a pure sterile functional approach towards a performative approach that encourages the design of spatial experiences, urban narratives, ambiances.

Refurnishing, installing, displaying, intervening, or installing an event, are all practices that consist on rearranging systems of spatial objects, and making lightweight flexible interventions. Cultural, social, natural and economical contexts are in constant change, and thus prescribed dictated programs do not work; therefore, any new design or intervention should be adjustable and open for the continual changes in the modes of production and living [50]. Regarding this aspect of openness and flexibility, Valentina Signore defines the performative project as

*“[...] spaces that are designed to be open to change: the design itself seeks to welcome and encourage transformations [...] The performative project lets things happen [...] It leaves room to the unexpected, to the indeterminacy [...] The idea of open form – distinctive to late modernity – not only accepts but even requires uncertainty, ambiguity, incompleteness, imprecision[...] Forms and functions are neither determined nor determining[...]”[51].*

Architectural practices should be allowing themselves to be inspired from the performative spatial disciplines (exhibitions, installations, scenography, etc.) and take tools from the wide repertoire of the performative. Therefore, architectural practices had to reconnect with more performative spatial practices, and adopt a curatorial attitude towards the making of spaces. Performative-oriented approach to spatial design is the art of articulating spaces, curating experiences and ambiances, staging spatial

events, designing spatial experiences, curating interventions and articulating them with events and positive urban transformations. This paper encourages deeper methodological reflections on architectural practices basing on a performative understanding of spatial design.

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