EXHIBITING SCENOGRAPHIC IDENTITIES AT THE 2007 & 2011 PRAGUE QUADRENNIALS

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ABSTRACT

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Theatrical design is difficult to exhibit as *Art*. During the course of the twentieth-century, prominent theatre designers have sought ways to share their revolutionary ideas and remarkable work with an outside audience. In this dissertation, I examine the boundaries, struggles and methodologies found within contemporary design exhibition at the Prague Quadrennial. More specifically, I explore a philosophical shift taking place between the 2007 and 2011 Prague Quadrennials, as the event’s artistic leadership repositions the scenographic underpinnings toward a more inclusive theory of performance design. This resultant shift occurs due to several trends throughout the Prague Quadrennial’s history including: decentralization, the inclusion of performance and the contextualization of scenographic artifacts. I examine the significant impact of this philosophical shift on the event’s curatorial visions, audience interactions and connections with the city of Prague.
To Emily for her love and support
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CHAPTER 1.
INTRODUCTION

Why think about the Prague Quadrennial? In its forty-seven year existence, the Prague Quadrennial has established itself as a major international theatre design exhibition challenging popular preconceptions regarding visual practice in the performing arts. The Prague Quadrennial’s exhibition hall serves as a laboratory to test the boundaries, limitations, and potential for contemporary scenography and performance design. National exhibit curators transform historical design archives comprised of remnant production artifacts into an experiential venue for scenographic investigations. The methods curators use for these transformations create a fluid relationship between scenography and performance design. Spectators view the resultant design exhibition as expressions of both scenographic and performance styles.

In my dissertation, I focus on the Prague Quadrennial’s impact on the shifting concepts of theatrical design, scenography and performance design. Between the 2007 and 2011 Prague Quadrennials, event organizers actualized a huge shift in thinking with regard to design exhibition when they transitioned the event’s identity away from scenography and towards performance design. I investigate this shift and consider the following questions:

- If scenography is defined through the shaping of visual space for a performance and performance design is defined as spatial design being transformed through performance, what is gained and lost by exploring design exhibition through these different lenses?
- When considering the Prague Quadrennial’s philosophical shift from scenography in 2007 to performance design in 2011, how does the Prague Quadrennial’s shift
reposition visual design practice? In addition, by redefining scenographic practice, in what ways does the Prague Quadrennial strengthen or undermine its own status as an international theatrical design exhibition?

In my investigation of these questions, I expose how curatorial choices (and curatorial shortcomings) within individual art installations provide insights into the representation and presentation of scenographic identities in design exhibitions.

What is the Prague Quadrennial? Starting in 1967 and every four years since, the Czech Ministry of Culture and the Arts and Theatre Institute organize a multi-week design exhibition located in Prague. The event’s organizers invite theatre organizations, governmental institutions, universities, and prominent artists to display, present, re-produce, and sometimes perform significant visual work from the previous four years. The Prague Quadrennial is a convergence of designers, performers, architects, theoreticians, historians, visual artists, and cultural advocates. Its history includes twelve quadrennials spanning the height of the Cold War, the Velvet Revolution, and the beginning of a new millennium. By 2011, the Prague Quadrennial spread throughout the city utilizing presentation spaces including: the National Gallery’s Veletržní Palace, St. Anne’s Church, DAMU (Theatre Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague), the piazzetta outside the National Theatre, and other urban locations for site-specific work. Representatives from sixty-two countries participated in one or more sections: the countries and regions section (hereafter, referred to as the national section), the student section and the architecture section.

After the completion of the 2011 Prague Quadrennial, organizers claimed that “over 50,000 spectators visited more than 15,000 m² [square meters] of exhibitions consisting of installations, photo exhibitions, videos, and live performances, and more than 500 events,
workshops, performances, presentations, lectures, and discussions.”¹ The event’s attendance figures included thousands of international theatre artists, educators, performance students, architects, curious tourists, and the local city population. It was a massive site of expression, experimentation, investigation and deliberation.

Understanding this cultural nexus between practitioners and attendees is critical to comprehending the Prague Quadrennial’s mission and impact. Its mission constantly evolves with each iteration as new Prague Quadrennial artistic teams, curatorial concepts, technologies, and exhibition strategies occur. The resultant archive, consisting of individual designs, ‘national’ art installations, exhibition catalogues, international collaborations and live performances, initiates discussions on the vitality of contemporary scenography. During the last three Prague Quadrennials, in an attempt to overcome ephemerality and the separation of design from performance, organizers established the event as a performative site, evolving beyond a static performance archive or museum piece. The spectator became essential to the Quadrennial’s considerations of theatre performance – interpreting the new curatorial performance narratives imposed on top of the existent performance archive. In the last decade, the spectator became the primary focus of the Prague Quadrennial which led to professional workshops, performance research projects, conference presentations and artist talkbacks unpacking significant developments during and between each quadrennial. Ultimately, the Prague Quadrennial’s organizers integrate these ephemeral presentations, workshops, and projects into deliberations about scenography, performance design, and exhibition.

As a consequence of the Prague Quadrennial’s continual evolution, its boundaries are constantly critiqued and under debate by its participants. Recently, the Prague Quadrennial’s organizers changed the event’s focus moving away from existing preconceptions of design exhibition and toward an inclusive understanding of visual design. In order to prepare an audience for this terminological and philosophical shift, the event organizers stated in a 2011 Prague Quadrennial promotional flyer that “. . . the Prague Quadrennial International Exhibition of Scenography and Theatre Architecture is changing its name to the Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space, with the goal of including a wider scope of artistic disciplines and genres, to break down the often imaginary differences between them.”

In the same promotional flyer, the artistic team highlighted potential opportunities as “PQ 2011 will look at scenography as a discipline existing in between the visual and performing arts, using the best of both worlds, thereby creating a dialogue between the two arts – a dialogue too often missed out on.”

In establishing a new discourse for the event, Prague Quadrennial’s artistic leadership repositioned visual design in relation to performative practice. The flyer challenged its readers to acknowledge absent dialogue, formulate new thoughts, and initiate discussions concerning the intersections and overlapping spaces of visual and performative arts.

At the start of each four year cycle, the Prague Quadrennial’s artistic teams established guidelines framing the event’s explorations of the nature of scenography and the influence of space. During the Prague Quadrennial’s evolution, each artistic team had different visions for developing future events. These changes influenced curatorial themes and exhibition formats.

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3 Ibid.
National curatorial teams, which also changed throughout the Prague Quadrennial’s history, were charged with interpreting the Prague Quadrennial’s artistic vision statement and thematic guidelines. Inevitably, the curators merged their own understandings of scenography, their application of the Prague Quadrennial’s vision and their approach to design exhibition, with design work from the previous four years. When the Prague Quadrennial’s artistic staff refined their terminologies during their conceptual process, their analysis of scenography and performance design exposed terminological inconsistencies amongst similar artistic disciplines. In 2011, the terminological boundaries were brought into question which encouraged curatorial teams to delineate new boundaries and limitations, testing the theoretical parameters of new artistic concepts.

For this dissertation, I explore several claims made by those organizing the Prague Quadrennial, curatorial participants, and academic spectators as they define the Quadrennial’s performance space with regards to scenography and performance design. My investigation into the Prague Quadrennial’s shift examines the boundaries of visual performance. I ask: what is gained (and lost) by defining the space as scenography versus performance design? While the Prague Quadrennial’s change in leadership amplified this terminological shift, I believe it was the national curators who gave form to those theories by exploring the theoretical boundaries of scenography, performance design and exhibition through the realization of national exhibitions. In order to understand the magnitude of the Prague Quadrennial’s shifts, particularly from the 2007 Prague Quadrennial to the 2011 Prague Quadrennial, one must first understand how the event structures the spectator’s visual experience.
Introduction to Research Subject, Design Exhibition

During the course of the twentieth-century, prominent theatre designers have sought ways to share their revolutionary ideas and remarkable work with a more extensive audience beyond the original production’s economic and geographical limitations. Theoretical writings, practical textbooks, speaking engagements, and design exhibitions have been traditional communication methods for designers to share their work. However, the process of sharing design work by prominent international artists has been fraught with difficulties. Whether Stanley McCandless’ textbook, *A Method of Lighting the Stage*, Robert Edmond Jones’ *The Dramatic Imagination*, or the professional design exhibitions in New York City which influenced the early stages of twentieth-century American theatre, a single common trait emerged restricting the overall impact: the inability to articulate time. The audience cannot return to the historical production. The design has been separated from its original context. Throughout theatrical design history, the archive has been confined by its inability to reflect the complexities of the designer’s work as a temporal art form.

Theatrical design is inherently linked to the dimension of time. By its nature as a performance, theatre is an artistic medium which must communicate through time. In traditional design exhibitions, without the performance habituating within space providing temporal context, the design must alone convey a sense of both plot and time. During exhibitions, curators separate the visual object from the performative action it was created to support. The remains of a realized production of *King Lear* may include scenic models, photographs of noteworthy moments within the play’s action, and physical costumes; however, all of these are removed from their original context of time and space. These static, inanimate objects from the past are asked to represent the production long after the performers have taken their final bows.
However, the substitution of the original production sites for an alternative viewing environment is most significantly difficult when curators present the design archive. The performance may have been realized in a traditional performance space, on a theatre stage; however, the context has radically shifted when a design is asked to represent a performance at an exhibition. In most cases, the exhibit’s spectators are no longer in the original performance space. A new space containing both the audience and objects has radically changed their spatial relationships. Consequently, the new site alters the audience’s readership of the production archive and the audience reacts differently to the visual stimuli. The isolated object becomes intellectualized – as spectators dissect the artifact removed from its constructed environment and recontextualize its intent. The eventual analysis becomes problematic, as the archive audience’s understanding of the object moves beyond the scope of its original creation and purpose.

As Arnold Aronson notes “[t]heater is a temporal art – it can be comprehended only as it unfolds through time.” Consequently, when design exhibitions separate theatrical performance into a visual object removed from its performative action, our analysis tends to dismiss the temporal dimension. The spectator cannot reclaim the past with perfect clarity. Instead, the audience reinterprets the archive within the new present moment. A true reconstruction of the performative stage action is impossible, as it is rooted in an ephemeral moment. Barring video or audio recordings, design objects as the production’s surviving residue must inform us about the performance and its kinetic action. The performer is no longer there to activate the object. In this instance, for the first time since the initial production meetings, the design speaks for the production – but it cannot speak for the past. For that reason, theatre design exhibition becomes a

victim of its ephemeral nature, the very thing that makes theatre unique. Theatrical design is
difficult to exhibit as Art. Not surprisingly, there is considerable debate within the theatre design
community regarding effective archival methods to represent past theatre designs. Designers
address this dilemma in different ways. Scenic designers traditionally communicate through still
photographs, artist renderings, and hand-crafted scale models, all of which present the
production as a piece of architecture, temporarily devoid of human interaction. Costume
designers struggle to find a context for beautiful costumes without the individuals who filled
those pieces; the costumes become imperfect fashion pieces and ethnographic facsimiles of the
production archive. Lighting designers struggle with temporal elements, in trying to show the
precision of lighting changes and technological production elements, while being subverted with
poor quality cameras which distort lighting effects. Finally, sound designers struggle with
sensory deprivation. Exhibiting sound designers must contextualize the design without the visual
stimulus that theatre feeds upon, not to mention the fundamental shift in listening as sound
designs are transferred from acoustic space to an exhibition hall’s earphones. In all of these
cases, the presentation of theatrical design as Art is marred by the challenges of resituating
designs beyond the contexts of the live performances for which they were created.

Despite these struggles, international theatrical designers continue exhibiting design for a
viewing audience. The Prague Quadrennial was an inheritor of the twentieth-century Modernist
exhibition movement during which major designers and design theorists were brought to
international attention. This movement included the 1922 International Theatre Exhibition in
Amsterdam showcasing both Adolphe Appia’s designs and Edward Gordon Craig’s theoretical
work, as well as the 1919 Bourgeois Galleries exhibition featuring American New Stagecraft
designers Robert Edmond Jones, Joseph Urban, Norman Bel Geddes and others. The Prague Quadrennial was particularly indebted to the São Paulo Biennale International Exposition of Fine Arts of the late 1950’s and early 1960s in addition to the 1958 Brussels World’s Fair where Czech scenographers achieved international recognition. Continuing this tradition, since 1967 (the year of the first Prague Quadrennial), the Prague Quadrennial’s organizers have endeavored to find new ways to express, experience, and explore the boundaries of international theatrical design. The first Prague Quadrennial, and indeed successive Prague Quadrennials following the event, provided a venue for the design community to interact with each other during the Cold War. As Brockett, Mitchell, and Hardberger note, “the PQ was the only event sanctioned by the Communist government that allowed artists from the West to come into contact with artists living and working under Soviet control.” Since then, the Prague Quadrennial has built from these historical roots as a design exhibition and expanded its influence. In 2011, the Prague Quadrennial consisted of organizations representing more than sixty countries from six continents. As an international event Brazilian scenographer Jose Carlos Serroni, president of the 2007 Prague Quadrennial jury, notes “[t]he PQ is the utmost of keenness in terms of sharing ideas, acknowledgement, apprenticeship, reflection and togetherness in this field – a unity of so many people from so many different places.” The Prague Quadrennial represents both the tearing down of boundaries and the creation of new perceptions of worldview. As a result,


6 Brockett, Mitchell, and Hardberger, 295-296.

national and transnational ideas on the practices of scenography and performance design are displayed, questioned, and debated.

Today’s Prague Quadrennial is sponsored jointly by the Arts and Theatre Institute and the Czech Government. During each four-year build-up to the event, Prague Quadrennial organizers explore potential arenas to position design within multiple contexts, including contemporary performance design, national cultural identities and explorations of current artistic practice. In one particular segment of the Prague Quadrennial, the national exhibition section, organizers contact professional organizations, government agencies, and artists to create thematic national art installations showcasing representative design work generated within their country over the previous four years around the pre-selected Quadrennial theme. At the Prague Quadrennial, an international jury grants awards on behalf of the organizers to exceptional national exhibitions, celebrating the thematic or conceptual approach towards scenography, as well as individual excellence in particular design fields. The Golden Triga, the major curatorial award at the Prague Quadrennial, is given to the national exhibition which captures the Prague Quadrennial’s jury’s attention demonstrating both artistic excellence and scenographic innovation. As Brockett, Mitchell, and Hardberger observe, “[t]he designers who represent nations that won the Golden Triga in recent Prague Quadrennials are held in high esteem. Selected by their peers, they exemplify the cutting edge of design in their countries and around the world.”8 Throughout the Prague Quadrennial’s history the Golden Triga exemplifies the event’s gradual shift from museum archive to thematic exhibition, and finally, to performance space.

8 Brockett, Mitchell, Hardberger, 340.
Further evidence of the worldwide impact of the Prague Quadrennial can be found in the international organizations that have significantly contributed to the Quadrennial such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Organization of Scenographers, Theatre Architects, and Technicians (OISTAT) – which is comprised of various professional theatre design organizations including the United States Institute for Theatre Technology (USITT) and the Society of British Theatre Designers (SBTD). These organizations have contributed additional programming (Scenofest, OISTAT, 2003-2011) as well as additional cultural awards (UNESCO Prize for the Promotion of the Arts, 1999 and 2007). Additionally, the Prague Quadrennial benefits from international funding, sponsorships, and governmental grants supporting its organizational mission. In 2011, Daniela Pařízková, Prague Quadrennial Executive Director, and Pavla Petrová, Arts and Theatre Institute Prague Quadrennial Director, emphasized the Prague Quadrennial’s impact within Europe:

Over the past few years and in collaboration with many different domestic and foreign partners, we have organized international theoretical symposia and artistic workshops, set up an online scenographic information portal, and arranged for the presentation of Intersection performances throughout Europe during the second half of 2011. For the realization of Intersection, the Arts and Theatre Institute received the largest EU [European Union] grant ever received by the Czech Republic in the area of culture.9

Pařízková and Petrová note how the Prague Quadrennial generates significant international interest, programmatic support, and cultural funding for its accompanying events. The Prague Quadrennial’s ability as a cultural organization to partner with global institutions strengthens the event’s impact on explorations of modern performance design and scenography.

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Contrasting PQ 2007’s Scenography against PQ 2011’s Performance Design

When the Prague Quadrennial’s artistic leadership changed between the 2007 Prague Quadrennial and the 2011 Prague Quadrennial a substantial shift occurred. The event was repositioned with a new title and a new emphasis on performance resulting in new scenographic applications beyond traditional theatre. Following the structure of previous iterations, the 2007 Prague Quadrennial organizers divided the exhibitions into four categories: the juried national exhibitions, the national student exhibitions, the national architecture exhibition, and a transnational event. These events were centralized on the grounds of the Industrial Palace.

For the 2011 Prague Quadrennial, its event organizers shifted their focus away from scenography to performance design. The event’s structure continued to utilize the traditional four major categories: professional, student, architecture, and transnational. However, the physical layout of the transnational event became decentralized, as transnational events and the architecture exhibition were spread across the city during the ten-day event. Sodja Lotker, artistic director for the 2011 Prague Quadrennial, explained the reasoning behind the first significant renaming of the event since its founding: “[i]n 2008, Prague Quadrennial changed its name from the International Exhibition of Scenography and Theatre Architecture to Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space in order to emphasize that it is an event beyond static exhibition as well as in an effort towards incorporating a large variety of performative disciplines.”

This new focus changed the curatorial approach when contextualizing visual design in performance. In an effort to move beyond static exhibition and its problematic representations, Lotker, along with her artistic team, expanded the event’s focus to include disciplines outside traditional

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theatre. At the 2011 Prague Quadrennial, national exhibit curators had significant reactions to this refocusing. Some national organizations ignored the mandate and presented a traditional conceptual art installation or art gallery exhibition. Others expanded their presentations beyond the traditional gallery exhibition towards more performative spaces.

I believe this shift from scenography to performance design demonstrates a fundamental change in the way that the international design community views their art. During the course of my dissertation, I examine at length both the 2007 and 2011 Prague Quadrennials to investigate this shift in theatrical design exhibition. This philosophical shift resulted from the Prague Quadrennial’s evolution as an event, as the Prague Quadrennial transitioned from a static, centralized exhibition space towards a decentralized exhibition format. In 2011, the event’s decentralization advances this philosophical shift toward performance design. The presentation site fractures with decentralization, thus altering the audience’s interaction with performance spaces, and encouraging them to question their interpretations of performance design, scenography, and visual design.

**Thematic Concepts Stemming from Research**

In her book, *Destination Culture*, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett categorized ethnographic objects displayed for a viewing museum audience into two non-mutually exclusive categories: *in situ* and *in context*. When we consider theatrical productions, the ethnographic objects are created *in context*. The construction of meaning comes through the combination of design choices made in support of a dramatic work. However, similar to most design exhibitions,  

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objects exhibited during the Prague Quadrennial are presented *in situ*, as the object is presented as a stand-alone fragment isolated from the original production. The traumatic separation of the artifact from the production causes significant difficulties in the exhibition of theatrical work, as the original production has been represented by only an imperfect artifact limited by space, time and technology. Since 1967, many curators presenting at the Prague Quadrennial have sought to re-contextualize *in context* production fragments for a new audience. In some cases, curators reconstructed the original production through an inclusive archive of visual fragments *in context*. In another approach, curators re-contextualized the production’s themes and importance within a nation’s performance history by positioning the design fragments in relation to other significant designs. Sometimes, the production’s design became secondary to the overall thematic approach and subservient to the curator’s objectives, thus creating *in situ* fragments. In the modern-day Prague Quadrennial’s exhibition environment, national section curators create cohesive, thematic visions from these imperfect artifacts. In most cases, the *in situ* artifact of the past theatrical creation, not only represents a specific production, but also represents the current status of theatrical design within a nation. As a result, the artifact’s *original* meaning dilutes when it must simultaneously operate as a multifunctional object representing the past and the present.

Within the larger context of a national exhibit, the artifact becomes isolated by the absence of supporting material from the original production. Regardless of the artistic re-contextualization, most Prague Quadrennial curatorial participants provide an *in context* narrative to aid the audience’s understanding of their exhibit’s thematic or curatorial approach. The resultant closed-ended contextualization provides a written narrative to bind the *in situ* artifacts together. Some curators, however, prefer to ‘let the exhibition speak for itself’ resulting in ‘open-ended’ audience reception. The audience must re-contextualize the objects based on a
visual narrative, placing greater strain on the *in situ* artifact’s ability to represent its original production in juxtaposition with other *in situ* artifacts. In both cases, the object is no longer controlled by the forces of a production and its agents; instead, it is controlled by an artistic curator with a different agenda.

I believe this recontextualization of theatrical artifacts during the Prague Quadrennial informs its audience about current trends in scenography and performance design. The curator’s transformation of the artifact into a contemporary piece of artwork forces the object, often as the sole representative from the original production, to take on new artistic meanings. The exhibit object becomes a cultural artifact of the present, telling a different narrative to its present day spectators. The 2007 United States National Exhibit was an example of recontextualization. The exhibit, shaped as a shattered cube, displayed scale models, video clips, still photographic production images, sound design clips and costume pieces representing the broad range of American scenography from 2002 to 2007. The sheer number of designers, production styles, and producing organizations featured provided a heightened understanding of American theatre practice beyond the commercial boundaries of Broadway. The exhibit demonstrated the cultural connections between contemporary events and theatre design. The 2007 United States national exhibition curators positioned the exhibit and contextualized its artifacts, in an American cultural consciousness for its international audience. It performed.

Cultural, artistic and nationalistic undertones persist within the event as national curators re-contextualize the exhibited fragments of theatrical productions. As curators conceptualize production artifacts, removed from their original productions, they place artifacts in a collage consisting of other artifacts similarly displaced. It is how curators contextualize these objects that creates meaning for an audience. In essence, the focus shifts due to the artifact’s interaction
with a new audience in a new context. The need ‘to speak’ for the present moment, to an
audience in this moment, supplants the historical production’s context and past audience.

Hypothetically, as an example, a curator could create a museum installation filled with artifacts
from a professional production of *Henry V*, placing objects from the original production
throughout the national exhibition space. An audience views the objects including a realized
costume for John Falstaff. This becomes highly problematic, since the character Falstaff does not
appear in Shakespeare’s *Henry V*. Many spectators may not realize this fact, as they focus on the
artistic brilliance of the production and the costume designer. In this situation, the curator has
decided to focus on artistic merit in order to showcase national design.

Alternatively, the curator could create an installation contextualizing various design
artifacts along with the *Henry V* Falstaff costume. In this case, the curator might establish a
dialogue about absent characters, who do not appear in original play scripts and yet appear on
stage in modern productions. John Falstaff’s costume could be placed alongside a particularly
controversial costume design of Godot from a production of *Waiting for Godot*. In so doing, the
curator would need to frame the exhibition to clarify for the spectators that these characters do
not traditionally appear onstage. This dialogue invites further discussions about the author’s role
within the realization and contextualization of their story. How much agency does the original
playwright have when an external organization produces their play? In some cases, the objects
are the hook to bring the audience into the installation. In the case of *Waiting for Godot*, adding
Godot as a costumed, on-stage character is a blatant infringement of Samuel Beckett’s authorship
of the play. It becomes the controversial draw, the unusual approach to the piece of dramatic
literature. It is not tolerated, nor should it be. However, in the case of Falstaff, practitioners turn a
blind eye to the infringement of Shakespeare’s manuscript. As the curator asks, *why,*
encouraging the audience to question the appearance of those characters, or lack thereof, the objects become secondary to the intellectual purpose of the exhibit.

The aforementioned examples are scenographic approaches to recontextualize an artifact for a contemporary audience. Throughout the Prague Quadrennial’s history, curators have gradually transitioned away from in situ presentations to in context presentations. They keep exploring new ways to contextualize past productions. In the two most recent Prague Quadrennials, these presentations have included action, performativity, and other kinetic approaches when displaying and contextualizing the archive for its audience.

**Significance of Research**

While there have been several journal articles published over the past twenty years, there is little written about the recent convergence of theatre design, scenography, and performance design in theatrical art installation. In researching this subject, I have not found a book on this subject as it pertains to the impact of the Prague Quadrennial as a site of scenographic negotiation. While I have found several books related to questions regarding the Quadrennial’s influence on our understanding of performance design and scenography, these texts are compilations of several academic essays bound together into a text. Additionally, there are three histories of the Prague Quadrennial: *Kronika Pražského Quadriennale* by Jarmila Gabrielová, *A Mirror of World Theatre: The Prague Quadrennial 1967-1991* by Vera Ptáčková, and *40 Years of the Prague Quadrennial* distributed by the Theatre Institute. There is also an addendum, *A Mirror of World Theatre II*, which considers the 1995 and 1999 Prague Quadrennials.

Supplementing this scholarship, the Prague Quadrennial and various national organizations
publish event catalogues archiving the event. Much of my research is drawn from these source materials.

In a published interview during the 2011 Prague Quadrennial, Daniela Pařízková responded to the uniqueness of the Prague Quadrennial “in comparison to similar events held abroad”\(^{12}\) stating

> it is the only one to focus on the visual side of contemporary theatre and the performing arts. Unlike other large events focusing on the visual arts, PQ has always, since its inception, been “grounded” in theatre. With the evolution of contemporary art, the last several years of the Quadrennial have naturally shifted away from traditional theatre and towards performance, installation, and visual events; still, its main purpose remains the presentation of the visual aspect of theatre.\(^{13}\)

This shift away from theatre and towards other performative practices needs to be examined further, especially given the continued shift away from both static art installations and scenography exhibitions and toward an international exhibition of performance. In response, I ask: does the inclusion of other performance fields significantly alter our understanding of visual design in performance? Thea Brejzek’s statement regarding the 2007 Prague Quadrennial would seem to suggest the answer is yes, as she observes “[t]he merging in practice of art, installation, and scenography denotes both the dissolution of formerly separated genres and the recognition of the production of space as a cultural practice.”\(^{14}\) Here Brejzek notes the great shift that will take place at the next PQ redefining scenography, performance design, and theatre on an international level. In 2011, the Prague Quadrennial artistic team’s efforts are an extension of this redefinition of space as cultural practice, placing performance and contemporary art at the forefront of our

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\(^{13}\) Ibid.

understanding of theatrical design and performance space. The Prague Quadrennial embodies an attempt by members of the international design community to situate shifting attitudes in design practice and competing methods of exhibition in order to encourage new visual aesthetics and advocate design’s significance within performance. I believe an in-depth scholarly study of this convergence between scenography and performance design could provide significant insights into how international professional theatrical organizations situate performance space as either an independent production entity or a necessary inseparable element within the larger context of performance.

Models and Methodology

Throughout this study, I propose to breakdown elements of the Prague Quadrennial through a methodology incorporating theories of scenography, performance design, and design exhibition. For scenographic theory, I will unpack the modes of contemporary international scenographic practice considering contributions by Pamela Howard, Arnold Aronson, and Thea Brejzek. When examining performance design, I will consider interviews provided by the Prague Quadrennial’s artistic team, including Sodja Lotker and Daniela Pařízková, as well as the national exhibition curators’ justification of their decisions with regard to performance design as a concept. Likewise, I will contrast how scholars package scenographic practice utilizing the terms scenography and performance design (Arnold Aronson, Sodja Lotker, Dorita Hannah, and Thea Brejek). These theoretical investigations into design exhibition, scenography and performance design are the focus of chapter two.

In chapter three, I investigate the Prague Quadrennial’s history as an international site of intellectual deliberation. I provide a recounting of the Quadrennial’s history as published by its
organizers from the first Prague Quadrennial in 1967 to the tenth Prague Quadrennial in 2003. I investigate common trends and themes in the historical narrative as they develop understandings of scenography and performance design. I examine how the Prague Quadrennial and its national exhibitions evolved throughout the quadrennial’s history, which set the stage for the major shift in the event’s focus between 2007 and 2011.

After establishing a scenographic history for the event, I concentrate on the most recent editions of the Prague Quadrennial in 2007 and 2011. This will be the focus of chapters four and five, as I delineate the shift from scenography to performance design as it impacts a spectator’s understanding of visual performance. In addition to these sources, I will provide my own personal reflections on the international exhibitions as a spectator who attended both the 2007 and 2011 Prague Quadrennials. In 2007, I received a grant from USITT to attend the 2007 PQ Study Tour, which included visiting cultural sites in Serbia, Croatia and Montenegro, in addition to attending the Prague Quadrennial. In 2011, I attended the event again, with a greater focus on the proceedings of the event for scholarly study. As a spectator attending both events, I believe my firsthand experience in witnessing the Prague Quadrennial’s exhibitions provides unique insight to the shift from scenography in 2007 to performance design in 2011.

It is important to note this personal aspect of my methodology. During my dissertation process, I was asked about my experiences and whether I kept a diary during my time in Prague. My first response was no, I had not. At the time, I was considering a full study of the Prague Quadrennial; however, after ten days on the 2007 PQ Study Tour, I wanted to experience the event without the anguish of writing a daily report. It occurred to me later in this analytical process that I had a diary after all. As a visual artist, I am particularly interested in photo-documentation. I view the object and experience its surroundings first as a spectator, then as a
traveler. Personally, as a photographer, I endeavor to experience the moment first – fully – and then archive an image for future reference. Oddly enough, I rarely take vacation photos to the extent I take photographs when I am traveling internationally for theatre events. However, when I am attending theatre events, I tend to photo-document ‘everything’ that I am engaged with as a memory archive. At each Prague Quadrennial, I took over a thousand photos of the event inadvertently creating a visual diary of the journey.

One constant in these images is the time-stamp provided on each file. Why is the time-stamp important? It provides a temporal archive of how I experienced the Prague Quadrennial. It locates my experiences by a sequence of events which seemed noteworthy at the given moment. Since, as a spectator, I could only experience the Quadrennial in a positivist sense of time, I made choices concerning which exhibits to view, the viewing order, and the time spent within each exhibit. Since my photographic archive informs my reception of each event, I will explicate these experiences when contrasting the 2007 and 2011 Prague Quadrennials. These photos will provide supporting documentation throughout chapters four and five.

Finally, in my concluding chapter, I consider the potential impact of the Quadrennial’s investigations and applications of scenography and performance design. Does the Quadrennial’s shift in event title and organizational purpose contribute to a new understanding of these terms and their application? Have the terms combined, so they are interchangeable? What is the impact of these changes? By answering these questions, I believe this document will provide a greater understanding of scenography, performance design and the shaping of theatrical spaces, which is closely linked to performance.
Scope and Limitations

Of course, in working on such a project, the potential scope is daunting as it combines the past forty years of Prague Quadrennial history, the history of theatrical design exhibition, exhibition theory and practice, scenographic theory and practice, and the theoretical underpinnings which connect national and international identities to the act of exhibition. Therefore, I plan to limit the scope of the project. I focus my study on the national exhibitions of the Prague Quadrennial, which I consider the primary exhibition section throughout the event’s history. Both the national exhibition and the architecture sections have been part of the Prague Quadrennial since its inception, yet only the national exhibition section provides a continuous vantage point from which to examine scenography and performance design. While I briefly comment on the student exhibition, the transnational performance spaces, and the architecture exhibition, my dissertation will not focus on these spaces. The composition of these events tend to focus on singular institutions or architectural spaces, and while these are noteworthy in themselves, there is a greater degree of flexibility when incorporating these three exhibition spaces within the larger construct of the Prague Quadrennial. Similarly, supporting cultural events and artistic endeavors surrounding the Prague Quadrennial will be separated from the main focus of my study, since these events are more autonomous from the events in the national exhibition hall and tend to be rooted in the present, as opposed to a reconfiguration of the archived past. These limitations focus my analysis on the primary venue of the Quadrennial: the national exhibitions.

There are many primary sources that provide information about the Prague Quadrennial; every four years these writings provide an institutionalized mission statement and justification for the event. The organization’s publications, such as the exhibition catalogues and the
supporting exhibition materials (flyers, daily schedules, posters), provide the voice of the
institution at the moment of publication representing the Prague Quadrennial. Other primary
sources, such as the Quadrennial’s daily magazine, provide additional information about the
Prague Quadrennial’s artistic collaborators through a series of interviews. Official histories of
the Prague Quadrennial, as related through DVDs and institutional web archives will support my
analysis of the institution’s mission throughout its history. Finally, the Prague Quadrennial
webpage provides a supporting archive of newsletter articles, publications, and catalogues which
have fallen out-of-print. These sources will supplement the historical narrative for years
preceding my two case studies.

Secondary sources, such as recent theoretical writings regarding the Prague
Quadrennial’s exhibition, scenographic theories considering theatrical design practice, and
contemporary exhibition theory have also proved useful. In most cases, these are sources
reflecting on the experience of the Prague Quadrennial from a scholarly spectator. Several
attempt to define or redefine the Prague Quadrennial. Others provide a self-reflective narrative
after experiencing the event, searching for thematic developments. In my study, these sources
provides a multiplicity of ‘voices’ towards a richer reception of the Prague Quadrennial’s ideas.

Lastly, I consider my own experiences. These include a combination of personal
memory, random jotted notes from miscellaneous symposia sessions, and photo documentation.
From this threshold, I analyze the Prague Quadrennial’s institutional shift from scenography to
performance design and react to perspectives brought forward by other scholars attending the
Quadrennial.
Conclusion

In 2011, artistic director Sodja Lotker stated that “Prague Quadrennial 2011 is questioning contemporary scenography – it is exploring when and where it is and what shapes and sizes it takes. Thought [sic] the expansion of ideas about the field we are pointing out to the expansion of the meaning of scenography within performance, to its active place in the making of the performance.”\textsuperscript{15} Lotker’s commentary positioned the Prague Quadrennial as a deliberation site about the future of scenography. Could our understanding of scenography be significantly expanded to include the impact of performance?

I investigate how the national exhibitions at the Prague Quadrennial provide a contested site of intellectual deliberation, which necessarily tests the Prague Quadrennial’s artistic statement of intent: to redefine our understanding of performance. I examine the efforts of the Prague Quadrennial’s primary artistic collaborators when creating an international exhibition focused on scenography and, more recently, performance design. I believe that an examination of the exhibit as a plural space, which functions as a historical archive and as a statement on design philosophy, can provide useful insights into the ways that the international design community looks at the future of twenty-first century scenography. Finally, in contrasting the philosophical shift from the 2007 Prague Quadrennial to 2011 Prague Quadrennial, I explore new methodological approaches in design exhibition and design theory as the Prague Quadrennial transitions away from scenography toward performance design.

CHAPTER 2.
PROBLEMS IN THEATRICAL DESIGN EXHIBITION

In this chapter, I examine theatrical design exhibition methods, while focusing on potential limitations within this mode of communication. I explore the complexities found in design exhibition, particularly when the spectator encounters an imperfect reconstruction of an archived performance. Since reclaiming original performances is unattainable, these challenges influence curatorial methods and reveal curatorial approaches toward scenography or performance design. These methodologies acknowledge design exhibition’s limitations, while reclaiming the historical past and repositioning its artifacts. This chapter explores several key concepts related to design exhibitions and scenography, including curatorial challenges, differing scenographic philosophies and artifact fragmentation.

In this chapter’s first section, I examine potential pitfalls within theatrical design exhibition. Theatre is, by its very nature, ephemeral. The theatrical design exhibit curator’s tasks include the presentation of production artifacts removed from their original functions and specific performance contexts. For my analysis, I use Thea Brejzek’s obstacles which curators face when negotiating curatorial, conceptual, and contextual challenges inherit within an international scenographic exhibition.1 Brejzek provides a framework to unpack the Prague Quadrennial’s national exhibitions utilizing three curatorial challenges.

In the following section, I consider the contextual challenges in greater detail. What negotiations take place as curators place ephemeral objects in action for an audience? Since this dissertation focuses on the philosophical shift from scenography to performance design and its

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application throughout a major design exhibition, I consider definitions for each. Furthermore, I
delineate the 2011 Prague Quadrennial artistic team’s use of scenography and performance
design, while contrasting scenography’s applications throughout the history of the event. This
historical foundation serves as the launching point for further examinations of scenographic
identity between 2007 and 2011 Prague Quadrennials in the rest of this dissertation.

Finally, I consider how fragmentation influences our perceptions when reading into an
exhibit’s contextualizations of the theatrical artifact. This investigation explores the fragmented
production artifacts displayed in the exhibit, the loss of ephemerally and the conflicted
“meaning” or agency of the displaced artifact. I support my analysis with claims by Arnold
Aronson, Dorita Hannah, and Sven Mehzoud in presenting artifacts for an audience as part of a
larger curatorial narrative.

**Pitfalls of Theatrical Design Exhibition**

International theatrical exhibitions can be challenging events for the convening organizer.
The incorporation of a wide variety of theatrical traditions and performance styles into an
organized collection representing the goals of the producing organization is a daunting task.
Essential organizational elements such as language, terminologies, definitions and organizational
purpose can shift dramatically after internal deliberations amongst the participating individuals
and groups. Finding trends, artistic or otherwise, becomes necessary for its leadership to stabilize
the exhibition’s purpose. Nonetheless, the open-ended nature of theatrical design exhibition
makes any trend discussion temporary at best. After viewing the 2007 Prague Quadrennial,
German theatre critic Thomas Irmer commented

There are no such things as major trends at the moment, I believe. . . . The immediacy of
performance with real actors in unique artistic designs may therefore become more
important than ever before. This alone should be a strong argument for the PQ which is, in fact, a never-ending dialogue about an infinite number of situations and approaches.\(^2\)

Irmer’s commentary reflects on the continuing approaches to overcome the ephemeral pitfalls of design exhibition. Given endless possibilities, how can the Prague Quadrennial’s leadership shape the event’s direction? Curators structure their exhibition around similar ephemeral limitations and confront Brejzek’s three limitations, whether curatorial, conceptual or contextual, as they reposition production fragments for new audiences. Does the artifact provide resonances of the absent production, or does the curator recontextualize the artifact toward a new scenographic concept? Alternatively, should an exhibition be a collection of multiple displaced artifacts resembling a museum? Additional curatorial limitations such as economics, the exhibition space and the Prague Quadrennial’s current artistic vision shape these decisions. In the end, these factors may overwhelm the artifacts’ capacity to represent a curatorial concept. Meanwhile, it is important to note how Brejzek identifies performance’s absence as key to these limitations. It is impossible to replicate interactions between the original performer and object without engaging one of Brejzek’s exhibition challenges. This key idea is critical for our understanding of the Prague Quadrennial.

*Positioning the Archive: Curatorial Pitfalls*

Brejzek’s first challenge is curatorial. In acknowledging that the original relationship between representational objects and the performance event can be no longer reclaimed, how do curators position the archive? Can curators construct a cohesive narrative for audiences who

have not seen the original production? In the 2011 Intersection Project curatorial catalogue, Sodja Lotker considered several dilemmas in exhibiting scenography, including the construction of narrative writing

Exhibiting scenography, performance design is a tricky thing because it can never be exhibited as a whole, as the art piece itself. Scenography is a) usually too big for a gallery space, b) a thing existing in time, in a dramaturgical sequence, having multiple ‘faces’ over the course of performance, and c) it is indivisible from the context of the specific performers, space, city, venue and other contexts of performance. The issue is, of course, connected to the problem of documenting performance, performance being something ephemeral and temporary and at its core ‘ungraspable’ for eternity.³

Lotker acknowledges the ephemeral nature of the production, as the original production’s social constructs exist beyond the exhibition’s capabilities. During the 2007 Prague Quadrennial, the United States national exhibition provided a clear example of Lotker’s ephemeral limitations for a scenography exhibition’s audience. The exhibition featured the scenic work of George Tsypin, and in particular his well-known West Side Story scenic design created for a production of the show which appeared at the Bregenz Festival in July 2003. The design’s major metaphorical element featured a New York City skyscraper leaning toward the stage, as if the building was falling. Interestingly, due to the festival’s protracted production calendar, the design was submitted prior to the destruction of the World Trade Center towers. It was too late to redesign the production as construction had already started.⁴ In 2007, this design metaphor strongly echoed the September 11 attacks for spectators at the Prague Quadrennial. As an American spectator at the 2007 Prague Quadrennial, the scenic design was astonishing 69 months after the

³ Sodja Lotker and Martina Černá, Intersection: Intimacy and Spectacle, 92.
attack; yet, I could not imagine the original Austrian audience’s reception on the lakeside city of Bregenz nearly four years earlier.

Lotker noted that “[e]xhibiting scenography requires curatorial strategies towards creating and re-creating exhibiting contexts – spatial and physical, as well as emotional, artistic, sociological or political.”5 Note, these challenges are rooted within two areas: the curator’s spatial limitations and the curator’s manipulation of the spectator’s interaction with the archive. Can the curator overcome the physical limitations of the exhibition site, the incomplete archive, and present the production’s essence for a new spectator? Alternatively, does the curator reposition ephemeral production artifacts to connect the spectator to past moments and past productions? When examining these questions, Arnold Aronson’s commentary on the curator’s dilemma is incredibly useful in unpacking the curatorial decisions that must be made. Aronson designates four distinct curatorial approaches:

1) Static documentation such as photographs; 2) kinetic documentation such as video; 3) presentation of artifacts of process such as models and renderings, or occasionally artifacts of performance such as costumes, props, or set pieces; or 4) substitutional displays in which the exhibit itself becomes a form of scenography.6

After defining these categories, Aronson exposes limitations with each approach. To summarize his argument, each of these options abandons a critical aspect of the ephemeral subject within the exhibition (performance). With static documentation “the temporal dimension is lost.”7 In essence, the spectator is without the reference point of action. Kinetic documentation condenses the dimension of depth, the spectator is without the reference point of the third-dimension. Exhibitions featuring production artifacts remove the connection between the object and the

5 Sodja Lotker and Martina Černá, Intersection: Intimacy and Spectacle, 92.
7 Ibid.
performer. Finally, substitutional exhibits remove the performance from the spectator’s understanding of the object. In order to combat these limitations, some curators blend these exhibition methodologies into a collective whole and mitigate the original production’s absence. This particular curatorial approach was evident in the 2007 and 2011 United States exhibitions. In particular, the curators for the 2011 United States national exhibition included short live performances next to scale-models and two-dimensional photography.

However, beyond the national exhibition section, Aronson contrasted the 2007 Prague Quadrennial’s exhibition hall to a museum observing that

> [m]ost museums of any size are segmented into rooms, each containing a group of work unified by some organizing feature – artist, period, genre, country, function, etc. No matter how ornate or architecturally interesting the museum is – think of St. Petersburg’s Hermitage – the focus is always on the display, with the shell in most cases no more than a momentary distraction; the contents of the museum are the unifying force. The visitor’s movement through the museum, often dictated by arrows, sequential numbers, or the architecture itself, creates a particular narrative. As with any narrative structure, it reflects the intention of the “author” – in this case the museum director or curator.8

Let us break down his analysis into two separate modes. First, the construction of the exhibition’s overall narrative must be examined. How should a spectator experience the event? What was the narrative’s sequence? The Prague Quadrennial’s national exhibition section, curated along the exhibition-wide theme, should provide this narrative. This was part of Aronson’s claim that “the contents of the museum are the unifying force.”9 However, in representation, the national exhibitions read as a loose confederation of artistic constituencies. All are aligned to the purpose of the Quadrennial, however, curators have agency to re-shape the individual narratives at their own pleasure. Furthermore, the Prague Quadrennial’s narrative

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9 Ibid.
approach is haphazard spatially for the spectators, as they choose their own paths through the exhibition hall. They read the Quadrennial according to their desires, shaping an individualized narrative beyond the control of the curators. Some exhibitions are located in privileged locations, near major entrances and exits, which unconsciously frame the spectator’s readership for the entire event. The spectators create their own narratives through selecting which exhibitions to view and in what order. In 2007, spectators entering the right wing of the Industrial Palace from the central hall were confronted with the cubical United States exhibition, with models, costumes, and projection screens. Immediately behind this exhibition was the controversial Polish exhibition, a magenta-pink tower reaching to the top of the Industrial Palace. It was difficult to ignore these exhibits. Meanwhile, some curators constricted the spectator’s ability to choose. By encouraging the audience to put on provided rain boots to enter the flooded 2007 Russian national exhibit, the curators placed a capacity limit for spectatorship. Allowing some spectators to view the exhibition when they first reach it, while forcing other spectators to come back later. I examine these choices in greater detail in chapter four.

Creating Meaning: Conceptual Pitfalls

While curatorial positioning lends itself toward an acknowledgement that the past ephemeral moment can never be fully reconstructed for the exhibition’s spectators, exhibiting scenography can be influenced by other factors. Scholars Anne Karin Ten Bosch, Liesbeth Groot Nibberlink, Trudi Maan and Nienke Scholts consider another possible challenge: conceptual meaning, noting

[w]hile many scholars seek to formulate new theories and concepts in order to capture the postdramatic, scenographers have created a rich yet partly neglected archive of experiences and practices in which temporality, visuality, spatio-corporeality, rhythm and
materiality are the main tools of structuring the stage. Scenography is both an art and a way of thinking. In their statement, the authors explore scenography’s intellectual foundations. The exhibition’s conceptual underpinnings reposition the exhibit’s components. In establishing curatorial narratives, curators author new scenographic spaces binding historical objects, represented productions and performance concepts together. Nonetheless, the concept’s effectiveness is reliant on the curator’s ability to construct a narrative with these disparate elements. Furthermore, without a strong sense of context, spectators need to rely on the new narrative to understand the artifact’s past and present significance.

It might be useful to consider the curator’s role alongside Stephen DiBenedetto’s thoughts regarding the scenographer’s purpose:

A scenographer is a god of sorts creating the world through the shaping of the lighting, the objects, the colours and movements. Without structure we quickly spiral out of Descartes’s universe into the blank expanses of a never-ending vacuum. Scenography as dramaturgical structure enables attendants to focus their attention on one aspect, on one sensation, and guides them through their experiences so that they can comprehend.

Curators as scenographers also establish conceptual structures concentrating the spectator’s gaze in communicating their artistic objectives. When considering the continuing trend by Prague Quadrennial curators toward creating conceptual exhibits that dominate the performance archive, the conceptual approach represents an attempt to reengage the spectator from a single intellectual position. Lotker and Gough note in a co-authored editorial that “[s]cenography is not static. It is


unfixed and unstable and cannot be experienced from a static position.”12 The conceptualization of the scenographic archive allows curators the opportunity to create a singular performance narrative, enabling spectators to experience scenography from a singular position. This structuring fills the spatial void within the exhibition space, and provides opportunities for contextual reimaginings.

Connecting with the Spectator: Contextual Pitfalls

Although the conceptual and curatorial challenges are formidable, the contextual challenges are key in our analysis of the Prague Quadrennial as an exhibition of scenography. Providing context for the spectator’s reading of the exhibition is critical when understanding the curatorial statement and the original production itself. It offers a framework for readership. Brejzek emphasizes scenography’s connection to an audience, stating: “[e]mergent scenography requires and enables action, interaction, and communication rather than serving as a frame of action. The emphasis lies on the individual or the group interacting in and with space, thus defining space as a cultural and culturally dynamic, multi-authored product.”13 The artist and performers interact with each other and the performance space, while collaborating on a realized production. Moreover, the audience contributes to the exhibition’s scenography. As representatives of society and consumers of culture, the audience must be present at a performance for the exhibition to have impact.


Acknowledging these challenges and potential pitfalls, we need to explore the contextual challenges in greater detail. During the creation of a Prague Quadrennial national exhibition, the contextual challenges are formidable when positioning the production archive for a new audience. Lotker notes:

This relationship, a ‘live’ and ‘living’ meeting of audience/spectator and art/performance was taken as a crucial point in contemporary art and theatre, where artists are understood to be ‘context providers’ rather then ‘content providers,’ creating the potential for open dialogue with the audience. Space and spacing for performance as well as performance design were understood as one of the crucial dramaturgical aspects of creation of context in live performance, as well as of performative space in other disciplines.\(^\text{14}\)

The artist’s role as meditator between objects and audiences is essential to our understanding of scenography. However, Lotker leads us to a larger question. Since the concepts of ‘space’, ‘spacing’ and ‘performance design’ offers a multiplicity of definitions and approaches, does the audience have agency to influence the performance’s contexts beyond dialogue?

**Scenography: Definitions**

What does scenography represent? Pamela Howard’s noteworthy analysis in her prominent text, *What is Scenography?*, explores the scenographer’s role. An internationally respected scenographer and educator, Pamela Howard compares the historical foundations of the scenography with her philosophical approach, stating

[s]cenography describes a holistic approach to making theatre from the visual perspective. It derives from the Greek *sceno-grafika*, and translated in the common understanding as “the writing of the stage space – l’écriture scènique”. It is an international theatre word. . . . At the same time, scenography and scenographers are taking a different path from theatre designers (often now mistaken for those who design

theatres) and are sometimes crossing the demarcation lines between direction and design, become joint creators of the mise en scène.  

Howard’s statement provides a historical continuity between Ancient Athenian scenography and her own application of the term. In multiple instances throughout her text, she situates scenography as a collaborative action between artistic equals which “demands parity.” When Howard provides her own theoretical definition of scenography, she summarizes that “[s]cenography is the seamless synthesis of space, text, research, art, actors, directors and spectators that contributes to an original creation.” This certainly is a starting point for considerations about scenography, and indeed, her text is quoted in several reference bibliographies in works examined within this study. However, it is one definition amongst many – a fact made clear in Howard’s preface. She draws attention to scenography’s multiplicity of meanings through a running list of invited international scholars and practitioners providing their own short definitions.

Howard serves as a gathering point for other scenography theorists to expand on her notions with their own definitions. These differing philosophies can be broken down into several categories. Howard’s response falls into a category of collaborative creation towards the realized vision. Another consideration of scenography contemplates its architectural connections, which influenced the Prague Quadrennial’s origins as an exhibition of scenography and theatre architecture. Canadian scholar Natalie Rewa considers scenography’s foundations within architectural history by tracing its origins to Vitruvius’ *De Architectura*:

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16 Ibid.
17 Ibid., 130.
18 Ibid., xiii-xvi.
Scenography in Vitruvius is a representation of the front of a building with the sides withdrawing into the background and in which all the lines meet in the centre of a circle. He did not apply the term to the theatre directly but employed this principle of perspective when he discussed the proportions of the *scaena* relative to the spectators and how to make theatre architecture sufficiently imposing as a civic building. When Sebastiano Serlio translated Vitruvius in the sixteenth century, his use for ‘scenography’ was related to perspectival paintings of buildings used as two-dimensional backdrops on the stage. As Christopher S. Wood points out, ‘scenography’ at this time had ‘a broader sense, for it can denote quite generally the application of optical laws to the visual art and architecture in their entirety: that is not only the rules for making flat pictures on flat surfaces, but also the rules of architectonic and plastic construction, insofar as the latter are interested in countering the distortions entailed in the process of seeing’ (see Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, 97).19

In Rewa’s scenographic history, the Ancient Roman architectural legacy becomes prominent, positioning design within a scientific or mathematical discipline. The connections to Italianate perspective rendering techniques are understandable. Rewa’s definition is deeply rooted in this architectural tradition. As she defines it:

*Scenography* emphasizes the “graphic” dimensions of the materiality of the performance – their eventfulness. Moreover, scenography is what comprises all the design categories – set, costumes, lights, and sound – modulating the focus of attention onto the spatial dynamics, the active presence of the performers in the given spaces, and the choices of materials which have entered the interpretative and creative vocabulary of the production.20

Notice the audience’s absence within Rewa’s definition. In fact, when considering the interaction within the space, Rewa commented “[s]ince scenography conceives of the performance environment as a kineasthetic contribution to choreographic rhythms, it can restrict the scope of the movement by the performers. Objects on stage mark the scale and proportions and punctuate the spatial relationships with the performers.”21 In Rewa’s definition, the audience’s vantage


21 Rewa, *Scenography in Canada: Selected Designers*, 120.
point does not matter in the construction of space. If objects create scale – the potential space – and the performers create action – the kinetic space – then the audience’s emotional response is unnecessary when defining space. When considering perspective rendering, the space is defined primarily by the vanishing point, which informs proportionality, and places a mirror opposite from the audience. Scale is defined by the performer’s relationship with the objects on stage creating a ‘realistic’ environment.

However, a third philosophical alternative can be found: scenography as a performative action. In *Performance Research*’s compilation of articles on the topic of scenography, editors Sodja Lotker and Richard Gough provided a new approach to scenographic theory, stating that scenography can be built or it can be found or it can be a combination of the two. It can be built by a scenographer, a collective of artists, an architect or nature itself. It can be found by an actor, a dancer or a spectator. What is important is that scenographies are environments that not only determine the context of performative actions, but that inspire us to act and that directly form our actions.22

Their definition places the performer and the spectator as the key scenographic ingredients for the performance. Scenography is a means toward creating both context and action, without which the environment is deprived of meaning. It may (or may not) be a seamless synthesis of its components; it may (or may not) be defined through the interaction with a performer. Scenography is a space where potential action is realized and, perhaps, even a space of undefined possibilities.

In examining scenography theory, three distinctive philosophies emerge through these definitions. Pamela Howard establishes scenography through Ancient Athenian theatre tradition as a collaborative fusion of artists, space and audience. Alternatively, Natalie Rewa situates her

22 Sodja Lotker and Richard Gough, 3-4.
definition from Ancient Roman and Italian Renaissance traditions. She positions performance space as the spatial, dynamic relationship between scenographic object and performer. Finally, Sodja Lotker and Richard Gough offer that scenography is any site, constructed or naturally occurring, influencing future actions of performers, artists and audiences. In understanding these possible ways to comprehend scenography, I examine the concept of performance design.

**Performance Design: Definitions**

Back in 2007, Arnold Aronson’s reflection on the Prague Quadrennial brought attention to a major systematic shift in the exhibition hall. Aronson, while reviewing the 2007 Prague Quadrennial, observed several commonalities and new tendencies displayed during the course of the exhibition. Aronson explored new potential ways to think about work that crosses the borders between stage design, art installation, and performance art . . .

The aesthetics seem to come from stage design, but it is employed more often for an “event” rather than for the unfolding of a narrative. More accurately, it is not used to support a performance as traditional design is expected to do (see Ian Herbert’s essay) – it is a central element within a performative act.23

Aronson’s statements are similar to statements made by Lotker and Brejzek during the run up to the 2011 Prague Quadrennial regarding the repositioning of scenography and performance design practice. While introducing her book, *Expanding Scenography: On the Authoring of Space*, Brejzek offered a pivot point for discussing scenography:

Scenography, however, discussed here as a transdisciplinary practice of the design of performative spaces can no longer be assigned to a singular genre – set design comes to mind – and a singular author. It is rather its fluid articulation of staging spaces between the disciplines of theatre, exhibition, media, and architecture that renders it particularly suitable to formulate speculative spaces of potentiality.24

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Likewise, Lotker’s definition of scenography includes a commentary on the distinctions between scenography and performance design noting that

[scenography is considered and used in the Prague Quadrennial terminology as an almost exact synonym of ‘performance design’. ‘Performance design’ is used here instead of ‘set design’ (that rings too close to setting and decoration), instead of ‘stage design’ (that limits scenography to the space of stage) and instead of ‘theatre design’ (that excludes a variety of performative genres).

Contemporary scenography performance design can be ‘built’ or ‘thought;’ it includes ‘invisible’ designs, scenographies that are not physically constructed.25

Lotker’s description of the Prague Quadrennial, where performance design is merely a close synonym for scenography, forces a question: why the two terms in the first place? If the two terms are similar to one another, then one could argue a there is a negligible philosophical shift between these concepts. However, this conclusion may not true. First, if we accept that the definition of scenography and understanding of scenography is already in flux, it becomes difficult to compare performance design with the multitude of applications of scenography. Our philosophical understanding of scenography is representative of several historical, practical and theoretical narratives contributing to modern scenographic theory. Is it possible that performance design could be subject to the same forces, especially when the term’s legitimacy is equated with a fluid definition of scenography? Second, we need to consider this question against the reflections of those curators participating in the Prague Quadrennial. For example, Maxie Götze, the curator of the student exhibit from Germany PQ 2011 responded to the shift saying “[t]he change of theme to “performance design,” I think, is going with the times. It is hard to have borders between scenography, design and art.”26 I believe scenography is far more complex than


the artistic statements pulling the national exhibitions together during the 2011 Prague Quadrennial. Scenography is interpreted by both spectators and participants alike. These observations regarding scenography’s complexities inform my dissertation’s core approach in analyzing scenographic philosophies and performance identities.

One Other Issue: Artifact Fragmentation

After the 2007 Prague Quadrennial, Aronson’s reflections on design exhibition provided additional considerations when reading into the archive. In the introductory section of his essay, “Exhibiting Scenography,” Aronson remarked on the futile nature of scenographic exhibition since

any attempt to capture a performance through a static medium is bound to fail on some level. Inevitably it can illustrate only a moment of a production – a shard, an afterimage, a fleeting glimpse that teases us with a promise of the whole. But in so doing, it unavoidably draws attention to what is not present. In a sense, an exhibition such as the Prague Quadrennial (PQ) is a manifestation of absence: absence of the performance, absence of the physical context, absence of the social milieu.27

What Aronson terms “manifestation of absence” deserves further investigation. When the artifact is displaced within its new environment, it is subject to the loss of ephemerally, fragmentation through interpretation and disassociation from its original societal setting.

First, curators must consider the artifact’s loss of the original, ephemeral production. Removing the artifact from the dramatic action removes a temporal connection for the object. In their considerations of curation, Dorita Hannah and Sven Mehzoud comment on the relationship between the artifact’s fragmentation and scenographic exhibition methodologies as

“[c]onventional curation seeks to make good the image through representations of past live

events. However the curated performance exhibition is not just a healing device recuperating the lost event. It also provides a lens to expose problems with conventional exhibits, which tend to refuse performance as an active contaminant.”28 In their statement, they draw attention to the loss of performance. The scenographic exhibition site functions beyond reclaiming the object’s original agency. It highlights the principal dilemma in reclaiming the archive. This is a sentiment similar to Pamela Howard’s, as she notes “[s]cenography is always incomplete until the performer steps into the playing space and engages with the audience.”29

Therefore, the artifact’s inability to function in isolation becomes critical. How does the artifact function when acting as a fragmented agent of meaning? During a scenographic exhibition, such as the Prague Quadrennial, curators contextualize artifacts far removed from their original environments for new audiences. The object is constructed as a scenographic object during the production process and comes into existence through the combination of artistic, technological and practical methodologies. The object’s historical, social, and political identities are researched and superimposed by the object’s creator. The object is placed within the performance and given relationships to performers on-stage through blocking and its relationship to other objects (including other physical objects, stage illumination, and sound). Also, the object has spatial relationships to performers off-stage. While hidden from an audience, the object still performs – as stagehands, performers and stage managers create patterns of movement for the object. Put simply, the object does not cease to exist once off-stage.


29 Howard, xix.
However, after the production closes, the object’s relationships with the performance are slowly stripped away. The scenic units providing the necessary spatial relationships to the object disappear over time. Performers, who wore costume pieces, find new work. Properties are catalogued and placed in storage. Scenic renderings, once vital to the production’s artistic vision and communication, are relegated to historical archives – to hang on the wall as a piece of art, to be given away to a colleague, to be filed away for some unknown collection as a memory device, or to be discarded since its primary function is complete. Finally, the object’s connections to society diminish. Over time, and without the cultural and ephemeral connections which bind the object to the present moment, the object becomes an artifact solely representing the past.

In all of these cases, the object reverts to a prior state, an artifact without scenographic purpose. It is within these moments that the artifact’s agency is lost. When recontextualized at a design exhibition, the curator subverts the artifact’s function and mitigates the scenographer’s artistic contributions. Aronson comments on the historical implications of this occurrence, noting

As photographic and digital documentation increase, those attending the exhibition, including (or especially) the scenographic artists, have decried the loss of the artifact. The aura attendant on the model, rendering, or the tangible costume outweighs the arguably more precise and accurate documentary depiction of the theatrical event. In such an event as the PQ, in which the scenographic is foregrounded and privileged over the performance, the desire – the need – for the tangible object created by the designer/artist’s own hands becomes insatiable.30

Aronson’s commentary reflects a fault line between performance and archive.

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Conclusion

All of the considerations brought forward during this chapter illustrate various difficulties confronting the Prague Quadrennial’s curators. By extension, the event’s organizers are confronted by similar challenges in the overall construction of the Prague Quadrennial itself. In many ways, these scenographic encounters during the exhibition contribute to the post-Quadrennial discussions regarding the theory and practice of design exhibition. Prior to the 2011 Prague Quadrennial, an event promotional flyer, the same flyer briefly mentioned during chapter one, documents these deliberations while preparing its future audience. The author states that “[t]he Prague Quadrennial will continue with the struggle of exhibiting performance, to capture the ungraspable and make eternal something that is a constant construction site, always temporary and never completely finished. A process eternally qualified as undefined and unfinished.”31 In this promotional statement, the organizers recognize the difficulties in presenting the performance archive, identifying potential limitations.

In doing so, the organizers comment on a continuing purpose for the Prague Quadrennial. The type-face choice in bold letters, “to capture the ungraspable” emphasizes the inabilities to overcome difficulties in representing the scenographic practice. The site is never at rest. Thus, the Prague Quadrennial distinguishes itself as site in flux, lending itself to dynamic discussions and future kinetic approaches. These discussions cannot be resolved, nor should they be. Perhaps this is why Thea Brejzek explained the 2011 Prague Quadrennial curatorial team’s approach this way:

We felt that this new focus and outlook that must be seen in line with an increasing merging in practice between the visual and the performing arts needed to be

31 Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space. Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space: at the still point of the turning world: poetry of motion. 3.
communicated and developed in a collaborative effort between PQ, curators of nations and regions and researchers from both artistic and theoretical practice over an extended time.\textsuperscript{32}

Brejzek emphasized the need to capture performance as a visual artifact existing between disciplines, which led toward discussions of producing the archive – its methodology, conceptual definitions and curatorial purpose.

The philosophical nature of scenography permeated discussions surrounding the last two Prague Quadrennials. Scenography’s boundaries were questioned. Practitioners and performance scholars identified new scenographic limitations. They explored performance design as a terminological expansion. Perhaps the most illuminating commentary on these ideas comes from British theatre scholar Ian Herbert. In reaction to the 2007 Prague Quadrennial, Herbert identifies two separate trends within the history of the event, stating

[t]he last forty years – the lifespan of the Quadrennial – have seen stage design follow two distinct paths. On the one route we find the designer-artists, often performers in their own work. . . . For most of these, design is performance, and the images they create are the intent and content of their work. . . .

On the other route there are the designer-craftsmen, working in the service of a text to illuminate it.\textsuperscript{33}

Herbert’s analysis highlights a schism within the curatorial visions of the Prague Quadrennial. He separates designer-artists and designer-craftsman, while contrasting the positioning of performance within the scenographic archive. In his conclusion, he advises the Quadrennial’s organizers to consider this split in future exhibitions.\textsuperscript{34} The curatorial divide comes into focus during discussions of scenography and performance design. In chapter three, I continue my

\textsuperscript{32} Thea Brejzek, “Expanding Scenography: On the Authoring of Space,” 8.

\textsuperscript{33} Ian Herbert, “Thoughts on PQ 07 – and PQs to Come” in Exhibition on the Stage: Reflections on the 2007 Prague Quadrennial, ed. Arnold Aronson (Prague: Arts Institute – Theatre Institute, 2008), 54.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 54.
analysis of scenographic identities at the Prague Quadrennial through an analysis of its history, primarily through its exhibition catalogues which publicly document the various national exhibitions’ curatorial ideas and the event’s artistic vision.
CHAPTER 3.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PRAGUE QUADRENNIAL

In this chapter, I explore key developments through the Prague Quadrennial’s history where performance, art installation, and scenography exhibition intersect. I track three major trends: the exhibition’s connection to Prague, the development of the conceptual exhibition, and the methods used by organizers, curators and individual designers to overcome design exhibition limitations. These trends, traced through the Prague Quadrennial’s history, indicate processes and methodologies culminating in the major philosophical shift realized during the 2011 Prague Quadrennial.

In investigating these trends throughout the Prague Quadrennial’s history, several primary sources serve as the chapter’s historical spine. A number of books published by the Arts and Theatre Institute discuss the Prague Quadrennial’s narrative history. These books include information about noteworthy artists, outstanding exhibitions, and the organizational forces that shaped the Prague Quadrennial. Perhaps the most complete analysis is provided by Vera Ptáčková, who received the first Prague Quadrennial gold medal for Best Publication for her study, in *A Mirror of World Theatre: The Prague Quadrennial 1967-1991*. Ptáčková considers the major designers and exhibition trends within the Prague Quadrennial’s history. After the 1999 Prague Quadrennial, the Arts and Theatre Institute, then known as the Theatre Institute, followed this publication with an addendum, *A Mirror of World Theatre II*, providing supplemental information on the 1995 and 1999 Prague Quadrennials. In 2007, two additional studies about the Prague Quadrennial’s history were published by the Theatre Institute. *Kronika Pražského Quadriennale*, by Jarmila Gabriélová, is a Czech language narrative of the quadrennial’s events through 2003. The other study is a DVD titled *40 Years of the Prague*
Quadrennial, which provides a synopsis from each Prague Quadrennial through 2003, along with short television video clips and photographic images. In addition to these sources, the Prague Quadrennial organizers published exhibition catalogs that documented the participants for each Prague Quadrennial. In some years, the catalog editors provided conceptual statements, photographs of individual design collaborations, and special event information. These primary sources, promoted by the Prague Quadrennial’s organizers, express the Prague Quadrennial’s mission and illuminate the three trends which I explore throughout the event’s history.

Prague Quadrennial and the City

In unpacking the trends throughout the Prague Quadrennial’s forty-seven year history, I first draw attention to the Prague Quadrennial’s relationship with the city. The exhibition site’s connection with the Czech Republic is not accidental. In her study of performance within an urban community, Jen Harvie asserts that theatre demonstrates “. . . the structures, social power dynamics, politics and economies also at work more broadly throughout the city. Theatre actually does more than demonstrate urban process, therefore: theatre is a part of urban process, producing urban experience and thereby producing the city itself.”1 I believe her thesis applies to the convergence between Prague and the Prague Quadrennial. The event serves the city beyond just an identifier for the city’s cultural identity; it exhibits the city as an international epicenter for contemporary performance practice. The Prague Quadrennial becomes a way to experience, interconnect and situate Czechoslovakian design within international theatre. The city of Prague, itself, advances the Prague Quadrennial’s international status.

1 Jen Harvie, Theatre & the City (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 7.
The first Prague Quadrennial was a culmination of successful Czechoslovakian design exhibitions presented during the 1950s and 1960s, particularly at the São Paulo Biennale International Exposition of Fine Arts, where Czechoslovakian designers Josef Svoboda, František Tröster, and Ladislav Vychodil won international recognition from 1959 to 1965. The São Paulo Biennale drew international attention to Czech scenographic practice. As a result, the Czech Ministry of Culture and the Theatre Institute organized the Prague Quadrennial to capitalize on the emergent international appreciation for Czechoslovakian theatrical style. In 1967 the Prague Quadrennial was established “in accordance with the institutions of the São Paulo Biennial” and showcased international design in the main competition section.

Meanwhile, a separate juried exhibition of Czechoslovakian scenography occurred, as exhibition attendees viewed the best in Czechoslovakian theatrical design and theatre architecture. Participants in the Czechoslovakian exhibition were awarded gold medals for stage and costume design – similar to the international participants in the national exhibitions section. This practice of dual exhibitions lasted for several quadrennials. It was only after the 1989 Velvet Revolution, starting with the 1991 Prague Quadrennial, that Czech and Slovakian participants and exhibitions were juried together with the international exhibitions.

In addition, the Prague Quadrennial’s organizers expanded the showcase of Czechoslovakian design through their event’s location. The 1967 Prague Quadrennial organizers compiled a special exhibition of Svoboda’s, Tröster’s, and Vychodil’s award-winning São Paulo

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The exhibition site, the Brussels Pavilion, was an internationally recognized venue by 1967. In 1958, Czechoslovakia participated in the Brussels World Expo, the first major world’s fair since the end of the Second World War, and sponsored the award-winning national pavilion. As Czech scenographer Josef Svoboda would later recollect in his memoirs:

It was our first participation in a world exhibition after 1945, our first display of our sense of the historical evolution of our art, and our first entry into competition with knowing the strength of our opponents. We were unusually lucky that those who prepared our exhibition understood that world exhibitions are first of all surveys of ideas, not buildings and objects, no matter how well made.4

Future Prague Quadrennial organizers echoed Svoboda’s thoughts that an international exhibition should serve as a generator for future discussion, a site for new ideas. This realization that design expositions can primarily contribute toward international dialogue, contrasts traditional aesthetic perceptions of a museum or art gallery; moreover, this approach distinguished the Prague Quadrennial as a site for international communication and professional networking.

As the authors of *A Mirror of World Theatre II* noted “... scenography, unlike any other art discipline, is tightly bound to a community’s destiny: formed by the present, it is happening here and now.”5 The Prague Quadrennial’s emphasis on scenography meaningfully linked Prague and the Czech Republic (including pre-Velvet Revolution Czechoslovakia) to the contemporary visual expressions of society found in the exhibition hall. First, the establishment of the Prague Quadrennial relied on the previous successes at the São Paulo Biennale and the

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Brussels World Exposition to build credibility for the organizers hosting a major international event. The Brussels Pavilion launched international appreciation for Czech architecture and Czech design style. Afterwards, the Czechoslovakian Brussels Pavilion was brought back to Prague and reassembled. 6 It was within this internationally recognized exhibition hall that the first four Prague Quadrennials took place. Second, the first Prague Quadrennial added a non-competitive section showcasing the “Czechoslovak laureates of the international art biennale in Sao Paulo, Brazil”7 This act lent credibility to Prague’s hosting of the event by displaying past international successes. Third, the major juried prize at the Prague Quadrennial, the Golden Triga, was “a small replica of a sculpture on the roof of the national theatre in Prague.”8 The city’s cultural legacy became the major icon of dramatic excellence for the Prague Quadrennial. In each case, the city appropriated elements from its own cultural past and present in order to advance the city’s status as an international site for performance design. Prague, and the nation at-large, staged its contributions to mid-twentieth century design style through hosting the Prague Quadrennial. Exemplifying Harvie’s theory that “theatre is a part of urban process”9 – Prague’s cultural icons and celebrated artists added legitimacy to the city’s international festival, thereby making the Prague Quadrennial performative as the event performs both Czech and international cultural identities.

Considering the Prague Quadrennial’s performativity as a vital part of an urban process becomes a groundbreaking act if one considers the historical context. How did a major

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6 Arts Institute - Theatre Institute, 40 Years of the Prague Quadrennial.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Harvie, 7.
international theatre exposition in communist-controlled Czechoslovakia find the agency to encourage countries inside and outside the Soviet-influenced bloc to communicate and share their cultural identities? In *A Mirror of World Theatre*, Vera Ptáčková offered a possible answer to that question noting, “[t]he international exhibition suddenly became an excellent democratic mask reinforcing totalitarian relations. Stage design could hardly do much damage; live theatre, however could not give such assurance.” 10 The Prague Quadrennial’s format provided opportunities to engage in a discourse not easily limited by the state. As Brockett, Mitchell and Hardberger note “they [the censors] paid little attention to visual elements of a [Czechoslovakian theatre] production, so designers and directors found ways to communicate with their audiences through scenography.”11 The innocence of stage design could be seen as a passive art form, where temporality is removed and action is constrained. As a fragment of a fully realized production, it could not perform language without a curator’s contextualization. The Prague Quadrennial’s governmental sponsors could be assured of a controlled museum installation instead of vibrant, unpredictable performances. Perhaps this is why, as Ptáčková’s continues, she reminds her reader that after the 1967 Prague Quadrennial “[t]he contacts which the first PQ began to build up with the theatres, ideas about a festival which would naturally link stage design with live theatre . . . were all discontinued.”12 These discussions must have been impacted by the Prague Spring in 1968. As Oscar Brockett noted “[i]n 1968 the vitality of Czech theatre was severely curtailed following the invasion by Warsaw Pact troops sent to end the liberalization that had been underway in Czechoslovakia. Many theatre directors were removed from their

10 Ptáčková, 49.

11 Brockett, Mitchell, and Hardberger, 295.

12 Ptáčková, 49.
posts and many plays were forbidden publication or production.”13 It would take over thirty years before live performance resurfaces as a concentrated effort at the Prague Quadrennial. Yet, according to the Theatre Institute, “. . . from 1968 to 1989 and even though it was overseen by strict censors, the PQ functioned as an oasis of artistic freedom as did many theatres in Czechoslovakia.”14 Over the event’s history, the Prague Quadrennial’s artistic leadership hoped that the event would serve as an international site for open-minded discussions about the advancement of theatre practice. As Jaroslav Molina, the 2003 Prague Quadrennial General Commissioner commented:

The reason for coming to the PQ over nearly 40 years, the reason why thousands of people from four continents gather here, is information. . . . In this way we come to another and much more important reason for the growing interest in the PQ, which is meeting each other. We feel instinctively that it is not enough to know the culture of others through pictures, photographs and videos, but that personal contact or at least a theatre event in common is necessary.15

The range of professional design work, scenographic experiments, and the variety of participating nations allowed the Prague Quadrennial the agenda to position itself as an international design festival. These exchanges endured Prague Spring and continued throughout the Cold War into the twenty-first century.

However, due to the impracticality of restaging performance, economic limitations forced exhibitors to find alternative, cost-efficient strategies to share their work without sacrificing context. Harvie, in Theatre & the City, defines the boundaries between cultural materialism and

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14 Arts Institute - Theatre Institute, 40 Years of the Prague Quadrennial.

performance analysis. In viewing the PQ through these two lenses, I apply her analysis to my examination of Prague’s relationship with the Prague Quadrennial. Harvie comments:

Both cultural materialism and performance analysis have advantages and limits. Cultural materialist analysis risks suggesting that making socially progressive theatre verges on the impossible because theatre is always so constrained by its material conditions. Conversely, performance analysis can give the impression that theatre and performance are infinitely progressive, offering us unlimited opportunities to reinvent ourselves with unlimited agency.16

The Prague Quadrennial’s historical narrative has been caught between these opposing forces. In 1967, the Golden Triga winning French exhibition noted that reconstituting the performance from artifacts is impossible, thus reconstituting meaning is impossible as well.17 Since the original performance is ephemeral, the archive cannot reclaim this moment. It is imperfect, and the original context morphs into new interpretations. In later years, Arnold Aronson noted that the impact of economics has resulted in “the increased use of projections and digital technologies to archive the production” resulting in the reduction of the physical objects’ presence.18 Over the Prague Quadrennial’s history, technology continues to enable the digitalization of the archive – providing a presentation strategy that is cost efficient in comparison with the transportation and upkeep of physical objects. Also, digital technology provides temporal representation for theatre designers – even as it sacrifices the audience’s agency to choose what to view (and in some cases, how to interpret). Despite modern solutions, contextual problems continue to exist.

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16 Harvie, 9-10.

17 Arts Institute - Theatre Institute, 40 Years of the Prague Quadrennial.

The Prague Quadrennial’s prominent challenge is the intellectual and artistic intersection of creativity and material constraints. In her study, Harvie comes to an interesting conclusion about this convergence:

[W]e have seen how the material conditions of theatre in the city seem to deprive us of social and material opportunities and how the performance practices of everyday life in the city seem to provide us with social opportunities to change, among other things, our material opportunities. We might certainly feel ambivalent, therefore, about the relationships of the theatre, performance and the city to social opportunity or, as we might otherwise name it, democracy. 19

In essence, is not the Prague Quadrennial a democracy of ideas as it includes design representation from a multitude of countries in a multitude of styles? The Prague Quadrennial’s participants, organizers, and curators breakdown geo-political boundaries between participants. As an international community of designers, they attempt to overcome these obstacles forming new theories about design exhibition, scenography, and performance design. They use the Prague Quadrennial as a venue to experiment with these theories and analyze the results. If yes, the event is a democracy of ideas, then I find Tim Etchells commentary on why cities are important in understanding theatre and culture at large applicable. It is “[b]ecause it layers commerce, manufacture, leisure, the political sphere – because it demands negotiation, compromise, co-operation, conflict, agreement in order to function, in order to move.” 20 If the Prague Quadrennial is a microcosm of the city, can the Prague Quadrennial become a temporary city itself, with its own structure, population, and culture? I believe the answer is yes, in a way, particularly as evidenced by the expansion of the Prague Quadrennial throughout its history as it evolved toward the 2011 Prague Quadrennial.

19 Harvie, 70-71.

20 Tim Etchells, foreword to Theatre & the City, by Jen Harvie (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), xii.

The first Prague Quadrennial, hosted in 1967, was titled the Prague Quadrennial of Scenography and Architecture (although, the English translation included in the 1967 exhibition catalog states “Theatre Design and Architecture” and the French is “Scenery and Architecture”). The event was held under the auspices of the Minister of Culture and Information and the mayor of Prague. The Czech Ministry of Culture tasked the Theatre Institute with organizing the 1967 Quadrennial. In establishing the Prague Quadrennial, the event organizers emphasized the major tenants of the organization, which they articulated in the PQ 1967 catalog, asserting that the Prague Quadrennial “is governed by the endeavour to illustrate the specific characteristics of stage design, the indivisibility of stage design and stage direction and all other elements of a dramatic work, stressing its synthetic character.” In this statement, the organizers situated their desire to emphasize stage design without removing its performance connections. This statement would be tested, explored, and renegotiated through twelve Prague Quadrennials.

In 1967, the Prague Quadrennial was set-up in four distinctive sections: a national exhibition of set and costume design consisting of international participants, a section of Czechoslovakian stage design, a theatre architecture section, and a thematic section based on an event-wide theme selected by the event organizers. There were twenty countries participating, including nations from Eastern Europe (Bulgaria, Poland, East Germany, the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia), Western Europe (France, Italy, the Netherlands, West Germany), Central Europe

\[21\] Ptáčková and Jindra, 1.

\[22\] Arts Institute - Theatre Institute, *40 Years of the Prague Quadrennial*.

\[23\] Ptáčková and Jindra, 16.
(Austria, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia), Scandinavia (Finland), South America (Brazil, Argentina), North America (Canada, Mexico), Asia (Japan), North Africa (Tunisia), and Oceania (Australia).

Two noteworthy exhibitions sustained interest beyond the 1967 Prague Quadrennial. First, the French exhibition established a baseline for exhibition strategy, which was rewarded by the Prague Quadrennial’s organizers with the first Golden Triga. France drew praise from the Theatre Institute’s commentary which emphasized the French exhibit’s “. . . group of cultivated mostly painted and drawn designs, although some designs contained architecture figures and fragments.”24 In their exhibit, two-dimensional drawings served as the initial link to the production, along with some isolated three-dimensional objects rounding out the displayed archive. This would be a strategy replicated by many national curators in future Prague Quadrennials and continued in 2011. However, the French exhibit also questioned the practicality of presenting theatrical design through archival display. French exhibition General Commissioner Yves Bonnat, after referencing the 1937 Czechoslovak exhibition in Paris, stated “[t]he French exhibitors at the Prague Quadrennial have no other ambition than to present the diversity of inspirations and styles of their contemporary art.”25 This conceptual statement from the first Golden Triga winner served as counterpoint to future discussions about design exhibition throughout the Prague Quadrennial’s history.

The second exhibition which drew attention was the German Democratic Republic’s national exhibition. This exhibition was headlined by the first scenography gold-medal winner

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24 Arts Institute - Theatre Institute, *40 Years of the Prague Quadrennial*.

25 Ptáčková and Jindra, 87.
Karl von Appen, who was a longtime collaborator with Bertolt Brecht. 26 In *A Mirror of World Theatre* Ptáčková stated:

Right at the start the East German exhibition contributed to the development of the PQ in that its creators did not only contemplate WHAT to exhibit but they also began to emphasize the importance of HOW. This HOW is rooted in the manner in which the whole work is to be brought closer using a part of it – the live production. This idea should be repeated frequently, for this attempt is a driving force and one of the greatest assets of the PQ. 27

Ptáčková illuminated a core issue in design exhibition. Not only does the fragmented artifact speak for an ephemeral performance event, but the spectator must be involved with this curatorial transformation, witnessing the fragment’s metamorphosis from production object to exhibition object. The East German exhibition moved theatre design exhibition from a static archival display towards a more active exhibition focused on engaging spectators. For Ptáčková, the Prague Quadrennial provided a means for the historical archive to be understood in the present by the Prague Quadrennial’s audience. These ideas launched the evolution of design exhibition in future Prague Quadrennials as curators worked on reconstituting past visual images for a contemporary audience.

*Prague Quadrennial 1971*

The second Prague Quadrennial expanded beyond the Brussels Pavilion and moved into the left wing of the Palace of Congress in Julius Fučík Park, a site later known to Prague Quadrennial attendees as the Industrial Palace. 28 For this edition of the event, design exhibitors

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26 Arts Institute - Theatre Institute, *40 Years of the Prague Quadrennial*.

27 Ptáčková, 10.

refined presentation techniques from the 1967 Prague Quadrennial. In a retrospective by *PQ Today*, the author noted “[t]he way in which the exhibits were presented changed even more than the content of the scenographic works. More large-scale models, objects and other media appeared, providing three-dimensional presentations of the production.” This commentary reveals an effort made to provide the audience with more detailed artifacts, representing the dimension of depth and a notion of scale with regard to scenography. There was a greater quantity of stage artifacts, representing various facets of realized productions, all seeking to connect the spectator to the original performance. Thus, the 1967 Prague Quadrennial’s quest to represent the production as fully as possible from production fragments continued to unfold.

There were several noteworthy aspects particular to this Prague Quadrennial. First, the Prague Quadrennial jury awarded the 1971 Golden Triga to the German Democratic Republic “in view of the work of Mr Horst Sagert.” This served as a template for future Prague Quadrennials where a single artist would dominate a national exhibition’s entry (the designer centered exhibition). Also, in this quadrennial, new boundaries were explored. A special gold medal for research was granted to Polish designers Józef Szajna, Jerzy Gurawski, Leokadie Serefinowicz and Zofia Wierchowicz “for their work on Shakespeare” In the Theatre Institute’s retrospective, they noted how “Poland once again presented an outstanding assortment filled with surreal creations and experimental spirit. An alternative space for Calderon’s *Constant Prince* was created by designer Jerzy Gurawski. . . .” Perhaps, by offering this special award,


31 Ibid.

32 Arts Institute - Theatre Institute, *40 Years of the Prague Quadrennial*.
the Prague Quadrennial recognized its potential to generate future discussions on scenography. The award recognized new concepts in scenography that were not necessarily tied with traditional visual styles, applauding scholarship and aesthetic variety.

A final noteworthy aspect was the inclusion of an internationally prominent artist to the exhibition: Salvador Dali. Dali, who made his legendary career primarily outside of theatre, came to the Prague Quadrennial showing another application of his artistic style. In a retrospective published in *PQ Today*, the author wrote “[o]f those exhibits that did not receive any awards, Salvador Dali’s designs for the classic production of *Don Juan of Tenoria* attracted the greatest amount of attention. The “King of Surrealism” bestowed the honour of displaying his theatre design works from his dreamlike world of fantasy.”33 However, despite his visually unique style, Dali did not receive formal recognition during the event. A possible justification for this slight may be found in the Theatre Institute’s DVD *40 Years of the Prague Quadrennial*, where the DVD’s commenter noted that “[t]he jury most likely did not want to be affected by Dali’s great fame and he did not receive an award.”34 While there would be many prominent theatrical designers, such as Svoboda, Serroni, and Koltai, whose work would become staples in the Prague Quadrennial’s history, the Prague Quadrennial would not see another international fine art superstar, like Dali, for decades.

The 1971 Prague Quadrennial continued several trends from the first Prague Quadrennial, which would permeate throughout future quadrennials. First, the production artifact was recontextualized in the exhibition and presented as an incomplete representative for the production. This new exhibition format offered resistance to traditional two-dimensional displays

33 “History of PQ 1979,” 3.

34 Arts Institute - Theatre Institute, *40 Years of the Prague Quadrennial*. 
consisting of production artwork and photography. Second, the awarding of the Golden Triga for a single artist’s contributions started a trend of notable personalities exhibiting at the Prague Quadrennial; however, all of these personalities (unlike Dali) would be centered in scenography. The centering of the 1971 Prague Quadrennial on theatre practitioners helped to create a recognizable design community with noted personalities and shared experiences. Ptáčková noted the 1971 Prague Quadrennial’s impact on the future 1975 Prague Quadrennial:

A partnership between the visitors to the exhibition and the exhibiting artists themselves began to develop. The visitor, now wiser from previous exhibitions, began to perceive and recognize the more important figures and emerging contexts. The fact that the stage designers began to notice each other had a great impact on the history of the discipline: nowhere, at any time, had they been given the opportunity to reflect their worth in such a broad context.35

Finally, organizers established the notion of awarding new scenographic ideas, encouraging new explorations of design space. These trends would serve as the intellectual foundation for spatial explorations of stage space during future Prague Quadrennials.

Prague Quadrennial 1975

Once again, there were four sections at the 1975 Prague Quadrennial: the stage and costume design section (national design exhibitions), the Czechoslovak stage and costume design, theatre architecture, and the thematic section. The thematic section for the 1975 Prague Quadrennial focused on schools of stage design. The Prague Quadrennial’s organizers justified this new inclusion: “It is formed by the expositions of individual stage design schools, conceived in such a manner as to provide a review of teaching methods and results achieved in the field of

35 Ptáčková, 89.
stage, costume and possibly architectural design.” The thematic section’s focus on educational institutions would result in a permanent change for future quadrennials as a non-competitive section featuring student work would become a mainstay.

The 1975 Prague Quadrennial’s conceptual vision focused on the junction between time and theatrical design. More specifically, organizers attempted to define temporal relationships between exhibited stage designs and scenography as part of a larger collaborative whole. Does time influence spectators reading into the objects found at the Prague Quadrennial? In order to successfully exhibit stage design’s role as an integral part of performance, exhibitors confronted the impact of time, its organizers stating that the Prague Quadrennial

.. endeavours to capture the specific and timely aspects of stage designing, which follow from its dramatic function and its capability of becoming integrated with the concept of the director and all other components of a dramatic work of art; therefore problems of theater architecture, especially as far [sic] the formation of the stage area is concerned, are also included.

In acknowledging the influences of time, the 1975 Prague Quadrennial organizers considered the integration of these production elements as temporally specific. As such, the flexibility of object meanings became another major consideration beyond the aesthetics of design exhibition. Arguably, this idea shifted the focus of the Prague Quadrennial’s presentation of design exhibition from “the indivisibility of stage design and stage direction and all other elements of a dramatic work” in 1967 toward an indivisibility of dimensionality in time and space. On another level, the impact of temporality was reflected in the scenographic style as well. In the

36 Vladimir Jindra, ed., PQ 75, trans. E. Malarová and Pražské (Prague: Theatre Institute, 1975), 14, Adobe PDF.

37 Jindra, 12.

38 Ptáčková and Jindra, 16.
Theatre Institute’s retrospective, they noted how: “[t]he Czechoslovakic exhibition presented acknowledged leaders in the field right next to representatives of the younger generation, protagonists of action design based on the variability of scenic objects. The term action design was first heard in connection with the PQ.”39 Similar to the Prague Quadrennial’s origins when organizers featured Czechoslavakian design from the Brussels World Exposition and the São Paulo Biennale, the 1975 Prague Quadrennial became the international launching point for a new sense of Czech design style and terminology. This engagement and development of cultural design styles and theories continued throughout the Prague Quadrennial’s evolution as a design exhibition, and reinforced its connection with Czech and Slovak cultures.

In addition to these considerations of space, time and locality, there was a refocused purpose of the Quadrennial’s major award, the Golden Triga, as the organizers stipulated in the PQ 1975 catalog:

The Committee of the 1975 Prague Quadrennial will, on the basis of recommendations made by the international jury, award the main prize, the Golden Triga, to one foreign exposition, for the best general arrangement, content, documentation and realization of the exhibit, for the artistic value of individual items and the general architectural concept of the exhibit.40

With this statement, organizers fused conceptual context with the traditional exhibition approach of noteworthy productions. A major shift occurred, which focused the Golden Triga both on the archived exhibition materials and the exhibition installation itself. Remember, in 1967, the Golden Triga was awarded to the French exhibition documenting French theatrical design with reference towards French post-war culture. The 1971 Golden Triga was given on the strength of

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39 Arts Institute - Theatre Institute, 40 Years of the Prague Quadrennial.

40 Jindra, 13.
Horst Segert’s contributions to the East German exhibition. In 1975, the Soviet Union received the award “for its cultivated sensibility especially for national drama and classical themes.” The 1975 Golden Triga indicated the shift towards the conceptual unity of an exhibition, which took into account both the production artifacts located within the exhibition hall and the viewing experience of the Prague Quadrennial’s spectators.

The 1975 Prague Quadrennial progressed the Prague Quadrennial in two distinctive ways. First, there was the attempt to overcome the fracturing of design from performance by acknowledging the impact of time. Second, there was an attempt to center the exhibition’s major award on the fusion of design exhibition and conceptual unity, which would impact future conceptual installations.

Prague Quadrennial 1979

The fourth Prague Quadrennial’s thematic section emphasized puppetry in design and performance. In their retrospective commentary, the PQ Today editors noted “[t]he Prague Quadrennial’s theme of “puppets” brought about a greatly increased public interest across the social spectrum as well as among all age groups. . . . The language of the artistic symbols, typical of the theatre of the East, attracted European theatre practitioners who were unhappy with stage illusion and realistic practices.” Again, we notice the influence of the audience on the display of the scenographic artifacts. It seems that the placement of the audience within the larger context of the exhibition hall finally entered the mainstream consciousness of the event

41 Arts Institute - Theatre Institute, 40 Years of the Prague Quadrennial.
43 Ibid.
organizers. The Prague Quadrennial started to evolve away from a static art exhibition, and acknowledged the spectator’s need to experience the event, similar to a live performance.

The Golden Triga was won by Great Britain. Twenty-eight years later, in a 2007 retrospective, the *PQ Today* editors noted how, in 1979, several British designers demonstrated excellence including “John Bury and Ralph Koltai, who brought a uniquely refined quality and aesthetic to their work; and the new costume designer David Short with his visionary hyperrealism.” Horst Segert of the German Democratic Republic won the Gold Medal for Scenography “with his imaginary and very funny creations for classic pieces.” In both cases, the jury contributed to the establishment of ‘star’ designers within the Prague Quadrennial community. John Bury and Ralph Koltai would be Prague Quadrennial regulars whose work frequently represented their country’s scenographic sensibilities. Likewise, Segert’s Gold Medal was his second major award at the Prague Quadrennial. Over the next twenty years they would be joined by several more acclaimed scenographers.

*Prague Quadrennial 1983*

The fifth Prague Quadrennial continued several emerging trends from previous quadrennials – most notably the merging of the conceptual approach with the design exhibition. In 1983, the thematic section’s conceptual unity was through the scenography and production design of Czech and Slovak operas. This was constraining subject matter for most participating countries, as professional productions of Czech and Slovak opera are uncommon, especially outside of the European continent. However, the Golden Triga winning exhibition from the

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45 Arts Institute - Theatre Institute, *40 Years of the Prague Quadrennial*. 
German Federal Republic (West Germany) found a way to merge their designers’ work with the thematic section’s primary requirement: create a unified installation. The German Federal Republic’s national exhibit encompassed their production archive of various Leoš Janáček opera designs with part of Jürgen Dreier’s set design for Kata Kabanova. A willowy field of reeds, a design element from the production, served as both floor and pathway for visitors to move through the West German exhibition. The experiential impact of this exhibit on the audience was significant for future Prague Quadrennials. The Theatre Institute noted that the West German installation “brought to the exhibition hall elements of theatre which allowed the audience to become actors for awhile.”

Likewise, Vera Ptáčková recognized the significance of this development for the future of the Prague Quadrennial, noting the jury “not only tolerated this irregularity but awarded the exhibition the Golden Triga! From the administrative point of view this triviality constituted a substantial breakthrough in the very construction of the festival, a breakthrough whose consequences were not to be recognized until the 1990s.”

This exhibition would be the realization of the ideas founded during the 1975 Prague Quadrennial: the merger of the exhibition with conceptual unity and the influence of ephemerality in design exhibition. The West German exhibition allowed its audience to experience design as a temporal entity through the installation. The audience physically connected to the past production.

Video recording, another new development at the 1983 Prague Quadrennial which attempted to overcome the separation of artifact and production, found its way into the national exhibitions. For the first time in the Prague Quadrennial’s history, the East German exhibition

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46 Arts Institute - Theatre Institute, *40 Years of the Prague Quadrennial*.

47 Ptáčková, 169.
brought video archived performance and contextualization of the artifact.\textsuperscript{48} Ptáčková noted the potential opportunities:

> It seems that the inspired installation of the documentation is capable of also giving the visitor a tangible perception, like the production itself, challenging the audience’s emotions; if the installation is sufficiently planned, it has a documentary value. Furthermore, those who had time could watch the production on video during the exhibition.\textsuperscript{49}

In future Quadrennials, curators would debate the benefits and challenges in representing design through video recording.

\textit{Prague Quadrennial 1987}

The sixth Prague Quadrennial punctuated the merger of static design exhibition with a performative theme; this trend was seen in the 1983 West German national exhibition and continued in 1987 with the Golden Triga winner, the United States. In the commentary from the 1987 Prague Quadrennial, the Theatre Institute noted “the PQ Jury surprised by awarding the Golden Triga to the USA, whose exhibit was entirely based on an installation effect, it was a hyper-realistic simulation of an artist’s workshop including the mess and bits of leftover food.\textsuperscript{50} The American national exhibit was a conceptual art installation displaying production photos from noteworthy designs, scenic models, costumes, and even realized lighting spread through four compartmentalized rooms. Arnold Aronson noted, “there was a costume shop, a scene designer’s studio, a lighting designer’s studio, and a West Coast art director’s office.”\textsuperscript{51} Contents

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{48}Ptáčková, 213.
\item \textsuperscript{49}Ptáčková, 172.
\item \textsuperscript{50}Arts Institute - Theatre Institute, \textit{40 Years of the Prague Quadrennial}.
\end{itemize}
inside the rooms included a drafting table with two lamps, straightedge, a pair of painted shoes next to brushes, stacked scenic models throughout the exhibition (including one with a coffee cup on it), slanted bookshelves, a television, and a stone angel statue. In retrospect, it was notable that this exhibition presented two previously underrepresented design areas at the Prague Quadrennial: lighting design and art direction.

However, it was not the models or costumes, nor the inclusion of the underrepresented production fields that won the Golden Triga for the United States. British designer John Bury, who served on the 1987 Prague Quadrennial jury, discussed the choice in a newsletter article after the quadrennial, stating that “[i]t was a fairly easy choice; the unique character of the American exhibit, and its popularity, was obvious from the moment their stand was opened.”52 Aronson’s post-Prague Quadrennial review agreed with this statement. He commented that while the idea of a unified exhibition was not new, the application by the United States production team was original. He noted that “[i]t was theatre. It was a setting designed for this space, with spectators as performers. It generated excitement.”53

It seems that the spectator’s role within the Prague Quadrennial became a major concern for curators in 1987. In *A Mirror of World Theatre*, Ptáčková commented

PQ 87 allowed for a greater understanding and perceptive ability on the part of the visitor; more and more exhibitors were becoming aware of the fact that the code has to be universally comprehensive and they tried to present the stage designs of known texts or librettos. Although the ordinary visitor knows surprisingly few dramatic texts well (excluding Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*), he knows at least the basic codes (Othello – jealousy, Medea – child murder etc.).54

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54 Ptáčková, 212.
Perhaps this is why the United States exhibition successfully reached its audience. It found a common denominator, the design studio, a site for artistic creation universal to most designers attending the Prague Quadrennial. For local spectators and tourists the exhibition provided insight to an unseen site: the designer’s creative space. The United States exhibition situated the production fragments in the spaces where the artifacts were first conceived by the artists.

Another controversial award was presented by the 1987 Prague Quadrennial’s jury. The gold medal in the thematic category went to the Soviet Union whose stylized approach to the exhibition resembled a house from one of Anton Chekhov’s plays, which surrounded Russian designs of Chekhovian plays. For reasons unclear, the Theatre Institute’s retrospective of this exhibition included the assertion that “[t]his award was not given as a cultural political offering to the Soviet Union.”\(^5^5\) This exhibition is noteworthy in my study, as the legacy of the 1987 national exhibition served as the foundation for Russia’s Golden Triga award-winning national exhibition twenty years later in 2007.


This was the first Prague Quadrennial after the Velvet Revolution, when the single-party state was dissolved after a month of peaceful protests including a general strike. A democratic state was established. Playwright and political activist Václav Havel became the nation’s first president after the Velvet Revolution. Consequently, the event’s organizers saw the 1991 Prague Quadrennial as having great potential. In the event’s catalog, its authors stated

> [t]he Prague Quadrennial of 1987 has concluded by the Czechoslovak Exhibition a certain chapter of its history. Those who are coming these days are bound to unravel the never ending parcel of tasks endlessly. After all, it concerns not scenography only; the best exhibitions of the Prague Quadrennial have always aimed to evaluate their broadest

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\(^{55}\) Arts Institute - Theatre Institute, *40 Years of the Prague Quadrennial*. 
possible interconnections. These being more and more identical with the horizons of our everyday reality, in the revolution of 1989 the Czechoslovak theatre has identified itself once more as its most integral part. This is why we tried to project our past space of life into the dramatic space of our exhibition. The actual state of evolution we consider to be a beginning perhaps rather chaotic — nevertheless necessary as a starting point for future development.56

It was anticipated that this iteration of the Prague Quadrennial would explore new ideas and concepts, test boundaries within performance, and significantly alter the exhibition. There were similar thoughts from across the globe. United States Institute for Theatre Technology President, Donald C. Shulman, noted

> every four years, the Prague Quadrennial allows theatre artists an opportunity to gather together and reflect on our cultural heritages, and to show our innovations and creativity to an audience of peers. The Quadrennial has an already established importance as the international festival in which theatre artists were able to meet even in times of national intransigence. Now there is added symbolism to this meeting in Prague as the Czech and Slovak nation is once again a center of freedom in an emerging world. The PQ ’91 will give theatre people around the world the opportunity to celebrate the theatre’s leadership in helping to make us one world.57

However, despite political and cultural shifts resulting from the Velvet Revolution, the Prague Quadrennial seemed to remain similar to previous exhibitions. Ptáčková noted “[t]he PQ 91 proved to be quite a surprise. We were expecting ideas, further variations on FORM (how), closely bound with the trend to use stage design for the expression of more general states. To express it not only with the theatre but also by living experiences. And what did it bring us? – an exhibition of the document.”58 In essence, the 1991 Prague Quadrennial returned to exhibition strategies from early Prague Quadrennials. Similar to the 1967, 1971 and 1975 Prague


58 Ptáčková, 250.
Quadrennials, the fragmentation of the design artifact from the performance returned, after the 1979, 1983, and 1987 Prague Quadrennials had made innovative strides beyond fragmented representation.

Noteworthy contributions during the 1991 Prague Quadrennial included work from British director Peter Brook, whose *Mahabharata* and *Tempest* were included in the French national exhibit, Brazilian designer Jose Carlos Serroni, Czech designer Josef Svoboda, Slovakian designer Ladislav Vychodil, Finnish national curator Tiina Makkonen, British scenographer Pamela Howard, and British set designer Ralph Koltai.

Conceptual installations continued as the preferred environment to support the displayed visual material. *A Mirror of World Theatre II* noted “[t]he tendency to substitute a viewer’s experience from the performance with an adequate exhibition sensation increased at PQ’91.”59 This was underscored by Great Britain’s Golden Triga winning exhibition (as Great Britain became the first nation to repeat as a Golden Triga winner). The Theatre Institute positively recorded “their solid and effective exhibition whose presentation was conceived as an aesthetic rubbish heap; models in the space, rising up out of the trash bin or industrial waste seemed like independent artistic artifacts which at the same time resonated with the basic drama of the productions.”60 Indeed, Ptáčková notes that “[t]he artefacts shown here were not ‘landscapes of the soul’, nor were they documents but, instead, a testimony to the production objective.”61 Great Britain’s exhibition fused three exhibition elements together: the artifact, the conceptual idea, and the artifact’s connection to the original production. However, the exhibition’s unity was not

59 Bílková, et al., 5.

60 Arts Institute - Theatre Institute, *40 Years of the Prague Quadrennial*.

61 Ptáčková, 253.
achieved through the fragmentation, with a piece representing the absent physical whole; but through centering, an artifact speaking toward the production’s scenographic origins and intentions.

Not surprisingly, several national exhibitions focused on the socio-political changes resulting from the end of the Cold War. The Czechoslovakian exhibition, participating for the first time in the competitive national exhibition section, focused on the concept “streets in the theatres, theatres in the streets [which] rose out of the experiences of the Velvet Revolution.”

Street performance, site specific performance venues and non-traditional spaces would be an important performance motif in later Prague Quadrennials, particularly during the decentralized 2011 Prague Quadrennial.

Prague Quadrennial 1995

For the first time in the Prague Quadrennial’s history, the thematic section was not separated from the other categories. Instead, the theme, “In Search of Stage Space,” was intended to encompass the entire exhibition. As such, “[t]he organizers were hoping that unusual connections would become apparent, new interesting ways would emerge.”

The Golden Triga was won by a team of designers from Brazil. The Brazilian national exhibition’s strength was the exciting work of one particular designer. Just as Horst Segert dominated East Germany’s award-winning exhibition in 1971, during the 1995 Prague Quadrennial, Brazilian scenographer Jose Carlos Serroni was featured at the Brazilian national

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62 Arts Institute - Theatre Institute, *40 Years of the Prague Quadrennial.*

63 Ibid.

64 Bílková, et al., 6.
exhibition. In the retrospective provided by the Theatre Institute, the design work “seemed as if his personality contained multiple artists from devotee of poor art and Baroque decorator.”65 Indeed, Serroni’s exhibited work was eclectic and included Zero 2 (an interchange ramp with a desolate concrete building wedged between the two ramps), Path of Salvation (a forest of poles and doorways) and Happy Days (a two-tiered mound, the first of light sand, the second of dirt and stone) representing a variety of artistic styles. In many ways, Serroni’s artistic dominance represented the apex of the designer dominated exhibition format. In the following four Prague Quadrennials, the jury would award the Golden Triga to design exhibitions featuring an assembled collection of design work from several designers conceptually bound together by the curatorial theme instead of a single designer focused exhibition.

In fact, there were several noteworthy conceptual exhibitions at the 1995 Prague Quadrennial. Due to the thematic section’s incorporation into the entire event, conceptual exhibitions dominated the 1995 Prague Quadrennial. The Japanese exhibition featured a circular sand garden in the middle of the exhibition. Sören Brunes, the curator for the Swiss national exhibition “installed a giant compressor, which for the duration of the exhibition was cruelly crushing thirty scene design models and other objects.”66 Both presentations were time-based, marking the transition toward conceptual art installations, performance, and temporal environments which would dominate the Prague Quadrennial in the 21st century.

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65 Arts Institute - Theatre Institute, 40 Years of the Prague Quadrennial.

66 Arts Institute - Theatre Institute, 40 Years of the Prague Quadrennial; Bilková, et al., 52.
Prague Quadrennial 1999

The divided competition and out-of-competition format, temporarily suspended during the 1995 Prague Quadrennial, was restored for the 1999 exhibition. The quadrennial’s theme, “Homage to Scenography,” provided curators with a wide range of opportunities to develop their installations. However, this indicated a change of approach for the Prague Quadrennial. In essence, the Prague Quadrennial was already a homage to scenographic practice. However, the 1999 Prague Quadrennial returned the focus to the investigation and artistic creation of scenography. It reconnected the visual archive with scenographic process and performance. Ptáčková noted the irony in this conceptual vision: “It is strange enough to set out an extra task, in the framework of an international scenography exhibition, stressing the fact that scenography is the point. It was as if the requirement of priority given to the graphic component had been splitting away from the requirement of complexity of the staging.”67 So, what distinguished this particular theme from the overall agenda of the Prague Quadrennial? In several cases, curators took this as an opportunity to highlight significant works by designers over several decades. This retrospective of scenographic history unexpectedly resulted in several events which transpired during the 1999 Prague Quadrennial, and then became features in future Prague Quadrennials. Most notably, performance emerged during the quadrennial. In front of the Industrial Palace, Prague Quadrennial organizers established Le Campement, a series of symposia and alternative theatres.68 Scenography exhibition was no longer separated from performance.

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67 Bílková, et al., 57.

68 Arts Institute - Theatre Institute, *40 Years of the Prague Quadrennial*. 
In 1999, the Czech Republic won the Golden Triga with their exhibition showcasing the design process from idea to realization and “the entire exposition was conceived as a labyrinth in which each participant had his or her own a corner.” The audience had to discover through the winding pathways the exhibition’s contents, which encouraged active spectatorship. Viewers needed to navigate each other, as well as the exhibition materials, in order to engage the exhibit. The Prague Quadrennial jury, consisting of established names from previous Prague Quadrennials including: Arnold Aronson (United States), Jerzy Gurawski (Poland), Maija Pekkanen (Finland), and Vera Ptáčková (Czech Republic), praised the Czech Republic’s approach. As the authors in *A Mirror of World Theatre II* noted, “. . . [this] trend to process the whole installation of the exhibition as a sort of theatre of its own has been coming into play for several years of the PQ, a trend to bet on direct, not mediated actuating. The jury expressed their sympathy to the ‘experimental’ way of presentation by awarding the Golden Triga to the Czech Republic’s exposition. . . .” This would return the Golden Triga to a strong conceptual, or thematic based, installation – similar to the 1983, 1987, and 1991 Prague Quadrennials. In the following two Prague Quadrennials (2007 and 2011), this emphasis on the thematic approach would continue.

Several national exhibits repositioned their artifacts to speak towards a larger construct of performance within culture. In Iceland’s national exhibition, curator Hlin Gunnarsdóttir drew attention to the present moment, noting “[i]nstead of bringing pieces from older productions, we have made a new ‘installation’ specifically for Prague. Our exhibition shows a ‘frozen moment’.

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69 Arts Institute - Theatre Institute, *40 Years of the Prague Quadrennial*.

70 Bílková, et al., 65.
We are waiting for the actor to come backstage, change his costume for his next role in a hurry, then run back on stage.” The historical archive was abandoned, as the curator stressed the performativity of the theatrical moment within space. The designs were discarded, as spectators considered the absence of the visual production archive. Likewise, the iconic South African national exhibition attempted to shift its audience’s viewpoint on design:

Our installation reflects the ongoing transformation process in our country since 1994 and its effect on our performing and visual arts. We have seen a strong African spirit emerge at a grassroots level and it is also now becoming evident in mainstream theatre, with dance and opera being most visible in this cross-cultural shift. There is a country-wide tendency to look to the African continent for inspiration, as opposed to Europe.

The South African exhibit challenged the spectators’ viewership of socio-political trends within the nation and its theatre. The exhibit’s curators positioned their scenographic practice as an alternative new voice with new thoughts and theories. Since the Prague Quadrennial was conceived from another international design exhibition, the São Paulo Biennale, to celebrate the ‘new’ Czech scenography against the background of socio-political change, it is fascinating that South Africa attempted to redefine scenographic style under similar significant societal transformations at the Prague Quadrennial.

**Prague Quadrennial 2003**

The tenth Prague Quadrennial’s organizers continued their expansion of the event’s parameters in their exploration of scenographic possibilities. Just as the Quadrennial extended its boundaries to include Le Campement in 1999, Prague Quadrennial 2003’s exhibition space was...


72 Albertová et al., 153.
once again expanded beyond the walls of the Industrial Palace. In *40 Years of the Prague Quadrennial*, the narrator explained that “[t]his PQ wasn’t just a place with static exhibitions, the Industrial Palace and its adjacent surroundings were turned into theatre spaces by the different performances that took place.” This was the first Prague Quadrennial where two transnational events occurred. Ondřej Černý, artistic director of the Prague Quadrennial noted “[t]his year, by means of the interactive project, The Heart of PQ, we have extended the structure of the PQ: we have planted a new ambition into its womb – something comparable to the Venice Biennale, for example. Our own programme – that is our own dramaturgy – asserts itself in addition to the individual national exhibitions.” Černý positions the event to expand the Prague Quadrennial beyond its exhibition structure. The Heart of the PQ was an experiment to fuse scholarship, visual design practice and performance into a transnational event developed alongside the Prague Quadrennial’s structure. It was framed by the five senses: “... it was an imposing divided structure on which and in which on all levels audience and performers met and broke off and together created chaos and relaxation. The heart also had symbolic value, the chambers representing the five human senses; sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste.” The Heart of the PQ bridged the two exhibition halls within the Industrial Palace and continued the Prague Quadrennial’s evolution toward performance design rooted in the present moment.

The second program, Scenofest, was sponsored by the International Organization of Scenographers, Theatre Architects, and Technicians (OISTAT). According to the Chair of

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73 Arts Institute - Theatre Institute, *40 Years of the Prague Quadrennial*.


75 Arts Institute - Theatre Institute, *40 Years of the Prague Quadrennial*. 
OISTAT’s Education Commission, Michael Ramsaur, “The aim is ‘to enhance the student experience at PQ’ with a full and exciting daily program of lecturers, workshops and presentations by the best designers of the world.” Scenofest would also be an important component of the 2007 and 2011 Prague Quadrennials with each slowly expanding its geographic reach further beyond the exhibition hall’s confines and its programming reach engaging emerging artists.

Looking toward the 11th Prague Quadrennial

Over the course of the Prague Quadrennial’s history three major trends took place. The first trend, the growing symbiotic relationship between the event and the city, occurred due to the close link between the city’s history and the Prague Quadrennial. The event’s response to socio-political events throughout its history enabled its organizers to successfully position the Prague Quadrennial as a crossroads for international communication. After the Velvet Revolution, the Prague Quadrennial’s exhibition footprint slowly moved beyond the interior walls of the exhibition space, breaching onto exhibition grounds and, finally, into the city itself. This particular aspect of the event significantly developed during the 2007 and 2011 Prague Quadrennials.

The second trend, the repositioning of production artifacts for the Prague Quadrennial’s audience through the establishment of conceptual, ephemeral, performance-based exhibitions, represented changing exhibition strategies. This trend resulted in new scenographic theories.

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being applied within the national exhibition spaces. Innovative curatorial strategies were
developed to contextualize ephemeral production fragments for new audiences.

These developments exposed the Prague Quadrennial’s third trend, the continued struggle
going against ephemerality. However, theatre’s ephemerality does not need to be the event’s weakness,
as 2003 Prague Quadrennial General Commissioner Jaroslav Malina notes:

Every stage design is transient, it perishes with the end of the production for
which it was intended. Its short life is for very often played out in the field of popular
culture. Its memory – photographs of it, designs, exhibits, can penetrate the field of elite
culture: museums and galleries. Its transient life is thus lengthened and experiences a new
interpretation with each person who projects into it. Its transience becomes its strength.\footnote{Malina, 21.}

I believe Malina articulates how the Prague Quadrennial endures as exhibition space while
celebrating ephemeral artifacts from short-lived productions. The Prague Quadrennial’s curators
instill new meanings for the ephemeral artifacts found within the exhibition hall and connect
objects to new audiences with new purposes. The artifact has a new purpose, which is more
meaningful when contrasted against its previous role as a representative of a historical
production. The Prague Quadrennial enables ephemeral objects to represent a society’s cultural
core through scenography. I investigate these concepts further in my analysis of the 2007 and
2011 Prague Quadrennials.
CHAPTER 4.
THE 2007 PRAGUE QUADRENNIAL AND SCENOGRAPHY

In 2007, Václav Klaus, President of the Czech Republic, commented on the event’s significance before the 2007 Prague Quadrennial:

Over the last four decades the Prague Quadrennial has evolved into a renowned celebration of international scenography. The previous one – if I understand it – sought to use the exhibition space to create an image of the world: the various national displays were arranged not according to some abstract key, but by geography. One merged into the next, together they built up into continents and thus we were treated to a nutshell rendition of the world we live in. The world seen through the eyes of scenographers is highly diverse, full of artistic parables and conceits far removed from our daily lives.¹

Klaus positioned the Prague Quadrennial as a site of cultural convergence. The Prague Quadrennial continued as an artistic representation of not only theatre, but the world itself. In these “far removed” stories within the Industrial Palace, scenographers brought the world to a local audience (figure 1).

Figure 1. The Industrial Palace during the 2007 Prague Quadrennial. Photograph by Carl Walling, June 2007.

¹ Václav Klaus, introduction to PQ07 Prague Quadrennial, eds. Lucie Čepcová, Daniela Pařízková, and Ondřej Svoboda, trans. Pavla Matášková and David Short (Prague: Arts Institute – Theatre Institute, 2007), 8.
Expanding on Klaus’ recognition of the Prague Quadrennial’s significance, I offer that the 2007 Prague Quadrennial continues the event’s evolution from its origins. In this chapter, I investigate the 2007 Prague Quadrennial national exhibits and their explorations of scenography and exhibition design. Building my analysis on twenty-first century scenographic scholarship, particularly Arnold Aronson’s work, I identify four approaches in theatrical exhibition by the curatorial teams: designer-centered (archival), conceptually driven (thematic), abstract representation (abstracted expression), and reflexive performance sites (experiential). These different methodologies provide a framework in unpackaging curatorial choices when engaging spectators during the 2007 Prague Quadrennial, demonstrating continuing exhibition trends from previous Prague Quadrennials.

As a first-time spectator, the 2007 Prague Quadrennial’s visual saturation of theatrical design, architecture, scenography and art installations was overwhelming. I have compared the Prague Quadrennial experience similar to a child’s first time going into a candy-store. In addition to the exhibited archive, several national pavilions provided video clips, audio recordings and in select cases fully recorded productions. As Brazilian scenographer Jose Carlos Serroni, the president of the 2007 Prague Quadrennial jury, noted “[t]oday the Quadrennial is a living monument. It pulses, every minute, and one cannot rest easy with such a vast amount of information.” Spectators become faced with the inability to intellectually digest all of the visual material in a single circuit through the exhibition hall. Multiple passes are needed, even a single day’s journey through the exhibition hall seems insufficient. The continuing merger of

performance and scenography throughout the exhibition halls caused additional ephemeral experiences. Lectures, national days of celebration hosted by national organizations and professional workshops resulted in unique Prague Quadrennial experiences for each spectator. While, in many cases, the national exhibitions remained stagnant, the activity surrounding these exhibitions formulated unique experiences for each audience member (figure 2).

The Prague Quadrennial was more than a multi-day theatre festival. As the 2007 Prague Quadrennial catalogue noted “[t]he Prague Quadrennial is celebrating its 40th year of existence and is once again a unique opportunity to confront diverse theatre cultures and personal artistic approaches, the numerous exchanges of experiences that are so necessary, and an opportunity to discover new technical possibilities and current theatre trends.” On a fundamental level, it was a

Figure 2. The right wing of the Industrial Palace during the 2007 Prague Quadrennial. Photograph by Carl Walling, June 2007.

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museum, which required its spectators to spend several days to grasp the imagery, ideas and cultural motifs. Every attendee could experience the event’s performance archive through the various art installations and displays that comprised the Prague Quadrennial’s venue. And yet, the 2007 Prague Quadrennial provided more than the displays, the visual archives and design ideas. As first time Czech spectator Steffen Silvis, the Culture Editor of the *Prague Post* attending his first PQ, discovered:

> I have now been at the PQ for four days solid, and still feel that I have missed much. But then there are exhibits I keep returning to – Estonia’s “Ubu Roi” video presentation, as well as the Irish and American exhibits, that are both like fascinating, miniature museums. And then there are the two Forman Brothers’ interactive exhibits that beautifully encapsulate the strong work that is being done here in the Czech Republic.4

The 2007 Prague Quadrennial was a site for exchanging scenographic knowledge and sharing experimentations, which was uniquely experienced by its spectators. The performances, interactions and lectures were ephemeral. It was impossible to experience everything.

**Prague Quadrennial 2007 Signposts**

I investigate three trends – the exhibition’s connection to Prague, the development of the conceptual exhibition and the methods used by organizers, curators and individual designers to overcome design exhibition limitations – in my analysis of the 2007 and 2011 Prague Quadrennials. At the 2007 Prague Quadrennial, there were several key signposts which continued historical trends.

First, the event’s organizers continued situating the event as a city-wide celebration of international theatre. In the 2007 Prague Quadrennial catalog, its authors noted that “[o]ver the

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course of the 10 days of the PQ, the entire city of Prague will become a living stage. On the streets in the city centre one can find performances by both Czech and foreign companies, installations and site-specific projects that will present theatre design in the context of various artistic and theatre disciplines.” The Prague Quadrennial’s relationship with the city had evolved from the event’s origins as a fusion of both international and Czech theatre. In 2007, the event’s artistic leadership continued these historical legacies by expanding the Prague Quadrennial into a city-wide event, instead of an exhibition housed on the grounds of the Industrial Palace. Pavel Bém, Mayor of the City of Prague, noted

speaking of the theatre, Chekhov once said – and this was over a century ago: “The theatre unites all the arts and we actors are as missionaries.” In like vein, I hope that all you who are taking part in the Exhibition will carry out your own mission of acting as ambassadors for your respective countries and that you will find a response [sic] public here in Prague. I believe that the Prague environment cannot fail to inspire you and will provide countless stimuli for your future creative endeavors.

Not only did the city host the event, it served as stage. The Prague Quadrennial became the nexus of which Prague, as host of the event, advanced international theatre. The 2007 Prague Quadrennial was a realization of Jen Harvie’s convergence of theatre and city.

Another signpost was the loose thematic approach toward the curated national exhibitions. During the 1999 Prague Quadrennial, the organizers themed the event “Homage to Scenography” which resulted in open-ended interpretations and applications of the event’s theme. Eight years later, the Prague Quadrennial’s organizers offered another open-ended theme. Ondřej Černý, the director of the Prague Quadrennial and director of the National Theatre, summarized:

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Our world seems to get more and more complicated, almost impossible to be comprehended from a single point of view. This is why this year each country has brought its own theme. From the organisers’ point of view, this stems from a mixture of resignation, a tolerance for ‘each to his own’, and an honest belief that the strength and hope of the world lies in dialogue amid diversity.\(^7\)

In 1999, the event’s theme lent itself to designer focused exhibition, thus providing a sense of common approach. In 2007, the Prague Quadrennial’s organizers removed creative restrictions at the cost of a unified narrative. Arnold Aronson, serving as the event’s first non-Czech General Commissioner reflected on the effects stating “[t]he abolition of an imposed, exhibition-wide theme this year perhaps made a very small step towards greater inclusiveness. At the same time, it contributed to a greater stylistic diversity (chaos?) that was already endemic to the PQ.”\(^8\)

Arguably, there were several elements which unified the event; however, these elements were separate from the national exhibitions which served as cultural islands within the exhibition hall.

Instead of an exhibition-wide theme, the 2007 Prague Quadrennial was primarily unified by two elements. First, there was the sustainable theatre, “cardboard box theatre,” designed by Sean Crowley, Ian Evans, and Jean-Guy Lecat, which became a primary performance venue for the Prague Quadrennial (figure 3). The “cardboard box theatre” served as a centralized performance space, in the heart of the Industrial Palace, for Czech and international performances. As Alice Cabanas explained

Following a failed EU bid for funding to build a performance venue during this event, project leaders had to think quickly and creatively to create a performance space at little or no cost, using materials to which they had immediate access. Using scaffolding poles, rockwool insulation and cardboard boxes, a fully functional venue was built by students and professional volunteers, and became an accidental highlight of the entire festival.\(^9\)

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7 Ondřej Černý, introduction to *PQ07 Prague Quadrennial*, eds. Lucie Čepcová, Daniela Pařízková, and Ondřej Svoboda, trans. Pavla Matášková and David Short (Prague: Arts Institute – Theatre Institute, 2007), 11.


In retrospect, the cardboard box theatre contributed to the internationalism of the event. It was a shared space which connected various cultures together.

The second element which unified the event was the Days of Countries and Regions. While not new to the Prague Quadrennial as events focusing on cultural exchanges, the Days of Countries and Regions, or individual ‘national’ days, significantly impacted the 2007 Prague Quadrennial. These events provided opportunities for countries to share their distinctiveness: “[p]articipating countries and regions will present their theatre performances, social events, lectures or sampling of national cuisines.”\(^\text{10}\) The events were performative in their nature as a

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\(^\text{10}\) Lucie Čepcová, Daniela Pařízková, and Ondřej Svoboda, 315.
cultural presentation by the country’s hosting organization to a gathered audience. The visual archive became secondary, a façade background which could be investigated afterwards. Moreover, ‘national’ days had a major impact on the Prague Quadrennial’s spatial cohesiveness as an exhibition venue. In the majority of situations, these national events were located inside or adjacent to the hosting country’s national exhibition. As a result, spectators surrounded the exhibition blurring boundaries between adjoining national exhibitions and interconnecting the exhibits (at least, spatially). As the performances became the essential draw for spectators to rediscover the visual materials, the ‘national’ days connected the pavilions at the Prague Quadrennial (figure 4). This effectively addressed the event’s main purpose to encourage cultural exchanges and dialogues amongst spectators.

Figure 4. Days of Countries and Regions: Taiwan. Photograph by Carl Walling, June 2007.
Categorizing the National Exhibitions

If the centralized sustainable theatre and the various performance exchanges occurring during the Days of Countries and Regions were essential in connecting the audience then the national exhibitions and their embedded production archives were the subject matter for future discussions. As 2007 Prague Quadrennial General Commissioner Arnold Aronson notes

[t]he PQ provided a unique forum for artists to gather and exchange ideas. It was a place for anyone interested in theatre to simply absorb the wonderful diversity of the international theatre world. It was a site for ordinary citizens to encounter people they would never otherwise meet. Every such encounter has a small but powerful effect. Art – and events such as the PQ – are the proverbial pebbles tossed into the pond: their effects ripple outward; they have surprising consequences.11

The activation of the art installation space as performance encouraged audience discussions regarding the Prague Quadrennial’s presentation and representation of art. However, there were different strategies towards establishing the connection of the audience with the curated visual material. In approaching the Prague Quadrennial’s national exhibitions, I believe it is important to understand the purpose of the national exhibition installations.

For the remainder of this chapter, I differentiate 2007 Prague Quadrennial’s national exhibits by means of four distinctive categories: designer-centered (archival), conceptually driven (thematic), abstract representation (expressive), and reflexive sites (performative). My categories build on Aronson’s four curatorial methodologies when exhibiting scenographic artifacts. In Aronson’s categorization, he considers how artifacts overcome their ephemeral nature within an exhibition environment. In my categorization, I define curatorial spaces through the curators’ strategies to engage their audience. In each grouping, I consider representative

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examples that demonstrate each scenographic exhibition approach during the 2007 Prague Quadrennial. While the categories are not mutually exclusive, I offer that each national exhibition belongs predominantly within a specific category. Furthermore, these categories inform the audience about the connection between scenography and performance.

**Designer-Centered Exhibition: Static Archival Exhibitions**

The designer-centered exhibition, similar to an archival exhibition, showcases works of a selected artist, a collaboration between artists, or a representative grouping of artists within the nation. It is a static exhibition format. The primary focus remains on the impact of the artist or artists on the nation’s cultural identity. As a result, the exhibition format tends toward display, much like a museum presentation, where the design work is presented as archival. Objects are presented as fragments of past productions. In order to provide ephemerality, the exhibition may include audio or video recordings to supplement the three-dimensional objects and two-dimensional image archive. Since 1967, this exhibition format has had a legacy throughout the Prague Quadrennial’s history. Several designer-centered exhibitions have earned the Golden Triga and Gold Medal awards, including exhibitions featuring the design work of Horst Segert (East Germany) and Carlos Serroni (Brazil). There were several examples of designer-centered exhibitions during the 2007 Prague Quadrennial. My analysis focuses on the Brazilian, Irish and American national exhibitions. Each case-study demonstrates the key quality found in this category of design exhibition: a group of artists representing national scenography.

The 2007 Brazilian national exhibition focused on recent scenographic interpretations of “Nelson Rodrigues’ Universe and Dramatic Work.” According to the Brazilian authors of the national exhibition’s concept, Rodrigues’ work is “the most staged in Brazil, [and] strongly
influenced the country’s scenography.”12 Brazil’s curatorial team restricted the presentation to designs related to contemporary productions of Nelson Rodrigues plays. The decision grounds the exhibition, creating unity throughout the exhibition. However, the concept does not dominate the visual space (figure 5).

It was interesting to see how the national exhibition supported the archived designs. Both the exhibition flyer and the catalogs’ conceptual statement mentioned scenographer Daniela Thomas’ role in designing the installation. Additionally, the exhibition flyer highlighted how the national exhibition “pay[s] homage to the great Brazilian set designer Helio Eichbauer, who has built his solid career strongly influenced by Prague and his relationship with Svoboda.”13 Both


statements relate the individual designer’s significance to Prague Quadrennial and Czech design history.

The Brazilian national exhibit as a separate scenographic entity was a two-story black box, with a square mesh making the structure accessible to outsiders. It was a neutral structure which served as a gallery of selected production designs. The curators foregrounded the curatorial theme by providing their audience with self-reflective quotations by Nelson Rodrigues about his dramatic work. This choice helped the Brazilian national exhibit’s audience understand the bleak situations, the abstractions of reality, and the harsh imagery found within the pavilion. The quotations illuminated “this provocative playwright and his art which exposed devastating human passions revealing surprising aspects of the Brazilian soul.”

For example, on the outside wall of the exhibition, a quotation of Rodrigues reminds us “[t]he theatre is really cruel, an abscess. It doesn’t have to be chocolate and cognac.” In essence, the national exhibition’s art installation served as the billboard advertising the scenographic aesthetics contained within the Brazilian exhibition space. The positioning of the dramatic material, with bold statements about theatre, drew an audience into the exhibition’s center.

Once the spectator entered the installation the visual archive provided substance to the quotations. The structure ensnared the spectator. Black mesh separated the rest of the exhibition wing, creating a barricade. In the interior, the curatorial team’s selection of Rodrigues’ quotations were more severe, for example “[t]o keep the audience you need to fill the stage with murderers, adulterers, maniacs, in short, a hoard of monsters.” The quote comments on the

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audience’s ensnarement. The audience was drawn by the promise of a harsh and unforgiving alternative world, which the design work gave form. Keeping the audience trapped inside as each spectator consumed the scenography, the design exhibition utilized Rodrigues’ quotations to amplify the designers’ work.

The Irish exhibition represented a different approach toward the designer-focused exhibition. With the theme, “Firing the Canon; Masterworks Revisited in Modern Ireland,” the Irish national exhibition positioned itself against the dramatic styles of its own theatre traditions. National exhibition curator John Comiskey noted

> the traditional form of Irish theatre has been naturalism. In staging works from other traditions, there has been a freer approach, from reinvention in an Irish context to total de-construction. And this has not been merely a reaction to previous styles of performance or scenography – many of these productions have had no precedent in Ireland at all.17

The Irish national exhibition challenged the Prague Quadrennial international audience’s preconceptions of Irish scenography. Cathy Leeney summarized the purpose of the exhibition, “it is our hope that it will enhance the profile of scenography as a theatre art, and as a profession in Ireland in the new millennium.”18 The national exhibition positioned its modern scenographic approaches toward classic Irish literature as expanding beyond naturalism toward twenty-first century postmodernism. In order to prove their idea, the exhibition included production work


from a variety of Irish designers, including lighting designer Paul Keogan, set and costume
designer Monica Frawley and costume designer Sinéad Cuthbert.

The Irish national exhibition as an art installation supported the curatorial mission. The
wooden walls intersected as if they were street signs at a crossroads (figure 6). The stained wood
walls established the naturalistic undertones of classic Irish dramatic literature. A black row,
positioned at eye-level, provided a neutral background for the photographic images placed on the
walls. The entire exhibition’s structure was structured similar to an art museum in arrangement.
Costume pieces were separated from the interlocking walls and marked the exhibition’s outer
boundaries. Process sketches, scale models, and photographs lined the exhibition. It was
traditional, classic modernism.

However, in alignment with the Irish curatorial statement, the selected imagery
contrasted with the refined naturalistic space. As Leeney expressed:
Theatre can work as a holding space where potentials, values and traditions are materialised, tested and remoulded. Designers engaged in re-conceiving canonical theatre worlds are perhaps testing a sense of connection and homeliness, while with new work they are proposing new images, narratives, identities and possibilities. Ireland’s exhibition brings these related axes together.¹⁹

The exhibition’s installation represented preconceptions of Irish scenography: refined, classic and traditional. Yet, the curators presented the archive along a traditional mode of exhibition. The featuring of installation sponsors, including the Irish tourism board, prominently on the exhibition’s walls continued this illusion. Only when closer to the visual archive could spectators realize the subversive nature of the art installation. The exhibition’s viewers discovered bold postmodern takes on Irish dramatic literature.

Contrasting the Brazilian and Irish exhibitions, the American exhibition’s curators established a thematic approach for the exhibition with the theme: New Voices, New Visions: Out of the Box. Alexandra Bonds, curator of the American exhibit, explained the exhibition’s purpose:

The USITT PQ 2007 USA curators shared a vision to exhibit the true caliber and range of theatrical design existing in the United States. From Broadway musicals to Shakespeare and the classics, to contemporary activism, from traditional theatres to found spaces, the mosaic of American theatre design is vast and complex. The task of sorting and making sense of this gamut of productions challenged the curators to choose designs that would demonstrate the individuality within disparate approaches and aesthetic philosophies while discovering their unity within the exhibit.²⁰

Similar to the Irish national exhibition, the American exhibition dealt with altering preconceived notions for American theatrical design. The curatorial team attempted a portrayal of the ‘other’ in American theatrical design and contrasted with the celebrated professional designs of large

¹⁹ Leeney, 7.

regional theatres, commercial venues, and Broadway musicals. Spectators were confronted with a more inclusive view of American design.

The American exhibition’s cubic shape captured each spectator’s attention (and time) with a high saturation of visual imagery, audio clips, and video technology (figure 7). Alexandra Bonds commented:

The exhibit design leads the visitor on a journey, using technology to create a personal experience for each guest. Projected design images on a vast angled screen greet each visitor at the entrance. Inside, interactive video and sound stations provide greater access to images and words telling the story of each design. In the gallery, designs are shown with models, renderings, photos, and installations of costumes and puppets. The curators and exhibit designers fused an inspiring exhibition with the presentation of the landscape of American theatre design representing the most innovative and thought-provoking work in the USA today.²¹

Figure 7. The United States National Exhibition at the 2007 Prague Quadrennial. Photograph by Carl Walling, June 2007.

²¹ Bonds, 246.
The multiplicity of design styles, venues, dramatic genres and artists overflowed the American exhibition. The spectator’s journey through the American exhibition mirrored their eclectic experience of the 2007 Prague Quadrennial at large. While the national exhibition provided a visual and audio library of American design since the 2003 Prague Quadrennial, the library was overwhelming. The overabundance of visual material required spectators to experience the exhibition several times to digest it all. In a way, the art installation was equivalent to a modern day Pandora’s Box. It was a curiosity. While this blurred spaces between the American exhibition and its neighbors, Hong Kong and Poland, the projection screen also pushed spectators away from the exhibition’s physical objects. Spectators, wishing to view the projected designs, needed to step away from the exhibition. This effect heightened the spectators’ curiosity, as individuals decided whether or not to enter the exhibition.

Where the Brazilian and Irish national exhibitions invited their audiences into rarefied exhibition spaces, the American exhibition’s narrative forced its audience to view it from the outside. While this may have been unintentional, the effect was nonetheless successful. The reverse of what one usually experiences with an exhibit, a gaze outward to the exhibit’s perimeter instead of being drawn into the exhibit’s interior. The exhibition’s spectators viewed the entirety of the American exhibition’s contents as a collective whole – before experiencing individual components. Once inside the exhibition, the spectator’s journey was individualized through the inclusion of technology and production artifacts (scenic models, renderings, costumes, etc.) focusing on individual designers.
Art Installation: Thematic Focused Exhibitions

Alternatively, the conceptually driven exhibit showcases the nation’s design works within a unified, conceptual art installation. In this exhibition format, design work has been re-contextualized for a new purpose. The installation frames the audience’s reading of the archive through the exhibition’s curatorial narrative. The conceptually driven exhibition relies on the merger of the art installation with the exhibited design archive. It actively positions the work within the culture through metaphor and imagery pushing our emotional connections to scenography further. It physically contextualizes the dramatic environment with a unified concept.

The conceptually driven exhibit continues the debate over the curatorial impact on the Prague Quadrennial. Aronson drew attention to this impact, noting “[o]ne solution to the problem of exhibiting design is to transform the exhibit itself into a scenographic unit. The question that arises is whether the result is, in fact, a scenographic display or an art installation. If the latter, does it subvert the purpose of the entire exhibition?”\textsuperscript{22} In my opinion, the present-moment exhibition does subvert the historical archive resulting in new scenographic explorations. In these sites, the art installation is an investigation into concepts and theories of performance and scenography. The passive archive from a past production is now rooted in the present moment. The curator repositions the exhibition’s content to speak toward larger notions of society and scenography for a viewing audience. Historical artifacts only exist to facilitate our awareness of these philosophical and technological investigations. This format’s legacy resides with Golden Triga winning exhibitions such as the 1987 West German exhibition, the 1991 United States exhibition, and the 2003 British exhibition. It was the dominant exhibition format

\textsuperscript{22} Aronson, “Exhibiting Scenography: the Loss of the Artifact,” 36.
during the 2007 Prague Quadrennial. For this category, I explore the positioning of the design archive against the conceptual art installation using the 2007 Golden Triga winning Russian exhibition, as well as the Israeli national exhibition.

In chapter three, I mentioned that the 2007 Russian exhibition was indebted to the 1987 Russian exhibition. The theme, “Our Chekhov: Twenty Years Later,” explored the significance of Chekhov’s plays which according to Viktor Beriozkin “still occupy a special place on the Russian stage, compatible with that of Shakespeare in Britain.”\(^\text{23}\) The 2007 Golden Triga (for the Best Presentation of a Theme) was awarded to the Russian exhibit “for beautiful synthesis between the theme and its expression in one pavilion”\(^\text{24}\) As Ian Herbert notes

Countries were this time able to choose their own theme for their exhibits, and Russia’s choice was to revisit “Our Chekhov,” which won them the Triga on my first visit twenty years earlier. It says a lot for the longevity of Russian designers that almost half of those exhibiting in 2007 had also shown in 1987, among them the late, great David Borovsky, to whom the stand was dedicated.\(^\text{25}\)

Conceptually, the Russian exhibition relied on the intersection between audience and art installation. The exhibition’s art installation housed the production archive in an open-faced basement flooded with pools of water. The scenic models were precariously placed on chair stacks and a book stack for the spectator’s eye-level (figure 8). In a way, there was a rushed sense of preservation within the exhibition with the artist’s need to save the production process


\(^{25}\) Herbert, “Thoughts on PQ 07 – and PQs to Come,” 52.
documents (the scenic models and a few costume renderings). Dmitry Krymov, designer of the exhibition, wrote:

“It’s always cold or rainy in Russia, or else it snows. Or there’s a leaking ceiling so something is constantly dripping from it. Or it falls on you. Some fluff, for example. More often it is chunks of plaster. You feel like putting on something water-tight, say, a pair of galoshes, and pick up an umbrella.

I remember the days when the Mona Lisa was brought to Moscow: people were queuing to see it for up to 8 hours. They were standing in the rain, and when I saw her, I felt she was so umber or bag-coloured that she appeared like any other Russian woman. Poor thing, she was cold. The fate of all works of art in Russia that can be stupendous at times is they are created under inhuman conditions, and are then drowned or burned, or they crack or fall on the ground to be dragged to the mud. And are recreated again.

As a matter of fact it is not Italy, where one can see stones and the sun. It’s dark clouds, pieces of plaster and dampness. It gives you shivers, but in some especially sad but still tender way. In a word, it’s Chekhov.”

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26 Beriozkin, 192.
It is these psychological cultural roots embedded within Chekhov’s dramatic literature, through which the Russian exhibit curators sought to connect the displayed contemporary scenographic work with the spectator. In order to understand Chekhov, spectators needed to experience the psychological spaces explored by Chekhov’s characters, his Russian audience, and Russian artists. The concept spoke to a larger sense of scenography beyond the archive of scenic models, amplifying the spectator’s response to the designers’ works within the installation. As Arnold Aronson observed

[s]pectators did not simply gaze into this space as if into a large model box; they entered. Because of the water, visitors had to put on galoshes that were provided . . . , and take an umbrella to ward off the leaks from above. Then, by stepping over a low barrier, the visitor entered the space . . . Unlike the enclosed exhibits discussed above, in which the spectators lost a sense of self, here the water, galoshes, and umbrellas never let the visitors forget for a moment their performative function.27

Indeed, the exhibition was performative, but only marginally interactive. It challenged the audience to experience the scenographic environment by crossing a scenographic threshold. However, the design work featured, as well as the national exhibition itself were static. Once its audience costumed themselves with the galoshes and entered the exhibition, the installation’s interaction with the audience was minimal. When the exhibition won the Golden Triga, it was a surprise. Aronson noted

there were some who questioned this award. As exquisite as the models were, and as good as they were as designs for the various plays, there were many who felt that there were better examples of design to be found throughout the exhibition hall. If we accept this judgment (certainly not universally held), then the award for the best exhibit of scenography was actually granted to the best scenography manifested through a pavilion.28


28 Ibid., 38.
Aronson illuminated a potential shift within the Prague Quadrennial. The award served as a prognosticator for the Prague Quadrennial’s future, where scenography would be judged on the merits of the national exhibition’s installation. The Russian exhibition showcased the artifacts of scenographic process; however, the provided visual imagery’s impact was mitigated due to the spectacle of the overall art installation. Consequently, the art installation emphasized a Russian cultural experience related to Chekhov speaking little to the production archive.

The Israeli national exhibition was one of the most culturally iconic exhibitions in the Industrial Palace during the 2007 Prague Quadrennial. The theme “Reaching Through the Looking Glass – Looking Over the Wall” manifested itself as a military barricade forcing the spectator to view the Israeli national exhibit’s two sections on both sides of the wall. The inclusion of costumed mannequins on top of the wall gave both an impression of a scenography that was both out of reach (to be viewed but not interacted with) and highly controlled (an impression heightened by the mannequin dressed as an Israeli soldier). Tali Itzhaki, co-curator and author of the theme, situated the exhibition as

> [t]hrough the looking glass we enter into a world of fantasy; our curtains, walls, coulisses – our stage images – do we use them to create our visual themes? Do they reflect our own images? Is our theatre vision and scenography a looking glass, or a safety curtain? What relationships are created between our stage images and our real lives? What is our reality, and are we fulfilling our role as artists in pushing and expanding the borders of art? Can we push our borders towards new forms? Can theatre overcome walls and barriers to establish communication between people?  

Similar to the Russian national exhibition, the Israeli exhibition amplified the cultural connections to theatre. As a passive art installation, which was placed over a field of red and underneath the vigilant watch of costumed characters, including the soldier, the exhibition

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positioned the audience within the realities of the West bank (figure 9). The production artifacts were embedded inside the barricade, perhaps symbolizing theatre’s impact in eroding barriers as the various enclosures of scenic models ‘chip through the wall’ from both sides. The exhibition mirrors the statements by Václav Klaus that “[t]he world seen through the eyes of scenographers is highly diverse, full of artistic parables and conceits far removed from our daily lives.”\(^{30}\) The result amplified the spectators’ reception of the Israeli curators’ theme as they investigated the similarities from both sides of the wall.

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\(^{30}\) Klaus, 8.
Art Installation: Expressive Explorations

The third exhibition format is an abstracted representation (expressive) site. These sites are art installations in which, in essence, the past has been substituted for the present moment. Abstracted representation exhibitions rarely showcase the performance archive in a traditional sense. Instead, the art installation focuses on a philosophical understanding of scenographic theory or practice. These sites push our understanding of scenography by facilitating discussion and debate between the curator and their audience. This exhibition invites the spectator to objectively explore new relationships with the exhibition’s scenographic artifacts. In 2007, the Swiss Pavilion was the best example of this category, as Aronson notes that designer Muriel Gerstner eliminates “. . . scenographic exhibition altogether . . . creating a structure closer to an art installation than to a scenic unit.” The objects within the Swiss exhibition speak to an art installation’s performance in the present moment. Its audiences critique the application of scenography.

The Swiss Federal Office of Culture, as a result of the Swiss Federal Design Commission’s recommendation, invited designer Muriel Gerstner to represent Switzerland at the 2007 Prague Quadrennial. The exhibition’s theme, “Going to Mean Houses,” resulted in a Kafkaesque art installation. Spectators entered a series of rooms with miscellaneous artifacts (properties) in museum-like isolation. Theatre critic Thomas Irmer commented on the abstract nature of the installation’s space, “it was a passage through a mysterious non-space which perhaps expressed a dream of stage designs that no longer have to rely on a spatial separation


from the spectators.”33 This approach resulted in considerable debate about the Swiss exhibition’s relationship to the Prague Quadrennial’s historical mission. Ian Herbert commented “[t]o my mind, the most questionable exhibits were those which chose to demonstrate design alone. Switzerland’s Muriel Gerstner offered an installation, largely consisting of black interconnection rooms, which was explained only by its accompanying booklet.”34 Gerstner’s art installation created discussions about the nature of scenography and the Prague Quadrennial’s role as an archive of scenography. The exhibition’s catalog entry provided part of the script and the absent characters:

A young boyish man opens the door, holding a little notebook and a pen in his left hand. Smiling, he says that yes, he was expecting me, and introduces himself: “K., housekeeper, master of a strange house, after having failed to be master in his own home.” He asks to please excuse the pun but he is just reading, strangely enough, about a man who dreamt about dissecting the lower part of his own body. “M.,” I reply, “stage designer, I prefer the scale 1:25 and 1:50.” “Please come in, but watch out, there is a small crack between the threshold and the floor,” he replies and writes something in his booklet. The door of the house closes behind me.”35

In essence, the exhibition’s assortment of properties provided the residue of human interaction. Spectators journeyed along the path of the absent characters and made connections between themselves, the characters and the story through abandoned objects. In many ways, this exhibit mirrored the exhibition experience throughout the Prague Quadrennial. Gurstner’s installation featured properties which by themselves would not be considered art in the same way a scenic model or a costume would be. The artifact was meaningless unless the spectator had access to the story.

33 Irmer, 59.

34 Herbert, “Thoughts on PQ 07 – and PQs to Come,” 53.

35 Gerstner, 231.
Reflexive Performance Sites

My final category is the national exhibitions which serve as reflexive (performance) sites. Unlike the abstracted representation site, reflexive sites include the archive in their presentation of the curatorial purpose. However, archived objects remain secondary to the art installation. The key element within this exhibition format is that the audience performs when entering the exhibition, and the exhibition serves as a reminder of the audience’s dual role as spectator-performer. Thus, the production archive is repositioned to support the connection to the present performative moment. Artifacts serve as devices to activate future performances engaging the audience. It is an active exchange. The audience completes the scenography. I consider two examples in this category: the Hungarian and Dutch national exhibitions.

The Hungarian national exhibition’s theme, Liliom in Baghdad, juxtaposed Ferenc Molnár’s *Liliom* (a play which would later serve as the source for Rodger and Hammerstein’s *Carousel*) with the socio-political situation in Baghdad. The curatorial vision for the art installation asked spectators

> how do we perceive our own culture, first and foremost our own town, Budapest, from the point of view of a distant and still – through the constantly streaming images, the news, the media and internet, and because of the terrible war and all the terror acts – frighteningly and not always attractively close civilisation, how do we perceive our own surroundings, our own world from the perspective of the most burning problems of the present, those political, historical and religious events that provoke an answer from us every day: right from Baghdad.  

The exhibit focused on ideas of transit and social control. The installation resembled a passport checkpoint with a raised platform blocked by a metal detector and security gate (figure 10). Contributing to the spectator’s awareness of control, the designers of the Hungarian exhibition

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space video recorded the spectators inside the exhibit space. András Forách noted that

“[e]verything will be recorded by a camera, and the resulting film will be projected to a huge television screen. On this screen, like at any airport, clips are running all the time, clips of city-bombing, clips of theatre performances, clips of the visitors’ faces.”\(^{37}\) Additionally, photographs were taken - not of the design archive, but the spectators themselves attempting to enter the exhibit space (if I recall correctly, some spectators were initially denied access to the space during the first few days of the Prague Quadrennial). The Hungarian artists manipulating the exhibit posted photographs on the exhibition’s back wall of spectators permitted into the exhibit. András Forách, curator of the exhibition, summarized the experience as “[t]he exhibition is an

exhibition of an exhibition: it is open and closed at the same time, entry is barred and permitted at the same time. It makes the viewer curious, yet it denies him the satisfaction of his curiosity.”38 Spectators physically experienced the installation’s powerful scenographic message through active engagement with the installation.

An alternative exhibition strategy was employed by the Netherlands. In 2007, the Dutch national exhibition became the literal site for scenographic deliberation (figure 11). As Aronson recalled “[t]he Dutch did not merely acknowledge the inherent difficulties of scenographic exhibition, they boldly declared its impossibility and rejected the notion of artifacts and documentation in favor of the live presence of the artists themselves, engaged in real time discussions about the art.”39 It was the manifestation of the Prague Quadrennial’s organizational

Figure 11. The Netherlands National Exhibition at the 2007 Prague Quadrennial. Photograph by Carl Walling, June 2007.


mission to encourage scenographic discussions. The Dutch theme, “the soul of the designer: the essence of design,” encouraged direct conversations about scenographic process between the audience and the designer. Furthermore, the exhibition was highly ephemeral as the design presentations and presenters changed each day of the Prague Quadrennial. Grote Gansey and Peter de Klimpe, who authored the theme, stated their desire to create

[a] place where the focal point is the design process itself rather than the final result. We want to centre on the invited Dutch designers and their working process and thus go beyond the pure exhibition of scale-models. We want to reflect on the ‘soul of the designer’. In a further concretization of the program we will also invite international designers to participate in round-table debates in our pavilion.40

The Dutch national exhibition actively engages its audience throughout scenographic dialogues, providing open-ended cultural exchanges about the scenographer’s role throughout their artistic process.

Moving towards the 2011 Prague Quadrennial

In establishing four principal approaches for the national exhibitions during the 2007 Prague Quadrennial, I considered different methods of scenographic exhibition. The national exhibition’s curators established scenographic approaches that defined scenographic spaces, overcoming the principal limitations in presenting production fragments for an audience. In 2011, the Prague Quadrennial’s artistic leadership presented a new charge promoting performance design over scenography. As a result, each of the four methods of scenography exhibition was supplemented with new performative aspects shifting the spectator’s reception of the visual archive. In chapter five, I investigate these developments.

CHAPTER 5.

2011 PRAGUE QUADRENNIAL AND PERFORMANCE DESIGN

I continue my explorations of three significant trends impacting the Prague Quadrennial’s development: the exhibition’s connection to the city of Prague, the expansion of the conceptual exhibition, and the methods used by organizers, curators and individual designers to overcome design exhibition limitations. I trace these three trends throughout the Prague Quadrennial’s history and signpost fresh approaches culminating in the major philosophical shift from scenography to performance design. The 2011 Prague Quadrennial represents a key organizational change in the event’s identity through the repositioning of its title and mission. In this chapter, I explore how the 2011 Prague Quadrennial evidences changing perceptions as notions of performance design, art installation and scenography intersect.

The Prague Quadrennial’s evolution was defined by both its organizers and its audience in the exploration and creation of effective methods for communicating scenographic practice. While recalling the 1987 Prague Quadrennial, Vera Ptáčková commented “[t]he isolation, at least on the part of the public had been broken, even though furtive voices could be heard in the lobby: ‘Cancel the exhibition. It’s NOT about theatre. It’s exhibiting something which never existed. The material being shown is pure fantasy.’”1 The Prague Quadrennial’s limitations as an exhibition, or art gallery, of theatre design artifacts, production images, and costume pieces began to wear out its success. Spectators questioned the continued separation of visual scenography from the ephemeral, holistic performance act, which resulted in conceptual installations referencing the material outside of their original performance contexts. However,

1 Ptáčková, 209.
after the 1987 Prague Quadrennial, the socio-political changes post-Velvet Revolution allowed new opportunities to significantly reposition the event, featuring transnational events which converged scenography with live performance.

After the 2007 Prague Quadrennial, two major events impacted the event’s future. In 2008, the left-wing of the Industrial Palace burnt down forcing the Prague Quadrennial’s organizers to abandon their traditional exhibition venue for the upcoming quadrennial (figure 12). This event resulted in significant changes to its programming:

Since in Prague there was no other space large enough to host the Quadrennial with its over 15 000 m2 of exhibition and extensive accompanying programs, the spatial dramaturgy of the event had to be changed and individual *Prague Quadrennial* sections and projects had to be divided and spread around the city. . . . New ‘crossings’ had to be found, and the public space realm comprised the ideal situation.²

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The event’s survival relied on the artistic leadership team’s abilities to redefine its spatial needs. Along with a new exhibition venue, there was an accompanying change in the organization’s artistic leadership. After Ondřej Černý’s success in 2007, he passed on artistic leadership for the 2011 Prague Quadrennial to Sodja Lotker. As a first-time Prague Quadrennial artistic director, Sodja Lotker harnessed significant opportunities to reposition the Prague Quadrennial’s mission statement after the loss of the Industrial Palace. Lotker reflected on the future of the Prague Quadrennial stating that

> [t]he Prague Quadrennial, as other exhibitions such as biennales or triennales, is about the laying out of a puzzle of a current state of things in the field. It is about grasping the moods, trends, movements, and fashions of the present. It is about the here and now. Quadrennials do not serve, protect, and preserve, those are the functions of museums and archives. A quadrennial is about questioning, challenging, and pushing forwards.³

Lotker redefined the Prague Quadrennial’s loss of the Industrial Palace as an opportunity for a significant advancement for a new understanding of scenography. The loss of the physical space exposed the Prague Quadrennial’s core problems. Past attendees focused on the loss of history, the abandonment of the physical site (the event’s theatrical stage space) and the Prague Quadrennial’s historic mission to archive past scenographies. However, Lotker returned to the Prague Quadrennial’s original organizational tenants. As I charted through chapter three, these tenants are to understand the multiplicities of scenographic practice and the potential for new theoretical applications. By removing the exhibition’s traditional site, the Prague Quadrennial was forced to apply its own mission statement and methodologies to its future exhibition spaces.

Discussion of the necessary reconfiguration of the event morphed the Prague Quadrennial into a new entity, inclusive of performance and scenography. Its title reflected this shift with the

artistic leadership establishing “. . . the Prague Quadrennial International Exhibition of Scenography and Theatre Architecture is changing its name to the Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space, with the goal of including a wider scope of artistic disciplines and genres, to break down the often imaginary differences between them.” This shift in title and focus from 2007 to 2011 radically changed outside perceptions of the Prague Quadrennial’s purpose. The artistic concept for the 2011 Prague Quadrennial situated its mission as it

. . . aims to present a large spectrum of contemporary performance design disciplines and genres, in order to show the vast variety of forms of performance and performance design. Prague Quadrennial 2011 will examine theatre design in the context of contemporary trends in the theatre, as well as in trends in other art and cultural disciplines, working with performance to research scenography as a wider cultural phenomenon, appearing in many aspects of art and life.5

This artistic concept contextualized the changing scope of the Prague Quadrennial’s subject matter. The 2011 Prague Quadrennial’s artistic concept situated theatrical design as a significant part of society existing beyond the confines of the stage.

Scenography exists in an individual’s life whether he or she attends theatrical performances or not. The physical boundaries of the theatre space do not restrict scenography’s interactions with society. However, to what limitations did the Prague Quadrennial’s artistic leadership explore scenography’s influence within society? They commented that

[s]cenography will be looked at as a complex art field, providing more than decoration of space for actors. It will be examined as an important element of all performance, as a complex creator of all visual aspects of performance, elements that create, transform, construct, change, and fill the space and body and their relationship within the artistic piece, the performance. It will be researched as a phenomenon appearing in a diversity of

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art and cultural disciplines – visual arts, architecture, fashion, installation, video art, new media, site specific, as well as as [sic] an interdisciplinary art in itself.6

The artistic leadership for the 2011 Prague Quadrennial expanded the event’s focus into fine art fields, which were not typically interfaced with performance. As the organizers created an event inclusive of style and form, this shift expanded the Prague Quadrennial’s reach as a venue of design. While inclusion was important within the structure of the event, the need to contextualize the artifacts remained, as Lotker stipulated in her artistic statement:

Important word for PQ 2011 is context. The 12th Prague Quadrennial seeks new contexts for performance design as a discipline, looking for relations to visual arts, architecture, theory, sociology, etc. Expanding scenography for the 12th Prague Quadrennial means not only exploring scenography as complex active performance environments, but also creating new contexts and connections for its exploration.7

Lotker’s statement about contextualization is very significant when one considers the Prague Quadrennial’s evolution. At first glance, the statement reinforces the event’s expansion beyond scenography found within theatrical performance; however, the statement’s subtext is profound. Lotker spoke of new contexts for scenography as a field within performance design, as scenography’s inseparable link to other artistic, cultural and academic fields must be both acknowledged and investigated for a complete exploration of the term from a new threshold. The contextualization of scenography at the Prague Quadrennial was significant, especially when considering Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s exploration in Destination Culture of the distinction between artifacts in situ and those in context. In some cases, artifacts presented during previous Prague Quadrennials were presented in situ as artifact fragments speak for the absent production, as they are in most traditional exhibitions. During the 2011 Prague Quadrennial, the artistic leadership’s attempt to recontextualize artifacts spoke toward larger

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shifts in scenography, which placed every artifact within the exhibition space in context with active performance acts. These expansive artistic choices recontextualized the in situ presentations and in context conceptual installations found throughout the national exhibition section. The exhibition evolved beyond a celebration of the archive encouraging new questions going forward. All artifacts functioned within these two scenographic moments: the curated national exhibition speaking of ideas of practice, and a Prague Quadrennial-wide experiment to speak toward scenography as a whole.

The City as Theatrical Venue

When the Prague Quadrennial’s artistic leadership was forced to consider new venues after the Industrial Palace was made unusable for the 12th Prague Quadrennial, they were presented with an unusual opportunity. Since 1983, the Prague Quadrennial was housed within the Industrial Palace (also known as Congress Hall pre-Velvet Revolution), with the notable exception of the 1991 event being hosted at the Palace of Congress. For the second time in twenty-eight years, the exhibition would be staged in a different space – with the realization that the event was unlikely to go back to the Industrial Palace in the foreseeable future.

During the 2007 Prague Quadrennial, the Industrial Palace remained the central location for each exhibition section (with the exception of the student section, which was hosted in an adjacent pavilion). Similar to previous Prague Quadrennials, several small events were hosted around the Prague exhibition grounds, as well as at auxiliary locations throughout Prague; however, the major sections took place within the principal exhibition buildings. Additionally, temporal site-specific performances, which provided a sense of spontaneity to unaware citizens and tourists, could not substantially connect the Prague Quadrennial to the city.
In contrast, the 2011 Prague Quadrennial existed throughout the city. The Prague Quadrennial ended up in the National Gallery’s Veletržní Palace, which was within close walking distance of the former exhibition site. However, as Lotker noted “... in Prague there was no other space large enough to host the Quadrennial with its over 15 000 m2 of exhibition and extensive accompanying programs,” therefore, new spatial approaches were needed.8 The decentralization significantly impacted the event’s connection with the city of Prague, as the event was no longer fully contained within an exhibition site north of the Vitava River away from the city center. The event was spread throughout various locations within Prague: the national and student exhibitions in the National Gallery, the architecture section in St. Anne’s Church, a variety of performances and workshops in DAMU (the Theatre Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts), and site-specific performances planned throughout Prague. Similarly, Scenofest paralleled these developments, as projects and workshops involving emerging professionals were placed in various locations throughout Prague, with the creation of “[p]rojects for over 1,500 students include workshops and performances, all of which embrace the unique opportunity to engage with the hybrid terrain at the intersection of theatre with architecture, visual, sonic, and media arts.”9 The Prague Quadrennial, largely due to a combination of necessity and evolution, performed the city as spectators, citizens, and artists participated throughout the urban locales.

The Prague Quadrennial’s expansion throughout the city increased the event’s ability to inspire innovation, as Prague Mayor Bohuslav Svoboda noted

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[c]ulture, too, is constantly growing and changing, and Prague must not reject new expressions of culture. In fact, I am convinced that our city should use its ties to modern art in order to become an inspirational place to work and create, a place sought out by modern artists. Only in this way can Prague remain a cultural capital, and not a mere museum of the past.10

Bohuslav Svoboda’s comments exposed a potential fear: the possibility that Prague may lose its stasis as a cultural innovator. In the twenty years after the Velvet Revolution, was Prague truly in danger of losing its place as an international cultural center? This concern was particularly significant for the Prague Quadrennial due to its historical origins as a site for cultural exchange. Historically the successes of Czech design and architecture during the late 1950’s and early 1960’s provided the foundation for the establishment of the Prague Quadrennial as an event with international status. In the years following the Velvet Revolution, the Prague Quadrennial needed to redefine itself as a generator for cultural impact and in 2011 its artistic leadership sought to do just that. As Daniela Pařízková & Pavla Petrová remarked:

For eleven days in June 2011, Prague will thus be home to a sweeping contemporary art event, to be found at locations throughout the entire city. The city’s public space (historical contexts and contemporary aspects) will interact with art projects (created by artists from around the world, either as part of a different project/within a different context or created directly for our city) and with audiences (residents of Prague and the thousands of visitors who will come in order to see the Quadrennial).11

Consequently, the 2011 Prague Quadrennial was an event set beyond the isolated corners of Prague. The event invited international artists to interact with Prague as an international cultural site with significant historical legacies. The result was a distinctive venue for artists to not only

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perform their own culture, but cultivate Prague’s cultural identity as a center for innovative art as well.

**Reexamining Exhibition Categories**

The philosophical, terminological and geographical shifts made by the 2011 Prague Quadrennial’s artistic team carried over in their curatorial approaches toward the national exhibition section (known in 2011 as the section of countries and regions). The organizers’ call for curatorial concepts provided an open-ended framework similar to the 1999 and 2007 Prague Quadrennials. However, an overarching idea was superimposed on the national exhibition curators; the 2011 Prague Quadrennial’s artistic statement specified that “[t]he concept does not have to necessarily represent the most typical aspects of performance and performance design in the country, but rather the most unique, specific, current trends, with consideration given to the cultural and historical contexts of performance in their country.”

The Prague Quadrennial’s artistic leadership pushed the national curators to consider alternative venues, organizations and approaches toward scenography resulting in a significant shift within my 2007 Prague Quadrennial curatorial categories. While some national curators pursued similar strategies from the previous quadrennial, the majority of exhibitions during the 2011 Prague Quadrennial incorporated the new curatorial mandates for performance design. This resulted in new approaches towards the exhibition space and the inclusion of performance within their exhibition strategies. Similar to my analysis in chapter four, I investigate four design exhibition categories: designer-centered (archival), conceptually driven (thematic), abstract representation (expressive), and reflexive sites (performative).

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Designer-Centered Exhibition: Static Archival Exhibitions

I define the designer-centered exhibition as a showcase for works from a selected artist, a collaboration between artists, or a representative grouping of artists within the nation. It is a static exhibition format. While several national exhibitions continued along this trend in 2011, notably the expansive Canadian national exhibition and the noteworthy British exhibition, I focus on the Golden Triga winning Brazilian national exhibition.

In 2011, the Brazilian national exhibition’s curators emphasized the inclusion of scenography existing outside traditional performance mediums, a core idea within the Prague Quadrennial’s shift to performance design. The Brazilian exhibition’s title, “Characters and Frontiers: Brazilian Scenographic Territory,” drew attention to the role of performance within larger cultural contexts (figure 13). The curators commented that

. . . the Brazilian national exhibition for PQ’11 tackles the movement of scenography within today’s contemporary restlessness. It adopts the conceptual idea that scenography is a provocative art that establishes a pulsating frontier of languages, with an emphasis on the idea of the scenographer as an investigator of a scenography that provides a sensorial shelter for characters and ideas. . . . The physical exhibition space is presented as an installation where the interaction between scenography, visual art and popular culture reveals the Brazilian people.13

The Brazilian exhibition focused on how scenography represents a culture and its people.

The 2011 Prague Quadrennial’s highest prize, the Golden Triga, went to Brazil. According to the jury’s statement:

“The exhibit offers a vivid sense of the national identity and the vital spirit of creativity that animates Brazil; a current that flows from its cultural sources and continues spontaneously to open new scenographic horizons.” The walls of the exhibit, which were painted bright red, displayed “the rich diversity and the range of scenographies and

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productions that take place in Brazil. Equal place is given to street art, site-specific interventions, socially conscious performance, puppetry, as well as to more conventional theatre.\textsuperscript{14}

The exhibition represented the 2011 Prague Quadrennial’s artistic vision through two conceptual trends. First, the Brazilian curatorial team revealed new performance styles and, more significantly, placed these styles as equals contrasting with other traditional scenographic applications. Second, the exhibit displayed the critical connection between the Brazilian audience and performance design. Moreover, the Brazilian exhibition was a microcosm of the 2011 Prague Quadrennial’s relationship with Prague and its Czech audience.

The Brazilian exhibition’s quality was transparent to anyone who ventured to the exhibition hall’s isolated second floor. However, what was significant about the Brazilian entry was the static, designer-centered format chosen by its national curatorial team.

\textsuperscript{14} “PQ Award Winners,” \textit{Theatre Design \& Technology} 47, no. 4 (Fall 2011): 12.
The international competitive design exhibition remains, however, as the core of PQ, now housed in Prague’s National Gallery. In its sixty-odd exhibits can be seen a division between those who still see it as a review of four years’ work in theatre and those who see it as a scenographic ‘challenge’. The expert jury saw both sides of the coin in awarding the major prize, the Golden Triga, to Brazil, for an exhibit which, with its red wood floor and walls supporting a wide variety of exciting visual material, was both installation and retrospective.15

The Brazilian exhibition did not perform scenography and it did not re-conceptualize the exhibition’s artifacts. Instead, the exhibition domiciled scenographic artifacts letting the artifacts situate themselves within the exhibition space on shelves throughout the exhibition. The space gave a sense of belonging to the performance fragments, creating a unified statement.

**Art Installation: Thematic Focused Exhibitions**

The conceptually driven exhibit showcases the nation’s design works within a unified, conceptual art installation. In this exhibition format, design work has been re-contextualized for a new purpose. The installation embodies the curatorial concept and becomes a scenographic entity resonating with the archive. The conceptually driven exhibit continues the debate over the curatorial impact on the Prague Quadrennial. Similar to 2007, the conceptual art installation during the 2011 Prague Quadrennial tended to resist performance. This was because the exhibition format attempted to recontextualize performance artifacts within a single conceptual pursuit. National exhibitions centered on the convergence of performance as a contextualizing force tended to avoid the conceptual integration of disparate artifact fragments from previous performances. While this category was dominant throughout the 2007 Prague Quadrennial, I found its influence significantly diminished for the 2011 Prague Quadrennial due to a variety of

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factors, including the shift towards performance design and economic limitations in presenting a conceptual archive of past productions. The United States provided a noteworthy concept driven exhibition during the 2011 Prague Quadrennial.

The United States national exhibition exposed fault lines between scenography and performance design within their conceptual exhibition format. The exhibition stored production artifacts within the exhibition’s four brick walls, an encompassing structure that resembled an intercity warehouse complete with graffiti. The curatorial concept, From the Edge, also established the performance’s connections with American society. The exhibition’s site illustrated the significant societal forces which shaped the past five years of American theatre (figure 14). The curators stated

[r]eflective of those issues consuming American performance makers today, the exhibit addresses issues of identity, healing and obsessions with death and loss after 9/11 and

Figure 14. The exterior of the 2011 United States National Exhibition. Photograph by Carl Walling, June 2011.
hurricane Katrina; the pull of conscience that is inevitable when engaged in war; anger directed toward the obliviousness of many to the destruction of our planet; the politics of eating, rising political polarities (and ambiguities) in reaction to the first African-American to be elected President; tensions relative to race and gender; anxieties about technology; the role of religion in society and the challenges of those marginalized whether they are immigrants, differently-abled or queer.

The USA exhibit features the work of 36 design collaborations, both self-reflective and self-critical in nature. “The Edge” refers to the brave and precarious edge of creation but also references our country on edge.16

The American’s exhibition’s façade walls starkly reflected these historical events. A graffitied image of President Barack Obama next to the main entrance reminded the audience not just of political consciousness, but polarization and divergence within American theatre. On top of the exhibition almost guarding the exhibition, WarUSaurus, a Pat Oleszko inflatable structure of a wheeled creature is eating a figure dressed in American flag colors. The entire structure gave an impression of an urban environment that was under attack from the outside.

However, inside the structure, an array of scenographic models, production photography projected on the walls and costumes inhabited the space (figure 15). The United States curators successfully focused their exhibit on alternative theatre seeking to redefine the audience’s traditional perceptions of American theatre. Susan Tsu, the artistic director for the exhibition, commented “[t]he view of scenography is changing every day . . . [t]raditional boundaries and descriptors of scenography are being challenged by the intersections and blurred lines of other disciplines.”17 The American exhibition used alternative theatre in order to address the Prague Quadrennial’s artistic concept of performance design. The physical exhibition space served as a reminder of American theatre’s spatial and dramaturgical variety within the façade of brick


walls, providing a hidden space that explored new scenographies. Additionally, this space served as a performance site for alternative theatre throughout the Prague Quadrennial, most notably featuring Paul Zaloom’s puppetry performances. While transitioning the venue into a performance site was remarkable, it clearly contrasted the archived scenographic artifacts within the exhibition. The performance was not interconnected with the rest of the conceptual archive.

**Art Installation: Expressive Explorations**

The third exhibition format I explore is abstracted representation sites. These sites are art installations in which, essentially, the past has been substituted for the present moment. In abstracted representation exhibitions the displacement of the production artifact for an ephemeral moment lends itself to performance interactions between the art installation and the passive spectator. During the 2011 Prague Quadrennial, these exhibition sites shifted toward archive
performances questioning the boundaries of scenography. As it was in 2007, the 2011 Hungarian national exhibition was the best example of this category.

The Hungarian curatorial team choose a radical concept, the displacement of an artist in the modern world. This approach received recognition as best curatorial concept by the Prague Quadrennial Jury. In awarding the Gold Medal to the Hungarian national exhibition, they commented on “‘the conceptual unity of this evocative exhibit’ which ‘immersed visitors in an enigmatic, metaphorical world.’”\(^{18}\) The exhibition created a representative artist, who metaphysically disappeared from society. In the curatorial statement, the curators position this absence:

> In January 2010, our artistic group won the application for the Hungarian exhibition at PQ.
> In December 2010, for reasons yet unknown, our dear friend and colleague, scenographer Mihály W. Bodza disappeared. At present he is reported missing.
> In February this year we decided to put aside our work done over the past nine months in order to dedicate the Hungarian section of PQ to Bodza’s oeuvre.\(^{19}\)

Similar to the exterior of the United States exhibition, the Hungarian exhibition boxed out their exhibition space. However, unlike the American exhibition, the Hungarian curatorial team created a dark interior with a mysterious projection environment showcasing the missing designer’s significant contributions to Hungarian society (figure 16). The showcased designer did not exist. His biography was imaginative construction of cities, personalities and exhibitions, such as his attendance at Josef Svoboda College in Dublin. The interior’s negative space amplifies the spectator’s response to absence. It questioned the designer’s role in a design exhibition after their artifacts have been re-contextualized for new purposes. The exhibition

\(^{18}\) “PQ Award Winners,” 14.

Figure 16. The projections defining the 2011 Hungarian National Exhibition space. Photograph by Carl Walling, June 2011.

... asked spectators if we cared about the designer’s presence when celebrating their artifact’s value in scenography. This moment was significant, giving rise to the question: if the Prague Quadrennial and its surrounding exhibitions reposition the event further from design artifacts, does the scenographer’s significance within the event severely diminish?

**Reflexive Performance Sites: The Transnational as Performative**

The final category I examine is the reflexive performance installation. The key element within this exhibition format is that the audience performs when entering the exhibition and there is active engagement between performance and spectator. It was through this exhibition format that the most dramatic shifts were displayed during the 2011 Prague Quadrennial. In 2007, the audience completed the exhibition’s scenography. With the conceptual shift in 2011, the performer in concert with the spectator completed the scenographic unit. While the Japanese and
the Icelandic national exhibitions served as strong examples for reflexive performance sites, I believe the best case-study for this categorization came from Prague Quadrennial’s Intersection project.

Throughout this dissertation, I have defined major Prague Quadrennial-wide performance-centered exhibitions as transnational events. These events linked the Prague Quadrennial’s exhibition sections into a cohesive centralized event, embodying the core ideals for that year’s Prague Quadrennial. Since their introduction in the 1999 Prague Quadrennial, the transnational events brought individual artists and performance groups together in kaleidoscopic events bridging cultures, theories and audiences. Unlike the national exhibition section, where national curators determined their pavilion’s conceptual frameworks and selected artistic work for inclusion based on their own criteria, the transnational events were planned by international artists for internationals artists via a peer-review mechanism. As a result, the selected artists may or may not have been part of their nation’s formal exhibition. This allowed artists access beyond Prague Quadrennial’s cultural organization contacts and extended the potential for significant explorations for new scenographies.

After Le Campement’s initial success during the 1999 Prague Quadrennial, when public performances took place outside the Industrial Palace’s walls, the event’s organizers decided to expand the transnational event’s scope, to further connect the local audience with international performances. These discussions resulted in a symposium series culminating in the 2003’s Heart of the Prague Quadrennial, nested in the central hall of the Industrial Palace. The Heart of the Prague Quadrennial’s location meant that performances would be positioned at the principal intersection between various art installations found within both wings of the Industrial Palace. This practice significantly impacted future Prague Quadrennials, as the principal space within the
Industrial Palace was redefined by the transnational event. In 2007, the Industrial Palace’s center hall hosted three transnational events simultaneously: Scenofest (an educational event comprising of student-focused lectures and workshops), the Tower of Babel (a cylindrical scaffolding construction that housed performances) and the Cardboard Box Theatre (an alternative, sustainable theatre which hosted lectures and performances). The 2011 Prague Quadrennial’s reimagined transnational event, Intersection: Intimacy and Spectacle, was conceptualized to take place in the same central hall prior to the Industrial Palace’s fire. As a result of this unexpected event, organizers needed to reimagine the event’s purpose to fit an alternative space.

Intersection’s purpose spoke to larger thematic considerations within the Prague Quadrennial. The Intersection project took place on the piazzetta outside the National Theatre in a series of small cubical performance structures arrayed as a performance colony (figure 17).

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Installation performances included teaching dance to interested spectators, a playable human-sized board game titled Europoly that spoke to recent issues in European immigration, immersion therapy experienced through a video program, and other scenographic experiences exploring notions of performance and spectatorship. Three principal themes occurred, mirroring the three trends that I charted throughout chapters four and five. First, the Intersection project connected with artists underrepresented by the Prague Quadrennial’s exhibition format of national, student and architectural sections. Daniela Pařízková and Pavla Petrová emphasized this new opportunity stating:

Intersection will feature not only projects by artists who have exhibited at the Quadrennial in the past, but also entirely new artists, often from fields that have never before been represented at the Quadrennial. Thanks to Intersection, the Quadrennial has expanded not only its range of disciplines and genres, but also its presence in space and time.

Their comment upholds the Prague Quadrennial’s historical conviction to explore new scenographic boundaries. The transnational event showcased individuals working outside the traditional boundaries of scenographic practice, providing an alternative voice to the Prague Quadrennial’s formal exhibition spaces as the Intersection project’s roots within performance design contrasted scenographic statements explored within the national exhibition section. In this way Intersection expanded the Prague Quadrennial’s theoretical discourse.

Moreover, the Intersection project distorted the boundaries between these philosophical notions of scenography and performance design. Sodja Lotker described the curatorial approach for Intersection as a project examining “. . . the blurring of borders between theatre and visual

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arts and to evoke space as a medium for interaction of the public with art in both disciplines. It also examines a collision of the somewhat negating concepts of *spectacle* and *intimacy.*"\(^\text{23}\)

Intersection’s expansion resulted in sustained questions about boundaries between performance design and scenography. It not only blurred the boundaries, but it also attempted to extinguish popular preconceptions about theatrical performance. The terms spectacle and intimacy were simultaneously on display for an audience to question their terminological and conceptual differences.

However, Intersection was more than a testing of boundaries as Lotker explained in an interview for *PQ Mag*: “Our aim is to bring theatre closer to the people, to take it out of the theatre’s four walls and to enable audiences to experience it in a way that, for the most part, they are not used to. We also want to show that scenography is not just a part of theatre, but that it can also be found in video art, installation art, choreography and other art forms.”\(^\text{24}\) The event’s spectacle ironically resulted in an immediacy for spectators. Intersection not only questioned scenography’s relationships with performance and performance design, but it also questioned the spectator’s relationship to these terms. In Intersection’s manual for spectators, its author wrote

> [t]he intersection project does not present a hypothesis or an explanation. . . . Dramaturgically, the Intersection project is built as cultivated chaos of performance modes, moods and environments, a layered system created to mystify the definition of performance and performance design rather than define it, it’s a puzzle with many missing parts.\(^\text{25}\)

The event questioned the need for scenography to define theatrical space. It advocated chaos as a means to an end while presenting itself in various artistic expressions. This contrasted highly

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\(^{24}\) Daniela Pařízková and Sodja Lotker, 1.

formalized Prague Quadrennial venues and provided another vantage point from which to understand the spectator’s relationship with scenographic practice and form.

Finally, due to the unforeseen circumstances surrounding the 2011 Prague Quadrennial, Intersection was situated within Prague’s urban environment. Lotker noted that “[t]he city of Prague itself will create context for the rest of the PQ exhibitions and projects, the Architecture Section, Scenofest, Light and Sound, Intersection: Intimacy and Spectacle, as well as other numerous events and expositions, bringing it closer to the audience by entering the public spaces in the center of the city.”26 The Intersection project relied on the public negotiation of the performance spaces. The temporary performance site located on the piazzetta outside the National Theatre juxtaposed the event against the formal performance spaces surrounding it. The outdoor performance venue breached Prague’s urban landscape, as audiences could freely enter or exit the performance space. In fact, they were encouraged to walk through the various installations comprising the Intersection project at their own pace in any sequence they wished.

Considerations toward the Conclusion

In chapter five, I explored how the 2011 Prague Quadrennial’s changing perceptions toward scenography resulted in significant alterations to previous notions of performance design, design exhibition and scenography. The event’s multiple intersections amongst these practices stemmed from the three ongoing trends with the Prague Quadrennial’s development. First, the exhibition’s connection to the city of Prague was further developed as public spaces were utilized by the event’s organizers to simultaneously bring the Prague Quadrennial directly to a local Czech audience and encourage international attendees, including foreign tourists, to

experience more of the city. The event’s necessary decentralization resulted in new, exciting interfaces with its spectators. Second, the expansion of the conceptual exhibition included performance design methodologies introducing new strategies to mediate design exhibition limitations. These strategies resulted in attempts by several curators to reposition the artifact away from in situ presentations and toward in context performances. Finally, I explored methods used by organizers, curators and individual designers within the transnational event, Intersection, which challenged our existing understandings of scenography’s boundaries, limitations and future potentials.
CHAPTER 6.

CONCLUSION

In my introduction, I contemplated two fundamental questions for my exploration into the Prague Quadrennial. First, I asked what was gained and lost when exploring scenography and performance design through the lens of design exhibition. If scenography was defined as the shaping of visual space for performance, and performance design was defined as spatial design being transformed through performance, how did these philosophies influence curatorial decisions found within the Prague Quadrennial’s exhibition halls? My second question considered the Prague Quadrennial’s philosophical shift from scenography in 2007 to performance design in 2011 and how that shift repositioned visual design practice. In redefining what one might consider scenographic practice, did the Prague Quadrennial strengthen or undermine its own status as an international theatrical design exhibition? Throughout my dissertation I allow these questions to inform my investigation through case studies from the Prague Quadrennial’s history, with particular attention to the most recent Prague Quadrennials in 2007 and 2011. My conclusion coalesces the previous chapters’ considerations while systematically exploring the Prague Quadrennial’s effect on its participants and on the practice of theatrical design exhibitions.

Scenographic Visions and Performance Design Applications

In chapter two, I considered the origins of scenography along with the development of performance design. The philosophical underpinnings of scenography have been contested throughout theatre history; as a result, scenography has a multiplicity of meanings stemming from its connection to various artistic fields: architecture, fine arts and performance. This
multiplicity extended to cultural movements in Ancient Athens, Ancient Rome, the Italian Renaissance, Czech Modernism, and European Post-Modernism. During the Prague Quadrennial’s previous twelve iterations, event organizers and national exhibition curators deliberately explored philosophical questions such as, what is the purpose of scenography within performance and what is the scenographer’s role in establishing visual representations within performance? The fields of scenography and architecture were linked throughout the first Prague Quadrennials, as this significant relationship was developed throughout European theatre history, particularly during the Ancient Athenian, Ancient Roman, and the Italian Renaissance eras. Scenographers explored architectural techniques, including the development of buildings engineered for theatrical performance (Ancient Athens and Rome) and perspective drawing in creating representational city locations for performance (Italian Renaissance).

Architecture’s influence was significant due to two factors present at the first Prague Quadrennial. The first Prague Quadrennial’s dedicated exhibition site presented Czech architectural style to an international audience through hosting the event in the 1958 Brussels World Expo Pavilion. This setting reinforced Czechoslovakia’s legitimacy in hosting a theatre architecture section within the scope of the Prague Quadrennial. Architecture’s second influence involved the way Czech scenography was perceived. During the 1967 Prague Quadrennial, its organizers created a special section dedicated to the significant works of Josef Svoboda, František Tröster, and Ladislav Vychodil, who were internationally celebrated scenographers. Jarka Burian, in a foreword to Josef Svoboda’s memoirs, observed the connections between Svoboda’s scenographic philosophy and architecture:

In its historic sense, scenography for Svoboda relates back to the Renaissance and Baroque masters, such as Serlio, Sabbatini, Torelli, and the Bibienas, men who were architects and engineers, who brought scientific method and technological expertise to the service of scenic art. Conceptually, a scenographer is not merely a visual artist
interested in theatre, but one who has mastered the principles of design in relation to one of the “harder” disciplines, such as painting, sculpture, graphic art, or, above all, architecture, for the scenographer’s primary challenge is that of defining, controlling, and transforming space.  

Svoboda’s scenographic aesthetic expanded understandings of scenography beyond its historical connections to perspective drawing, scientific method and architecture. Svoboda viewed scenographers as specialists who created visual environments through their own individual skill sets, whether this was through architecture or fine art. Moreover, Svoboda’s scenography represented a potential to redefine theatrical practice. Critical to his scenographic aesthetic was the acknowledgement that scenographers shaped space through their own vision of the world. The Prague Quadrennial explicated and celebrated the scenographer’s explorations of life through performance space.

Over the course of the Prague Quadrennial’s development, scenography expanded beyond the establishment of theatrical space. Scenographers, curators and theatre artists explored new scenographic methods through the national exhibitions. Pamela Howard’s definition of scenography encapsulates this movement as she defined scenography as “the seamless synthesis of space, text, research, art, actors, directors and spectators that contributes to an original creation.”

Approaching the end of the twentieth century, scenography represented a larger construct involving the collaborative effort amongst theatre artists when creating their dramatic environments for an audience. As the Prague Quadrennial’s artistic leadership recognized their important role in developing their design exhibition throughout the 1980’s and 1990’s, the

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2 Howard, 130.
national exhibition curators slowly repositioned theatrical artifacts for new audiences. This
exhibition format, the basis for many of the early Prague Quadrennial national exhibitions, was
obligated to shape the exhibition space while contextualizing the historical artifact. Many
national curators at the Prague Quadrennial eventually abandoned this approach in order to
resituate artifacts for spectators rooted in the exhibition site at the present moment. In this
context, the artifacts functioned both as historical archives and cultural participants. Curators
focused on new conceptual exhibition strategies that recognized scenography’s ability to act as a
fusion amongst performance elements. Howard’s statement about scenography characterizes this
need to bind scenography to all of its disparate elements. Hence, when Jürgen Dreier’s set design
for Kata Kabanova established the conceptual exhibition approach during the 1983 Prague
Quadrennial, it fused the artifact within a scenographic environment supporting its text, the
Dreier’s pathways through the willowy fields, along with an audience who had a feeling that they
were performers on the stage. Future quadrennials would support similar scenographic
environments, such as the 1987 United States exhibition, where reconstituted artifacts converged
with a conceptual vision and a participating audience member exploring the installation space
serving as a performer.

In the twenty-first century, scenography made another significant leap with the Prague
Quadrennial when the event’s artistic leadership reestablished connections between live
performance and scenography. This development occurred after the Velvet Revolution, when the
Prague Quadrennial’s concerns about censorship were mitigated by democratic reforms.
Contextualized scenographic artifacts were no longer needed to solely speak toward larger
notions of performance, as performance revitalized curatorial strategies. Performance reentered
the Prague Quadrennial as a strategy in solving the ongoing ephemeral dilemmas which plagued
the exhibition from its very beginning. Engaging scenographic exhibitions emphasized the interaction between artist, artifact, performer and audience. At previous Prague Quadrennials, either the scenographic artifacts performed or the spectator became a participating performer within the exhibition. After the Velvet Revolution, I offer that the Prague Quadrennial sought to separate the performer from both artifact and the spectator. Performances, established specifically for a national exhibition’s audience, resulted in ephemeral interactions with the artifacts, exhibition site, and performers. The spectator’s objectivity was restored as a separate performance entity, as they were no longer required to simultaneously perform. As a result, the notions of scenography shifted again. For the 2011 Prague Quadrennial, Lotker contextualized scenography stating

[s]cenography, a term that is still part of the original title of the event in Czech, is in the context of the Prague Quadrennial considered and used as almost an exact synonym to performance design. It also features the discipline in its full complexity: today we talk of scenographies of exhibitions, scenographies of dreams, scenographies of war etc., when we talk about built and active environments that surround us in personal, political, sociological, or artistic ways that we inhabit or visit.3

So, if the two terms are similar, then why need the two terms? While the Czech translation placed scenography and performance design together, it also exposed a repositioning of these critical terms for an international audience. In the above quote, Lotker illustrates the need for performance design. Lotker’s definition speaks of scenographic environments existing beyond traditional theatre sites, a reframing which relates this exposed scenography to other performative acts within human experience. Lotker’s scenography could be shaped by a single artist or an artistic team; however, unlike Burian’s interpretation of Svoboda’s scenography, Lotker’s scenography is mediated between society and the artist. Scenography, from this

perspective, directly links performance to experiences of the human condition; due to the complexities of this endeavor, scenography must be established within cultural negotiations between artist, city and culture. In my understanding, scenography was seen as a regulated term, which limited its application to performance spaces just as stage design and theatre design are focused primarily on the theatrical stage. Traditional scenography’s scope was limited to traditional performance modes. Lotker’s definition of scenography builds on the previous historical definitions of the term, however, it expands the scope of scenography into everyday life. Lotker’s broadened definition of scenography set the stage for the 2011 Prague Quadrennial to expand its reach throughout the city of Prague for the 12th Prague Quadrennial. This expansion was seen as a trend throughout the post-Velvet Revolution Prague Quadrennials, as the event continued to increase its connection with live performance and continued to expand throughout the city. The burning down of the Industrial Palace merely accelerated this event-wide conceptual trend of theatre exhibition directly reflecting and influencing contemporary culture.

The Prague Quadrennial’s shift in approach toward performance design represented a major methodological change. In 2011, Lotker expressed her interpretation of performance design’s purpose as

... a legacy of Arnold Aronson, General Commissioner 2007, aims to emphasize exactly this involvement of scenography in a variety of performative activities. Using the term performance design aims towards acknowledging the changes in the theatre in the last decades as well as the changes in scenographic activity being part of numerous genres and disciplines. Performance design is used here instead of set design (that rings too close to setting and decoration), instead of stage design (that limits scenography to the space of stage), and instead of theatre design (that does not include a variety of performative genres).4

Lotker clearly defines scenography and performance design in relation to each other. Moreover, she positions the 2011 Prague Quadrennial’s application of scenography to expand into other artistic fields mediating complex spaces of human interaction.

However, there was one significant catch when establishing this noteworthy philosophical expansion – scenography was still linked to an ephemeral performance. In order to redefine scenography, its advocates had to overcome scenography’s ephemeral limitations. This pursuit has been at the Prague Quadrennial’s core since the event’s inception. Performance design is an attempt to reposition scenographic practice through active engagement with its contemporary audience. As the authors of *A Mirror of World Theatre II* noted

> [t]he PQ may remind its visitors of the fragile life and fame of theatre stagings, at least by means of scenographic recording. Because scenography is only a part of the art of drama, a part of a live performance and because it is not a separate artefact, it offers a *vision* of an apprehended performance in the exhibition halls even more strongly than on the stage, it paradoxically provokes a visitor to co-operate much closer; it forces one to *imagine the context*. 5

The audience’s reimagining of the artifacts’ individual contexts was a method to overcome early limitations within the design exhibition format; however, this was an imperfect approach. Placing artifacts *in situ* within a larger conceptual art installation refocused the audience’s attention to larger curatorial questions. This was evidenced by several installations at the Prague Quadrennial, including the Russian and Israeli national exhibitions in 2007, as well as the United States national exhibition in 2011. The *in situ* presentation format sacrificed the artifact’s present-moment spectator’s ability to discern accurate information about the historical production, such as the 2007 Russian exhibition’s scenic models, where the artifact represented only a small fragment of the overall production.

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5 Bílková, et al., 3.
In theory, performance design does more than present the archive or provide a visual environment. Performance design asks an audience member to consider the potential connections to the human experience with a multiplicity of ways to engage scenographic visions. The performance links spectators with their scenographic environments. Participants discover new interpretations for the scenographic fragment recontextualizing artifacts within a new performance environment to illuminate cultural identity.

Another impact of the shift toward performance design was a strengthening of the Prague Quadrennial’s connection to the city, providing cultural opportunities to position Czech performance within the larger constructs of the international culture of a major European city. The Prague Quadrennial developed into an international event showcasing performance design’s impact in shaping scenographic environments within everyday lives. Yet, the event’s evolution also undermined its status as an international theatrical design exhibition. The significance of shaping the visual environment within the performance became secondary to the re-conceptualizing of the Prague Quadrennial’s aesthetics away from visual artifacts and toward performance. The need to contextualize the performance archive often resulted in performances that wiped away traces of the original production altogether. Often the visual artifact, once supporting a production for which it was designed, became a fragment speaking to the cultural legacy within a nation’s performance history over the past five years – its historical significance, within the context of a production, diminished or ignored in order to establish a visual performance for a Prague Quadrennial audience. While the performance is rooted within the curator’s interpretation and the application of a national aesthetic, the artifacts provided never have impact solely through their own merit. This may be the major challenge confronting the Prague Quadrennial in future iterations of the event: the potential for the visual artifact, the
scenography, to be displaced as the event’s sole focus, and replaced by performances which are site-specific only to Prague itself.

So, have the terms scenography and performance design combined, and are they interchangeable? The terms have not combined, but they are interrelated. Scenography represents the impact and shaping of space within the performance. I believe scenography is the visual and aural resonance which an artist or collaborative team of artists create in amplifying their audience’s understanding of the human condition. Scenography expresses the spatial relationships between audience and performers within a predefined space. In most cases, scenography will be applied to an authored script in which the scenographer will make conscious choices to accentuate or diminish characters, themes, plot devices and language in support of an artistic vision. Conversely, my definition of performance design builds on Lotker’s as it is an expansion of scenographic theories beyond traditional performance (defined as theatre, dance, opera, site-specific performances, etc.) and toward cultural spaces shaped by performance (fashion, politics, urban environments, etc.). Performance design forms a complex relationship with society. In my opinion, performance design represents a mediated approach toward scenography accepting the audience’s vital role as co-creator. It is still essential to communicate an idea to a spectator, however, the spaces are negotiated as cultural performative sites. The shaping of theatrical spaces is closely linked to performance, yet, the audience’s role as artistic mediator or co-creator has changed.

**Topics for Further Consideration**

I believe my research establishes a foundation to explore further areas in the Prague Quadrennial’s scope. I believe the most critical question for the Prague Quadrennial’s future is
whether this trend toward performance design will continue to pull the event’s mission further away from the visual artifacts situated within the national exhibitions and toward a performance design festival where exhibitions must contextualize their artifacts within live performance environments. Due to another change in venue, the 2015 Prague Quadrennial’s national exhibition section will once again be spread throughout multiple locations within the city of Prague. This significant decentralization will have an impact on viewing the 2015 event. Will the decentralization result in static art installations serving museums of scenographic history or active performance-centered locales serving the present moment at the expense of the past? Moreover, will the Prague Quadrennial’s audience select favorite venues to attend while ignoring other exhibition spaces? In my opinion, this occurred during the 2011 Prague Quadrennial, as the National Gallery’s Veletržní Palace segmented the national exhibitions into two ground floor wings with an additional partial exhibition wing up on the second floor. This separation seemed to impact the number of attendees for the Golden Triga winning Brazilian national exhibition, as well as the Canadian and Finnish national exhibitions (among others) – as these exhibitions were effectively out-of-sight. Will further decentralization spread across city streets lessen the Prague Quadrennial’s impact as a generator for scenographic discussions as the city’s geography influences audience engagement? In 2011, I observed that the architecture exhibition in St. Anne’s Church, as well as an excellent exhibition of Edward Gordon Craig designs nearby, seemed under-attended near the city center when contrasted with the National Gallery’s Veletržní Palace attendance. Did Prague’s urban geography negatively affect the Prague Quadrennial’s scenographic investigations into new potential sites exemplifying performance design? Or, by sheer coincidence, was the audience’s reception of performance design skewed due to not experiencing the traditional scenographic approaches found both in the architecture
section and the Edward Gordon Craig exhibit? In 2015, will the Prague Quadrennial’s various constituencies select exhibitions featuring performance design and contextualized performances, or will they select traditional conceptual exhibitions featuring resituated artifacts? The 2015 Prague Quadrennial will be a barometer for determining the audience’s connection with performance design.

A second potential topic for further study is the acceptance of sound design as a scenographic artifact throughout the Prague Quadrennial’s history. In my dissertation, I have predominantly considered the visual stimuli which have been associated with the Prague Quadrennial. These stimuli include scene, lighting, costume and projection design. Sound design’s impact has been neglected throughout my dissertation. The national exhibition installations, the various scenic models, production photography, realized costumes, and various in-process documents (such as artistic sketches, renderings, and conceptual statements) are visually documented in the Prague Quadrennial’s literature. Sound design, however, has been poorly documented throughout the event’s history. Sound design artists gave presentations and workshops during the most recent Prague Quadrennials, which directly impacted their audience’s understanding of sound’s important role within theatre. While their names and significant works were documented in various print catalogues and exhibition daily calendars, their actual sound designs and compositions were underrepresented in the event’s archive. Their scenographic contributions, including sound recordings, are present at the Prague Quadrennial; however, further explorations stemming from the Prague Quadrennial are limited due to the lack of archival material. Given the 2014 decision by the Tony Awards to abolish the sound design award category, the significance of sound design’s role within the scenographic environment is
certainly a timely issue. It would be interesting to use the Prague Quadrennial as a case study to further examine the challenges in representing sound within a design exhibition environment.

Finally, if performance is the missing ephemeral element needed to address scenography exhibition limitations, will performance overcome ephemeral limitations in the audience’s reception of scenography and performance design? I offer that design can indicate plot, environment, emotional resonance and time. It does not necessarily provide verbal expression, but it can provide a strong indication of plot motifs and character. Design exhibition attempts to fill in the missing performance through contextualization and repositioning. However, the exhibition artifacts stand as fragments and there can be error in the interpretation. An unknowing audience can infer the production aesthetic choices when they view a costume design in a production of *Waiting for Godot* or *Henry V*. If the viewer is unfamiliar with the source material, the significance of the scenographic choices supporting the production is obscured. The spectator loses the cultural subtexts embedded in the scenographic artifacts. Can performance design successfully recontextualize the artifact’s original artistic purpose?

**Final Thoughts**

In my dissertation, I considered the potential impact of the Quadrennial’s investigations and applications of scenography and performance design. Did the Quadrennial’s shift in event title and organizational purpose contribute to a new understanding of these terms, concepts and their applications? What I discovered was that the organizers reinvented a quadrennial speaking to the evolution of theatrical design. Theatre does not exist within the boundaries of the permanent stage. It never did. It never will. The organizers resituated the event’s connection with
the human condition through the event’s decentralization throughout Prague. They connected the
event to the city and to everyday life.

I believe the late British sound designer Steven Brown, who served as the Sound Design
Curator for PQ 2011, summarized the Prague Quadrennial’s impact better than anyone else. He
addressed the larger question stated in the first sentence of this dissertation: why study the
Prague Quadrennial at all? Brown observed

[i]t seems to me that the Prague Quadrennial not only reflects what’s foremost in design
for performance and space but also what’s best in human nature. A gathering of creative
people who explore and reflect our world through investigating and reacting to time,
space, the human soul and condition with sound, light and all matter of visual stimulus.
For ten days, every bleary eyed morning is the start of a day which is always full of
discovery and challenges. PQ is about meeting old and making new friends, it’s about
sharing, collaborating and exploring, it’s a wonderful place to be. . . .

PQ provides a welcome respite from the rigours of trying to earn a living as an
artist, or creator, and if any Government official ever needs real proof of (and also
experience the real importance of) exactly how art, theatre and performance can improve
the quality of everyone’s lives, whoever they are, whatever they do and wherever they
live, they’d be foolish not to attend these fantastic ten days in Prague. They’d then surely
discover the contribution that so many skilled and talented people make to all of us as
they tirelessly work towards enhancing our lives and helping us all to understand and
make sense of the world we all share.6

Throughout the Prague Quadrennial’s history, the event has been designed for one express
purpose: to communicate innovative scenographic ideas to an audience. Over forty-four years,
the Prague Quadrennial has shifted its scenographic ideas and its targeted audience several times.

Back in 1967, the event celebrated Czech scenographers and international designers. Students
were encouraged to participate through the establishment of a recurring student section
beginning in 1975 and through the Scenofest years at the 2003, 2007 and 2011 Prague
Quadrennials. In 2007, the event’s organizers further pushed the boundaries expanding the

transnational event space, which defined the Prague Quadrennial community consisting of professional scenographers, emerging artists, students and the local Czech audience with an interest in theatre.

By the 2011 Prague Quadrennial, both the scenographic focus and the targeted audience had significantly shifted. Performance design expanded the fields which scenography impacted. The event’s artistic leaders embraced its connections with the city, expanding its reach beyond the performance community and its traditional audiences to include Prague’s non-theatre attending citizens and visiting tourists. Organizers embraced the event’s ability to bring international guests to Prague as a cultural benefit to the city and its population. Prague remained an international cultural center, yet its role as an intersection between Eastern and Western Europe dissolved after the end of the Cold War. Today’s Prague Quadrennial serves as an intersection of global culture, which exposes and celebrates the artist’s vital role within society.


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