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Editorial for the special issue on The Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space 2015 by Barbora Příhodová, Joslin McKinney and Sodja Lotker,

This special issue gathers together a collection of different perspectives and voices from The Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space (PQ) that took place in June 2015. Together these articles and images represent the diversity and global reach of the reflections and conversations that PQ has facilitated. Rather than attempt a comprehensive report on PQ 2015, we have aimed to reflect the range of motivations, impressions and evaluations of participation in PQ 2015. In that spirit, each of the editors offers their own perspective on the significance of PQ 2015 and the aims of this issue.

Prague Quadrennial meeting Prague

Barbora Příhodová

The Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space (PQ) is the largest international event that explores the art of scenography in its many forms. Established in 1967 in the capital of then Communist Czechoslovakia, PQ has for decades served as an important platform for exchanging ideas about set, costume, lighting and sound design and, more recently, about newly defined artistic forms that transcend the traditional theatrical genres such as site-specific or applied scenography. The 13th edition of the Prague Quadrennial was the largest in the history of the event. Taking place between 18th - 28th June 2015, and in some 60 indoor and outdoor venues in Prague, it consisted of over 600 live events and more than 150 exhibits. It introduced work by artists from 78 countries—some of whom have contributed to this issue—and it had 180,000 visitors and over 6000 accredited professionals.[i] The main theme of PQ 2015 was titled, Shared Space: Music Weather Politics, a theme that conceptualizes scenography as a "strong and sometimes invisible force of performance "(Lotker 2015a, 10) while focusing on its "social function, providing a space for sharing, relating, and also for being in conflict—a place of connection and of difference." (10)

Significantly, the PQ 2015 was more than ever connected to its location—the city of Prague and its historical zone. The Old Town and Wenceslas Squares, Kafka House, Clam-Gallas and Coloredo-Mansfeld Palaces situated in close proximity to

Charles Bridge, Jan Palach Square—all these sites, and many others besides, were temporarily appropriated by the participants of PQ. Connecting the event that carries the name of the city in its title so closely with the city itself, and literally merging with its very materiality, turned out to be a powerful and complex strategy on the part of the organizers.

Prague is a charismatic, hybrid and deeply ambiguous place with a complicated history and multiple identities that is both old and ultramodern, chic and shabby, provincial and cosmopolitan, welcoming and inhospitable. Prague as a whole, and many of the sites engaged especially for the event, is a distinctive arena that cannot serve as a neutral bare stage on which to unfold one's performance. Its charisma necessarily suffuses any action performed within it, making the place itself one of the protagonists and co-creators of the performance.

For eleven days, PQ produced an imagined *shared space* of people invested in different kinds of performing and visual arts that plugged into the multi-layered, unstable identity of the city, and, thereby, adding another layer of identity. This layer, generated by tension between the place and the *shared space* as a pulsating web of ideas, practices and energies, enabled those familiar with Prague to experience the city, its inhabitants and the ways they navigate it, in a completely different manner. And, more importantly, highlighted the impact of how we now conceptualize scenography.

PQ has been historically centered around "scenography," as a particular, rather exclusive, type of theatre practice that focuses on ways to articulate stage space. This type of practice, however, grows from a very particular set of aesthetic norms and cultural expectations and is also conditioned by particular types of institutions, economic models, and political systems. The perspective that privileged this view of scenography started to change with the arrival of millennium, and following a series of transgressive steps in PQs 2003, 2007 and 2011 that affected both the form and the content of the event, it reached an apotheosis at PQ 2015. By expanding the concept of "scenography" beyond the stage and re-conceptualizing the act of seeing scenography into *sharing space*, by moving away from displaying artifacts into creating them, and by introducing international open-calls to invite artists across disciplines, researchers, teachers, students—simply anyone interested—to join in the interdisciplinary theme-driven projects, PQ has opened

doors to participants whose performative practices and ways of making theatre have exceeded the rather limited view of “scenography” as previously understood.

This decolonizing gesture has brought at least two significant shifts: first, PQ, similarly to its *locus delicti* - Prague, has increasingly become a transnational celebration of hybridity and diversity. The importance of this move lies in that it disrupts any stable ideas about scenography, theatre, the figure of the artist/scenographer and the ways in which countries can be represented through, and identified with, a certain form of cultural production. At times, as in the case of Mexico, the participating artists evoked competing images of the country and its arts: on one hand, we could see in the Section of Countries and Regions the selection of projects by Mexican stage designers that emphasized the idea of PQ as a professional showcase, while on the other hand, participating Mexican collective Asalto Teatro turned their focus from the aesthetic of performance toward politics with their project *Frozen Cities to Survive the End of the World*, introduced in this issue by the author of its concept Ángel Hernández. Presented as one of the performative walks within the Performing Space section of PQ 2015, the walk and the following discussion pointed at the critical struggle of the citizens with violence in the country.

Second, as a result of expanding the remit and reach of PQ, the participating subjects—who were not only represented but present–were empowered by gaining their own voice and the possibility to reveal their own agendas. Or, to use the conventional vocabulary one more time, they did not have to rely on a playwright, director and actor, but like the city of Prague, they became the protagonists and the creators of their own performances. The Extreme Costume section, a feature of PQ 2011 was further developed in PQ 2015 through the Tribes project that introduced groups of costumed and masked individuals entering the streets of Prague. The masks, ranging from a group of elderly men incongruously dressed in Superman outfits to a group of swans taken out of a stage reinterpretation of *Swan Lake*, provoked discussion about a number of topics such as ecology, consumerism, or postcolonial identity, mapping them onto the city. In this issue the Tribes project is analysed by Sofia Pantouvaki. One should not forget, of course, that the materials and technologies used for making the masks have constituted topics for discussion of their own.

This special double issue attempts to reflect the hybridity and diversity performed during PQ 2015. Instead of the city of Prague, however, our site is words and images: it is through the different layers of language and photographic record that we aim to (re)perform the *shared space* produced by the participants of PQ. It has not been easy to transform the experience lived during those 11 days of June 2015, and to preserve the abundance of different voices coming from various disciplines, cultures and languages. However, the effort will have been worth it if the wide variety of authors, topics, ways of knowing and modes of writing contributes to a better understanding of PQ 2015 in all its complexity.

Communities of practice and structures of feeling

Joslin McKinney

Cognitive anthropologists Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) coined the term 'community of practice' to refer to the way apprentices are not simply inculcated in their craft by masters but are sustained by their interaction with a group of people who share their craft and/or profession. Learning and developing is a social process where members learn from each other and co-construct knowledge in their field. This concept does not just emphasise the importance of community sharing their enthusiasm; this kind of knowledge is situated in shared practice and practical interaction. Furthermore, it takes place within a 'domain', a place with which members of the community can identify and commit to. The Prague Quadrennial (PQ) is such a domain and through its activities it supports a community, or communities, of practice. PQ has shown a longstanding commitment to the next generation of practitioners. In 1975, the thematic section was dedicated to 'the work of scenographic schools' and the emphasis was on apprenticeship and 'a review of teaching methods' (PQ website) but this has shifted over the years towards a more active and dialogic mode of knowledge creation. Creative workshops, talks and discussions led by practitioners are now established alongside exhibits as an equally effective means of sharing and developing knowledge at PQ. The development of closer links between PQ and academic research have also served to extend the manner of knowledge creation and, in particular, reinforce the value of practice-as-

research as part of a developing understanding of the practice of scenography and performance design.

But embracing students from all over the world as a vital part of the scenographic community necessarily means accepting that the local contexts in which scenography is taught and practised have to be taken into account. For several countries, for example the UK, the student experience for instance arises from a well-established and extensive network of theatre and performance design courses whereas staff and students in the Philippines, as reflected in Rollie de Leon's article, are still struggling to achieve recognition and support for a practice of scenography that is in the process of emerging from traditional forms of performance. The expansion of PQ from a static exhibition stage design to a festival of performance design has opened up ways to interrogate practice and its processes as well as display its products. Scale models, costumes and production photos, once the mainstay of PQ exhibitions, are now supplemented or even replaced with live performance and this variety of means of expression lends itself to a multi-faceted exchange that can accommodate many different voices and different understandings of practice.

The range of ways in which scenography is presented and experienced at PQ has coincided with an appreciation that scenography is not confined to theatre stages and does not merely respond to a play text, but that it can arise from urban, everyday spaces, engage with political realities and provide a means of exploring individual and social identities. In this issue Serge von Arx, PQ 2015 commissioner of the Performing Space section, addresses the scenographic agency of architecture through a reflection on the somatic and sensorial experience of the city of Prague. He proposes that the insertion of ephemeral architectures initiated in other cities creates an intercultural dialogue through the medium of urban space and shared experience. Angel Hernandez (Mexico) and Juan Souki (Venezuela) both consider in further detail how the material and visual manifestations of cities reflect political realities. Souki shows how Caracas, a city of political spectacle, masks the reality of living in the city. Tatjana Dadic Dinulovic, too, charts how conflict has defined Serbia's participation in PQ. Following the violent break-up of the former Yugoslavia, Serbia has only exhibited as an independent nation since 2007 and Dinulovic attributes the emergence of 'scene design' in Serbia as 'a critical reaction to the

professional, educational, social and ideological context of Serbia in the 1990s'. In her article, she reflects on the aims and the outcomes for the Serbian exhibit and the ways in which scenographic practice ought to engage with notions of power and responsibility. These articles, as well as several others besides, demonstrate how participation in PQ facilitates an understanding of what scenography and performance design is and what it can do and, further, how the community of scenographic practice is engaged in a co-constructive process of developing the possibilities for future practice.

However, we should not assume that a process of sharing and learning from each other is a simple or straightforward matter; even if it seemed to be expressed as such in the 1975 catalogue, it is clear now that the scale and reach of PQ means that it cannot (and should not) expect to bring about a homogenous view of performance design or a single community of practice. There is (and there needs to be) debate, challenge and disagreement about where the boundaries of performance design should be drawn and what the core values and principles of the practices within it are. The perspectives that different participants bring to these debates are informed by strikingly different sets of concerns arising from particular social, cultural and political conditions. On closer inspection, PQ demonstrates that we cannot think of one singular community of practice but of many communities that intersect.

In this issue, Liu Xinglin describes how participation in PQ over many years, despite the difficulties, has been important in developing his sense of being part of a global community of practice. This has not replaced his membership of a community of practice that upholds traditional practices in Chinese art and design, but it has allowed him to consider how to respond to the opportunities of new technologies and the increasingly globalised context of his work. Reinis Suhanovs, meanwhile, makes it clear that despite the apparent international context of many scenographers' working lives, there is still a strong sense of a community of practice in Latvian scenography with its own particular values and traditions of expression. The articles by Katherine Graham on lighting design and by Sofia Pantouvaki on costume design address the challenges and opportunities for these two communities in representing the 'the dynamic and transformative experience of light' (Graham) and the potential of costume 'as a carrier of meaning(s) and a medium for social interaction' (Pantouvaki). PQ is therefore not simply a neutral domain in which communities of

practice can co-construct knowledge; it facilitates and provokes new ways of interacting and sharing. Pantouvaki quotes Sodja Lotker's comments on PQ's move away from an event documenting past work and aimed at 'experts' to an event that is more oriented towards the future and an 'experience-dialogue for scenographers/artists and the audience' (Lotker 2015b: 15).

The idea of 'practice' and the experience of practice is as important as the idea of 'community' and developing understanding through experience is essential to the way that new ideas can emerge and be challenged and/or accepted. Raymond Williams (1977) describes how cultural expression is an on-going process and a reflection of the historical, social and political context at any one time or place. Shifts in these larger social patterns necessitate changes in the way we sense and respond to things at an individual level; changes in what Williams' calls "structures of feeling" (1977: 129 -135). These changes are not the revolutions in art or ideology that can be easily rationalised and defined; they are emergent and even pre-emergent, 'at the very edge of semantic availability' (134), yet they 'exert palpable pressures and set effective limits on experience and on action' (132). In time and with the recognition of others, these emergent practices might become part of a more widely accepted and perhaps even dominant modes of expression (and eventually, perhaps, merely conventions), but at first they present themselves, often intangibly and very delicately, at the level of individual lived experience. PQ's emphasis on sharing through feeling and doing allows emergent ideas to be expressed and experienced as much as they are discussed and displayed. In selecting contributions for this special issue we have sought out pieces that articulate this sense of individual practice and experience. For example, several curators (usually also artists themselves) have reflected on their aims in assembling an exhibition that reflects communities of practice in their respective countries. Bibiana Puigdabrest explores how the relationship between 'landscape' and scenography is reflected in work from Catalunya. Meanwhile, Maiju Loukola and her collaborators show how a focus on sound as a scenographic material allows us to understand something about the broader ecological concerns in Finland.

Not all the work discussed here is obviously situated in a clear national context. Some, like Gundega Laivina's account of the Latvian national exhibit, focuses instead on the artistic aims and choices (the careful curation of space,

objects and performing bodies) that shape a particular aesthetic experience. Yet, this work, too, can be seen as a response to wider social and cultural concerns. An emerging area of interest for some scenographers is the potency of materials and the agency of the non-human elements in performance. A focus the properties and qualities of space and the way that objects and materials can operate as active agents finds some resonance in Katrin Brack's account of her use of materials and in Tanja Beer's work on 'eco-scenography' argues that this 'renewed respect for materials' is both an aesthetic and a political imperative.

, Most of the articles in this double issue are written by practising artists the knowledge they draw on is often tacit, arising from an embedded and embodied understanding of how to work with space, light, costume, sound, objects and materials. They are all part of allied communities of practice that between them reflect on and actively interrogate (through practice) both dominant and emergent ideas about performance design.

When You Invite Others to Come Out and Play **Sodja Lotker**

I have been artistic director of the Prague Quadrennial from 2008 to 2015, and I have worked for the Quadrennial since 1999 in various positions and I can tell you that the people who work there (and audiences, too) experience extreme fatigue after the event. It's an extremely exhausting event. And still on the Monday after the closing event (always on a Sunday) I can hear an echo of all the people's voices in my head. All the time, like white noise: thousands of people. And sometimes I understand a little fragment that makes me think a bit about what was said, but the other voices are still there and it takes weeks for the voices to leave me. The first time I experienced it – I was scared. But now I think about it simply as a post-PQ state and I almost enjoy it: because when you invite others to come out and play you can't complain that they made a mess.

And inviting others 'to come out and play' is the best part of being the artistic director of the PQ, and one of my priorities in the recent editions was to create a space of inclusiveness, for many people to be able to come out and play with many projects, many perspectives, from different approaches and disciplines. This inclusiveness is a necessity for a world exhibition where the scenography work from

all continents is presented. Since I have started working for the PQ I have quickly realized that I will never be qualified to objectively judge if a work from Brazil, the Philippines or Mongolia (for instance) is good or bad. I simply do not understand the context, local histories and needs of the work. (And of course I have not seen the performance as a whole but only a fragment of the performance.) So for me: 'everybody is welcome and invited' and the variety, the diversity, the possibility, the potential that follows form that invitation is the core of the PQ. And I really hope we managed to move the atmosphere in this direction: not everybody is present yet but the Quadrennial has become a place of 'this and that' and not 'this or that'.

Also in the 'coming out to play': the play is important. I think the live exchange among artists (and audiences of course) became the priority of the Quadrennial in the recent years. As Albert Einstein said "Play is the highest form of research." Through play we find out things we couldn't in any other way. And PQ is not mainly a place where (documented) work is presented anymore, but a place of exploration of what is happening in scenography now and what might happen in the future.

This issue of Theatre and Performance Design will hopefully provide the possibility for others to hear the multiplicity of voices that played at and after the PQ. But the 'list' can of course never be complete. And I would like to mention some projects that are missing from this issue but are still in my head after almost a year:

I want to mention the exposition of Spain - MUÉRETE: *"Social evolution evokes anxiety, but it's an unstoppable process."* This exposition where each visitor to the exhibit was invited to lay down on a bed of maggots in a room with golden walls and listen to a voice that helped them leave everything behind and see ourselves reflected in the mirrored ceiling, lie down and die and let go of ourselves and our values. Not only did it provide a situation for re-evaluation and change but also performed the core of theatre: the ultimate metamorphosis. The Bulgarian exposition, merry-go-round in St. Anne's Church had a similar affect on me. Though with maybe the opposite (happy) direction to the Spanish installation, it also invited the audiences to forget. And my experience of being on the merry-go-round was intimately profound – I remembered how important the forgetting is in the process of change.

The Finnish and Latvian student expositions as well as the Chinese and Slovak national exposition reminded me how important ‘elegance’ is in creation. And here I mean ‘elegance’ in the sense that it is used in physics – something coherent, where all the parts are in harmony with each other, and all the details are ‘nailed’. The aesthetic experience of this kind of ‘elegance’ provides us with possibility to enter other worlds, or at least see our own differently.

I also want to mention the Russian exposition - Meyerhold's Dream: Meyerhold is such a figure of (historical, theatrical) magnitude that he broke one of our walls in Kafka’s House just with a little movement of his gigantic head in his sleep. “It's September 29, 1933, 3:42 a.m.” To this day I cannot wrap my head around this exposition ‘was about’. The ambiguity it has provided me to play with is as enormous as Meyerhold’s head. The exposition of Australia allowed us to see into the incredible the quality and diversity of Australian scenography and theatre. And the team of the Polish exposition finally (thank you!) provided us with possibility to see what the guest could have eaten at Stanisław Wyspiański’s *The Wedding* (and this might be important mainly in the Eastern European context, but never the less).

So: possibilities and potentials, and change, and insights… But I am left also with important questions about the future: How will PQ continue presenting the work beyond traditional disciplines but not become just one more visual arts biennale? (How to maintain what is most special about the Quadrennial but continue being contemporary? How to continue presenting scenographies made for the stage and not become an exposition of scenographic installations?) Is there a way to present the context which shapes national exhibits so the audience can be drawn into the work more effectively? How to keep the Quadrennial open and inclusive and in the same time be ‘bearable’ (mainly in amounts of events and expositions) for the audiences?

So much work yet to be done… so much playing with others yet to happen!

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[i] These statistics were published on the web site of the Prague Quadrennial (http:// http://www.pq.cz/en/).