

INSTITUTE OF ART STUDIES, BAS



PETAR BORISLAVOV DENCHEV

**USE AND FUNCTION OF
SPACE IN THEATRICAL
PERFORMANCE
FROM 1968 TO THE PRESENT**

ABSTRACT

**OF A THESIS FOR THE AWARD OF
THE EDUCATIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC DOCTOR'S DEGREE
IN THE SCIENTIFIC SPECIALTY
THEATRE STUDIES AND DRAMA, 8.4.**

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The thesis was discussed and directed for public defence at a meeting of the *Theatre Sector* held on 29.07.2021.

The thesis consists of 336 pages, a preface, 5 chapters and 87 titles of bibliography in Cyrillic alphabet and 11 titles in Roman alphabet.

The public defense will be held on December, 2nd, 2021 at 11:00 a.m. at a meeting of the scientific jury composed of: Assoc. Prof. Assen Terziev, PhD, NATFA; Prof. Veneta Doycheva, PhD, NATFA, reviewer; Assoc. Prof. Venelin Shurelov, PhD, National Academy of Fine Arts; Prof. Nikolay Yordanov, PhD, Institute of Art Studies, reviewer; Assoc. Prof. Rumiana Nikolova, PhD, Institute of Art Studies, Chair.

The defense materials are available to those interested at the *Administrative Services* Department of the Institute of Art Studies, at *21 Krakra Str. Sofia*.

I. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE THESIS

1. Relevance of the topic

The thesis sets out to bring out space as an aesthetic category, but also as a kind of *metacategory* that is of primary necessity for the creation, consumption and analysis of theatrical performance. Trying to set the philosophical and historical boundaries of this phenomenon, the study endeavours to make a brief deliberate overview of the dynamics of the ideas of space and to trace the processes of emancipation of space as its own magnitude in Bulgarian theatre from 1968 to the present. The relevance of the topic is mainly due to the ongoing for over a decade interest in space that theatrical performances take, its exploitation and the aspiration to create a new language, precisely thanks to space. The theme appears topical through the prism of space in theatre as a unifying category that can be thought of as a continuous continuum, through the hypothesis of the construction of a narrative through which ideas and practices from the past are constantly re-actualised and transposed. In recent years, we have seen ever-narrowing boundaries between the real and the digital, between the true and the real, which also poses new challenges for how we should make sense of theatrical space. In the field of Bulgarian theatre studies, there are currently very few conceptual attempts in the field of space, which makes the topic relevant from a perspective that simultaneously unites historiography, phenomenology, and the signifying essence of performance.

2. Aims and objectives of the thesis

The aim of the thesis is to outline a perspective of Bulgarian theatre through the prism of space, bringing examples from the history and present of the Bulgarian stage in the larger context of European theatre to show how space plays a transformative role in the field of theatrical language and its reception. The historical period chosen, from 1968 to the present day, allows events to be brought to the fore that shape basic attitudes about how we understand and read contemporary Bulgarian theatre. The research sets before itself the hypothesis

that it is possible to construct a narrative of theatrical space as a unified continuum on the basis of the dynamics of ideas about it. The examination of the space's use is not thought of in the research solely as a practical function, but also through different contexts (where possible) - aesthetic, social, historical, etc. The focus of the research falls on the principle of the tandem between the director and the stage designer in Bulgarian theatre during the chosen historical period.

Main tasks of the thesis :

1. Formulating the concept of space in theatre. What is space in theatre performance and what possible meanings does this concept have? What is its use and function in different historical periods and how are these ideas re-actualized in the perspective of the development of theatre history.

2. Tracing the different lines in the use of space through the prism of the principle of the director-stage designer tandem in the defined historical period.

3. Conscious and deliberate selection of theatrical performances of various significant partnerships between director and stage designer in Bulgarian theatre (1968-present) and their examination in a critical context to serve as the focus of the research - the transformation of space through the prism of the subjective creativity of directors and stage designers.

4. An attempt to draw a parallel between the context of European cultural life and the Bulgarian one during the period in question.

3. Object and subject of the study

The object of the research is the space in theatrical performance in the Bulgarian theatre within the period from 1968 to the present day with a focus on the tandem work of significant partnerships between directors and stage designers. What constitutes space as a phenomenon and a category, how we should understand it, is part of this narrative and unfolds both in theoretical and practical terms.

4. Research methodology

The conceptual and theoretical, and historical understanding of space is the subject of the first two chapters of this thesis. The chosen approach is deductive - the research proceeds from the general conceptual framework to the particular manifestations in the Bulgarian context. The research is based on a number of different theoretical experiences and practical views of space in theatre performance from different origins - foreign authors, but also Bulgarian experience. Among the authors of these ideas are David Wiles, Marvin Carlson, Guy McAuley, Patrice Pavis, Anne Ubersfeld, Kazimierz Braun, Étienne Souriau, Peter Brook, Jerzy Grotowski, Angel Ahryanov, Anastas Mihailov, etc. The historiography is necessary in order to outline the main vectors, and from there to move on to the specific object of the research - the use and function of space in Bulgarian theatre. The expansion of the time frame of the study in the following chapters is necessary to point out some of the basic, underlying premises about the origins of Bulgarian theatre and its social role, which in many cases turns out to be fundamental for its self-definition.

The research is based on heterogeneous and diverse sources, literature and references. On the one hand, contemporary, and not so contemporary studies and works on the history of art, architecture, space and scenography in the world, European and Bulgarian theatre, research projects of Bulgarian scholars from the Department of Theatre Studies at the Krastyo Sarafov National Academy for Theatre and Film Arts, from the Theatre Sector of the Institute for Arts Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, as well as from the Academy of Arts were helpful. Another essential part of the sources of information are historical and cultural studies, research on literature and fine arts of the selected period, which give a more realistic picture of the cultural context in its dynamics; but also important is the overview of the cultural press during the different periods (Theater Magazine, Izkustvo (Art) Magazine, in Narodna Kultura (People's Culture), etc.). Important sources of knowledge are foreign and Bulgarian articles and conceptualizations on space, scenography and directing, philosophical and historical writings and collections. Last but not least, the

personal audio interviews that were conducted during the research are also a valuable source of information. The archival items of the State Photo Archive, the National Theatre, the Stoyan Bachvarov Dramatic Theatre in Varna, the Bulgarian Army Theatre in Sofia, the Nikola Vaptsarov Dramatic Theatre in Blagoevgrad, the Sava Ognyanov Theatre in Ruse, the Aleko Konstantinov State Satirical Theatre, the Union of Bulgarian Artists, UBA (Union of Bulgarian Artists), personal archives, etc. were also studied.

5. Scope and limitations

The main historical focus of the study falls on the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. However, the exploration of such a broad and largely uncountable field requires constant reference to trends and historical events of the past in order to clearly outline the context of artistic facts, but also for the study to attempt to be comprehensive in the scope of its intentions. The limitations fall on the deliberate choice of tandems and artistic facts to be considered in relation to the chosen historical period.

II. MAIN CONTENT OF THE THESIS

Introduction.

I. The problem of space

II. Modelling space

III. Modeling Space in Bulgarian Theatre: from its Emergence to the End of the WWII

IV. Manipulating Space: Sustainable Tandems between Director and Stage Designer in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s in Bulgarian Theatre

V. Occupation and Emancipation - Postmodern Space from the 1990s to the Present

Conclusion and implications

Bibliography

The **introduction** presents the intention and hypotheses of the study, sets its theoretical focus and lays out its structure.

Chapter One, "**The Problem of Space**", attempts to provide a theoretical basis for the study and to outline its historical boundaries, to encompass the problem of space both from its philosophical-conceptual point of view and to look through the practical dimensions of the problem, to make a thorough reading of the different dimensions of the object of study, its paradoxes, but also to draw a clear line to the hypothesis that the thesis tries to put forward. Namely, is it possible to think of space as a continuum of ideas that are constantly re-actualised through the history of theatre and the diverse artistic facts. This chapter analyses both the basic ideas of space in theatre and their dynamics. Numerous studies by theorists and practitioners of different generations are cited here, as well as philosophers and humanists who have addressed issues of theatre and space, such as David Wiles and Marvin Carlson, Guy Macauley, Patrice Pavis, Anne Ubersfeld, Kazimierz Braun, Étienne Souriau, Peter Brook, Jerzy Grotowski, Michel Foucault, Edward Hall, Jean-François Lyotard, Bertrand Russell, Arnold Aronson, Vera Dinova-Rousseva, Angel Ahryanov, etc.

The problem of space is basic to theatre, mainly because this phenomenon cannot be reduced to a general arbitrariness. Space is not a medium (although it sometimes appears as such a phenomenon), nor is it an artefact, so that we can

apply one-sided strategies to it, or easily transfer analytical approaches from other fields of art. Moreover, theatre is also a social phenomenon that has been formatted by various conditions along the way of its development. In such a sense, space must be thought of both philosophically and concretely, but also in the dynamics of ideas about it. Here is the definition we give for it, stepping on the different research experiences: 'Space in theatre is imposed as a *metacategory* that includes equally, in a single temporal flow, representation and observation; respectively, the theatre makers and the theatre watchers. Space emerges as a key issue for the artistic realization of theatre and its technical support, as well as for its understanding and study. This metacategory is a *territory* of interaction between the practical and the theoretical. Theoretical propositions by no means comprehend space, since its practical application is invariably a condition - in the form of the territory to be used by the performance as an artistic fact. This condition by its form, organization and physical properties influences the theatrical act and the communicative aspect of the theatrical phenomenon. It also influences the exchange of information, the signs and symbols that performers and spectators consume in the course of the theatrical act; and the coordinates of the work set by its creators - directors, stage designers, choreographers, etc." ¹

However, this definition and other research attempts do not answer the question what makes a space *theatrical*? Above all, two processes of subjectification are at stake here - one sensory-psychological, the other cultural and social. Firstly, it is the subjectivisation of the spectator's gaze that always turns the theatrical experience into a *space* because of the sensory attitudes towards this type of art. The second process is the emancipation of the directorial figure, which has existed in a latent form, with the emergence of modern theatre. The process of the assertion of the role of the director completely changes the dynamics of communication between author and work, between actor and role, and most importantly the dynamics of the relationship

¹ Denchev, Peter. The Use and Function of Space in Theatre Performance from 1968 to the Present Day, thesis, IICC - BAS, p.12

between the director and the theatre artist. This change that occurs with the emergence of the directorial figure also changes receptive attitudes towards theatre.

Thus, very soon in the first decades of the twentieth century, the first highly productive tandem partnerships emerged - Max Reinhardt and Ernst Stern, Leopold Jessner and Emil Pirschan, etc., and in Bulgarian theatre one of the first sustainable tandems of this type can be pointed out as the one of Hrisan Tsankov and Ivan Penkov. Another kind of partnership with a reversed paradigm also came into being between the two world wars. This one was between the artist Max Metzger and the three Bulgarians who introduced avant-garde practices into the interwar theatre of Bulgaria - Geo Milev, Isaac Daniel and Hrisan Tsankov.

The line of tandem which defines the dynamics of the space can be traced in Bulgarian theatre in the late 1950s and especially in the 1960s (Leon Daniel and Mladen Mladenov, Vili Tzankov and Mikhail Mikhailov, Metodi Andonov and Ivan Kirkov/Stefan Savov), and more faintly in the 1970s (Krikor Azaryan and Mladen Mladenov, Nikolai Lyutskanov and Georgi Ivanov, Georgi Nojarov and Luben Groys, Ivan Dobchev and Vyacheslav Parapanov, etc.), to return with full force to the Bulgarian theatre in the 1980s (Elena Tsikova and Krasimir Valkanov, Vaskresia Viharova and Zarko Uzunov, Zdravko Mitkov and Nevena Kavaldjieva, Stoyan Kambarev and Violeta Radkova, Slavi Shkarov and Neyko Neykov, etc.).

Chapter one of the study also clarifies what place scenography occupies as a conceptual part of space and how it is placed as an artistic fact in the *metacategory* of space. The study distinguishes the space of performance from that of scenography, setting the clear boundary that in purely semantic terms they may have different value and may not coincide at all as physical realities. Theatrical space appears as a figure to be considered on its own, a statement that is axiomatically imposed through the knowledge of its qualities, conditions, and the way it is seen by other researchers.

What will essentially constitute the object of study according to the findings of this first chapter is the correlation between physical and scenographic space, which is placed in an inseparable relationship with staging and acting, without excluding the social and political context. This is how the space of performance is shaped.

Chapter Two, "Modeling Space," sets out to review ideas about space in historical retrospect. The main hypotheses put forward in this chapter are related to the claims that there are almost no spatial ideas that cannot be traced backwards in the history of theatre. For example, Grotowski's proxemics of space can easily find its distant origins in the rituals surrounding religious cult in antiquity, where audiences and priests mingled. Also, even technological innovations implement ideas that were already present in the theatre space in one way or another. Thus we could argue that Josef Svoboda realized many of Craig and Appia's visions thanks to technology enhancing them.

For too long in the history of theatre, architectural space has been understood as the space of performance. The distinction between the two only began to make its way in the Renaissance, along with the development of illusionistic painting, but also with the increasing drive for performance to create a purposefully manipulated sensory reality for the viewer. That is, a reality that already *manipulates* their view. Then began the inception of the idea that the world of the performance, and therefore its space, are separate realities, emancipated from the architectural reality. So along with the manipulation of the gaze, the first signs of subjectivation were born.

This chapter explores the particularities of the spatial views of Antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and recent times. The historian Peter Bitsilli argues that what is peculiar about European civilization is its drive to constantly expand the political boundaries of what belongs to that

same civilization.²In this sense, Bitsilli continues his argument, the cultural expansion that Europe is carrying out is also an expansion in *space*.³As the earliest example of a space that can be defined as purposely theatrical and fixed to an architectural form, one must point to the site, or so-called theatrical space, at the palace complex of Knossos on the island of Crete, which is an archaeological remnant of the Minoan civilization.⁴ The following forms that developed in antiquity, the ancient Greek theatre and the Roman theatre, are directly linked to the urbanisation of living and to the social fabric of the societies in which they developed. The evolution of these spaces also underwent its own changes in relation to aesthetic views of theatrical representation. Although the ancient Greek and Roman theatres have essentially different social functions (one is strongly linked to religious cult, the other is emancipated from this interrelation) they are nevertheless not so different from each other in their essence, because they rely on the collective experience of the logos. Both ancient Greek and Roman theatre made use of different technologies to create different illusory perceptions in their spectators - machineries, spatial markers, etc.

Also, the stage space itself underwent various transformations from the ancient Greek theatre to the Roman one, both architectural and aesthetic. The main structural difference between the architecture of ancient Roman and ancient Greek theatres is that the choice of site for the erection of the theatrical structure is no longer determined by the most suitable possible topography, as it was in Hellas. The building could now be safely sited on the plain. For this purpose, arched substructures were built, which were to ensure the perspective position of the theatre; i.e. to form its *amphitheatricity*. On top of these substructures, the seats for the audience were erected, and arches were added in which stage equipment could be placed if necessary. In a purely theatrical sense,

² Bitsilli, Peter. Basic Directions in the Historical Development of Europe, ed. Science and Art, S., 1993, p. 15

³ Ibid.

⁴ See Bobchev, Sava, History of Architecture, Technica, S., 1966, p. 98

the orchestra acquired much more restricted functions (but expanded social ones). At the very bottom of the stage space, where the so-called *frons scenae*⁵ were located, was a specially built ornamented wall with a colonnade (which can be considered the Roman version of the scaenae). One of the first such theatres was that of Pompey the Great.⁶ The Romans changed the shape of the stage space from a circle, as in the ancient Greek theatres, to a semicircle. The stage area was considerably enlarged. The parodas were now covered and located under the entire arched structure on which the theatron lay. The orchestra now played a minimal role in the theatrical action, but it began to accommodate the senators as a privileged audience. Along with this, the distance between the playing area and the audience began to increase significantly.

The Middle Ages pushed theatre out of the centre of urban life and marginalised it. During this era, the theatrical phenomenon was placed in conditions of conformity - seeking its spaces, finding them outside the attractive parts of the city, its secular function was entirely reduced to a social role that was pushed to the periphery. The practice of simultaneous décor (*décor simultané*) is imposed, where the subjective view of the spectator and his body follow the action, rather than, as in ancient theatre, the subject/spectator falling into the space of the theatre (and its architecture). Theatre in the Middle Ages loses the dividing line between the living/being space and the specifically theatrical space. These processes were interrupted and mitigated by the fact that the church saw theatrical performance as a possible way to articulate the biblical word through play and action.

The Renaissance restored the theatre's secular function and brought it back into the theatre building, and revived interest in the ancient heritage along with that. At the same time, it gave birth to certain innovations in the fields of fine art

⁵ "The term means "front stage" or "front of the stage" which the audience saw throughout the performance. According to its original conception, it represented a royal palace - the main setting of ancient tragedy in general. "Rokomanov, Vasil. History of Stage Design. S., National Academy of Arts, 2017, p. 69.

⁶ Rokomanov, Vasil. History of Scenography. S., National Academy of Arts, 2017, p. 64

and architecture. Thanks to artists such as Filippo Brunelleschi, Leonardo da Vinci, Albrecht Durer and others, the practice of graphic perspective was developed. It quickly spread to fine art across Europe and so within a few centuries the visual culture of the continent was transformed. This was also due to the fact that the focus in the choice of subjects for representation changed - the themes of man and his existence began to dominate from ecclesiastical and religious ones. There are assumptions, based on scant evidence, that there have nevertheless been attempts to devise a system of perspective painting since the time of ancient Greece.

The Renaissance also marked new moments in the dynamics of ideas about space in Europe through the revival of the theatre building after it had been considered redundant since the Middle Ages (and in a sense competing with the social centre of the church). Italian scholars and artists such as Julius Pomponius Laetus studied Roman models of theatrical representation, the ruins of Roman theatres and their architecture. Thus, in fact, indoor theatres appeared en masse during the Renaissance. Which besides everything raised the question of acoustics and lighting. The first Renaissance theatres, however, were wooden structures, as we are accustomed to think of all theatrical beginnings, in antiquity, in Rome and in the Middle Ages. In fact, the revival of knowledge from antiquity happened thanks to the academies (like that of Julius Pomponius Laetus), where the wealthy elite could learn about the research of the past, and financially support the production of theatrical performances. The Renaissance laid the foundations of the modern development of the theatre, but also, as already said, restored its functions as a secular phenomenon and as an activity that had a place in the social life of the city. Most importantly, it transformed the theatrical event into an indoor event, which also gave rise to a multitude of engineering and creative explorations in the fields of architecture, acoustics and lighting.

The next two centuries, the seventeenth and eighteenth, mark some major changes in the course of European history. The political climate and social spirit of the continent underwent new transformations. At first religious confrontations

subsided, and with them wars on religious grounds. The calming of the public spirit allowed the conceptualisation of certain situations in society, the arts and culture in general. During French Classicism (XVII), for example, Nicolas Boileau and Denis Diderot attempted to discipline theatrical art and create matrices for its making. Boileau wrote his treatise *L'Art poétique* (Poetic Art) in the seventeenth century, and Diderot's *The Paradox of the Actor* in the Eighteenth. Enlightenment philosophical thought also had a strong influence on theatrical culture with attempts to rationalize some of the stage activities such as acting, writing for the stage, etc. The Enlightenment diversified the available genres in circulation on the stages, but somehow retained the structure of classical drama.

Along with this, stage practice in terms of space also changed - baroque scenography developed, and engineering attempts to make the stage more and more dynamic, with more varied and rapid possibilities for changing the stage pictures, received particular impetus. Alongside this, there was a continued drive to shape the stage space in such a way as to create a deliberate illusion for the human eye. Attempts to seek verisimilitude in the use of colour and the application of colour in the construction of scenery developed, particularly in Baroque scenography; as did other similar practices. The classicist conception of theatrical space (especially after the controversy that Corneille's *Le Cid* created in the 1730s over ideas of what genres were and how they should be defined ⁷) necessitated that the matrix in stagecraft be thought of as unifying spaces.

The Age of Enlightenment (the XVIII c.) largely continued to refine the ideas and conventions of stage space inherited from the Renaissance. That is, conscious efforts were directed towards achieving illusoriness. Theater artists have already accumulated at least two hundred years of experience in the development of various pictorial techniques precisely in terms of the creation of

⁷ "In the judgement of French academics, the *Le Cid* belonged to neither of the two genres (comedy and tragedy - P.D.); it was a tragicomedy which, though seemingly observing the classical unity of time, place and action, was in considerable breach of the requirements of conformity and plausibility." Wickham, Glynn. *A History of the Theatre*. Panorama & Intermission. Sofia, 2002, p.147

illusion, so this is a form that in the next hundred years will reach the limit of its development. Technological advances, the refinement of theatrical machineries, have allowed new developments in representational techniques to focus primarily on problematizing the relationship between the auditorium and the stage. The development of multiple lines of perspective that span all stage diagonals and produce multiple perspectival viewpoints as a result are something new - in contrast to the typical Renaissance model that produces only one *ideal* point of infinity (the single-point perspective).

The end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century were also marked by the opposition between the classical aesthetics in the theatre and the aesthetics of romanticism. Classical aesthetics drew heavily on historical European notions of how theatrical art should adapt the legacy of Greek and Roman art to the realities of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. That is to say, the classicist notion of the ancient as a source of inspiration continues to proliferate, while the Romantic aesthetic valorizes quite different human constellations that focus on the intimate, on personal experience and the traumatic preservation of individual sensibility in the face of encroaching industrialization. Very important in the stage manifestation of these constellations are the natural images that often find their place on stage - mountains, lakes, rural or forest landscapes ⁸. The natural image is the antipode of the rationalism of the Enlightenment. Romanticism also explicitly rejected the unity of time and place both on the dramaturgical level and in stage realisations, and this enabled the accelerated development of stage technology to change the scenery in these terms (something that culminated in Wagner's utopian Romantic project of total art).

The end of the 18th century and the middle of the 19th century was also the time when the deliberate search for the historical specificity of the set as part of the theatrical space became the main focus of most of those working in the field

⁸ See Terziev, Assen. The Internal Conflict of the Romantic Theatre, Homo ludens magazine, issue 20, S., 2017 pp. 313-320

of theatre in Europe. This focus continued the line of efforts to create stage illusion, but it also further elaborated the theatrical idea of authenticity. That is to say, it is a proto-naturalistic attitude.

In fact, in the nineteenth century, theatrical painting became industrialized, and many of the technical innovations in the theatre (including electric lighting) made universal scenery seem untenable in its claim to be able to create an illusory sensory effect for the viewer. Alongside this, the Nineteenth century saw the emergence of interior scenographies with scrupulously arranged realistic pictures in which actors could interact with their environment and this could alter the psychophysics of their behaviour (in fact, this method of interacting with the environment became the basis of Stanislavski's experiments).

The attempts of Duke Georg II Herzog von Sachsen-Meiningen in the 19th century were in the direction of the search for theatrical authenticity, mostly based on historical authenticity. His efforts to direct the spectator's attention to the hitherto not quite punctual details of the stage world, such as costume, scenographic realism, etc., acquired an independent pictorial potential. In addition, he exploits many other elements of stage organization in his work - different levels of the stage set, etc. With his troupe, he toured Europe, making a strong impact on the audience and thus actually anticipating with his ideas the attempts of André Antoine and Otto Brahm in creating hyper-realistic stage representation.⁹

The difference that we can determine today from the distance of time between the work of the Duke and the two reformers of the stage, on the French and German sides respectively, is that they relegate their experiments to articulated replicas of the material world in the fictional space of the stage. They do all this in an attempt to create an integral aesthetic for the purpose of a more credible, almost experimental insight into the possibility of theatre providing an authentic experience. While the work of Georg II Herzog von Sachsen-Meiningen cannot yet be termed an integral aesthetic. With Antoine and Brahm,

⁹ In many places we will use "hyperrealistic" as a synonym for "naturalistic".

the conceptual-aesthetic now completely seizes control of the performance and becomes the *raison d'être* of *the stage image*. These movements and ideas about theatrical space continued almost until the end of the century (XIX). Thus was born the aesthetics of naturalism.

In close proximity to the emergence of naturalism, Wagner's utopian romantic project *Gesamtkunstwerk* (The Total Art Project) developed, which was a real expression of the stage projection of idealist philosophy. Wagner categorically rejected the idea of the realistic representation of the stage. According to Wagner's conceptions, the stage should not become a chronicler of life as the pursuit of realism/naturalism would like to format it. On the contrary, the stage, in his view, should unite the audience around the diffusion between the magical and the mythological, both on the level of plot and through the means of stage imagery. He insisted that music as a kind of abstract figure (construction) was the unifying element. According to Wagner, it was the element that could carry out the complete diffusion between the plot as a fictional component and all the other scenic devices that make up the stage work.

Some of the most significant changes that occurred in the theatrical space, and in the reception of theatrical aesthetics and its organization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, would not have been possible without the changes brought about by the Second Industrial Revolution along with scientific advances. In this case, it is not even so much the direct impact of technology on the making of theatre and what performances look like that is important, but the lasting changes in sensory attitudes that prove to be massive and of very lasting (delayed) effect. Their change affects the creative strategies, and with it the receptive attitudes of the audience. For example, in the nineteenth century, gas lighting was already making a lasting impact throughout Europe, and by the end of the century it was being replaced by electric lighting, a fact that is inescapable as far as stage design is concerned.

Along with the tendencies of naturalism, an anti-realist theatre took shape in the late 19th century. In various ways its practical realization crystallized in

the theater of Symbolism in the person of Yeats, Lugné-Poë, Paul Faure and other directors. The aims of the Symbolists were defined by the need to translate some rather abstract worlds, internalized pictures of the personal, into the concreteness of the stage. On the one hand, they react to the natural-scientific method of naturalism; on the other hand, they try to give the stage that imagery which they believe it deserves as a sacred space, a space of the ultimate individualized gaze. In fact, also as a purely aesthetic space.

We have witnessed that, thanks to naturalism, stage space functions very well in the function of concreteness. But naturalism as an aesthetic approach proves inadequate for the Symbolists' purposes. In their search, language is displaced - they are not concerned with sending clear and rational verbal messages to the audience, dressed up in some kind of teleology of action. The Symbolists deprive not only the actor's body of concreteness, but also the space itself, dismantling it into its elemental components. This is supposed to create *atmosphere*. It is supposed to be the "canvas" on which the symbols, of which the text is the transmission, will be exposed. The problem of such a logical staging appears in the fact that the symbols have no personification, the semantic fate of the symbols is not related to the persons. This also explains why the theatre of symbolism is not particularly interested in the actor, would even like to liquidate him. The appropriateness that the Symbolists see between language and image is based solely on the belief that there are universal correspondences, conditioned by mystical connections, which the theatre as a kind of medium can illuminate.

Some of the Symbolist ideas also resonate in Bulgaria (of course, they have undergone many secondary transformations, such as their appropriation from Reinhardt's practice, etc.). Such resonances are, for example, the work of Boris Espe ("Oedipus Rex" at the Free Theatre - 1921, and at the Ruse Municipal Theatre - 1922. He practically transferred the model of Reinhardt's performance as a ready-made matrix.), as well as Geo Milev ("Dead Man's Dance" - 1920 at the National Theatre), and in some other stage realisations around the beginning and end of the First World War.

Moreover, the emergence of anti-realist theatre is also linked to the complex attempts to overcome logocentrism, even if this movement is carried out as a macro process. In terms of space and the stage image, this is the beginning of a movement in which the conventional framework between representation and reception is rejected. That is, what is presented no longer corresponds to the attitudes of what should be *seen*. If this happens in naturalism within some rather limited limits - the images that the spectators witness are apparent; the facade constructed by the fabula collapses in a moment, and behind it are internalized conflicts and traumas, in symbolism we already have a complete lack of correspondence between the appropriateness of the image and its realization - that is, the mystical has already replaced the rational. The word is unable to communicate anything more.

The dismantling of these attitudes has continued throughout the historical avant-garde of European theatre, not so much because of any ideological impulse, but because of the desire of the author/creator to remain faithful to the work he is building, rather than to conform to public expectations that he now considers obsolete. What kind of intellectual climate these attitudes created (they varied) in the first quarter of the twentieth century is a separate topic. This is why Hans Thies-Lehmann believes that the emerging forms of the avant-garde continue to serve the textual world (of play, composition, etc.) and cannot quite leave it, i.e. the logocentric world gives rise to spaces. Aware of this interrelationship, Lehmann argues that the forms of the avant-garde attempt to save the text from a kind of "disfigurement" by any conventional form that exhausts itself at a certain point and reaches a state of falsity.¹⁰

Modernism undeniably engages with the subjectivation of the gaze. Through this logical operation, giving the gaze individuality and depriving it of its claim to universality, it legitimates stage directing as a contemporary position of interpretation. Furthermore, it awakens the individual from the latent sleep of

¹⁰ Lehmann cites the example of Meyerhold and his stage devices, which "alienate the plays being performed in an extreme way, but preserve their internal integrity". Lehmann, Hans-Thies, *The Post-Dramatic Theatre*, ed. "New Bulgarian University, S., 2015, p.29.

the common and the conventional, from the illusion of the stability of the already established as form, i.e. from the anaesthesia of already experienced art forms. One of the main channels through which this process takes place is the push away from the claim of the realistic image, which is already sufficiently exploited by naturalism and realism, i.e. the stage space does not claim to *document*, but relies on abstract forms, or else deformed (and stylized) reflections of real images that are in dialectical dependence with reality, or else creates an autonomous reality through deformation and stylization.

Alongside the development of the manifestations of modernism, the chapter also examines in detail the qualitative differences in views of theatrical space between expressionism and futurism, between naturalism and symbolism, and also considers Bauhaus views of theatrical space and the crisis of modernist aesthetics after the Second World War. The fading away of the reformist quests of modernism, but not their legacy as an aesthetic legacy, is also within the scope of this chapter. It examines the transition to the aesthetics of postmodernism and the neo-avant-garde practices that developed after the war.

The **third chapter, "Modeling Space in Bulgarian Theatre: from its Emergence to the End of World War II,"** significantly expands the historical scope of the study. This was done so as to bring out the basic characteristics of the emergence of Bulgarian theatre and its development in the interwar period. The emergence of theatrical performance as a cultural fact in Bulgarian lands within the Ottoman Empire marked the beginning of a long period of the formation of basic social attitudes among Bulgarians about what theatre was, what functions it had, what was expected of it, and what receptive attitudes towards it should be. Along with the development of these processes, the public function of the theatre and the cultural infrastructure of Bulgaria is strengthening. Although uneven, multi-polar and contradictory, this process moves between two neuralgic points - the first is the desire to modernise a society that is late to its historical national awakening, on the tail of national narratives and small nationalisms in Europe, and the second is the aspiration to

build a national identity that is in tune with public attitudes, but that this aspiration does not become a mechanical transfer of foreign models.

The processes of this growth are fostered by the enthusiasm of the young nation, but on the other hand, stagnated by the historical, economic and subsequently social circumstances in which the Bulgarian state continuously falls on the path of its political growth. Therefore, we can safely say that the period from the emergence of theatrical performance as a cultural phenomenon to the radical political change in Bulgaria after the Second World War (1944) was a period of modelling ideas about theatrical space. It was during this period that fundamental attitudes and receptive expectations towards the theatre took shape.

The Bulgarian efforts, however, meet the historical stagnation, which, by the way, also appeared in the normal historical logic (the processes of accumulation of social experience cannot be skipped, moreover, for the natural development of these processes, social time is necessary). The Bulgarian theatre has not been able to immediately merge into European modernity and this is normal - after all, it lacks a sustainable tradition. On the other hand, while in the developed theatre cultures of the continent the tendencies to dismantle the conventions of the past (of the classical theatre) are underway, the Bulgarian theatre is just beginning to build its professional character. And it will not be too late when it will be able to open up to the avant-garde.

The building of the National Theatre in Sofia, designed by the studio of the Austrian architects Fellner & Helmer, continued the tradition of the late XVIII century in Europe of creating national theatres. The establishment of a Bulgarian national theatre is a continuation of these cultural processes, according to which national identity is built thanks to language, culture and ancestral memory, and the theatre stage is the most prestigious place for the legitimation of a literary language. Before we say to what extent theatrical attitudes at that time were still unformed and immature, and the practices of professionalization were to be absorbed gradually (and unevenly), we should note that the event of the construction of the theatre was a civilizing moment for the Bulgarian capital and

state. Although a belated act, it legitimised an institution that gave shape to national culture. The space of performance, of course, was not yet part of the conscious understanding of the manipulation of stage language as we can see it in the theatre of naturalism at the time, and the primitive scenographic practice of illusionistic painting did not yet provide opportunities for great experimentation on the Bulgarian stage. But everything was still to come.

The place of space in the theatrical performance is at the outset a mere given, physical, logocentric, conditioned by language and social expectations, grounded in the reflexes of a language that has yet to be constituted on stage (and which carries with it to a large extent the attitudes of the Revival period). Notions of ideas about space at this time were moving according to the momentum of popular theatre from Europe, and a definite stirring in this direction would only come after the end of the First World War. Stage design, on the other hand, was one of the professional activities that had yet to undergo development. The space would become an essential part of the thinking of theatre practitioners with the definite entry of avant-garde practices into Bulgarian theatre after the First World War.

The whole period up to the end of the WWI was dominated by popular notions of realism and efforts to develop not only stage design but also acting, to harmonise the work of the theatre, to clarify the function of directing and to make it all disciplined. The first impulses to modernise practices and perceptions of *space* in Bulgarian theatre shortly before and after the First World War did not come from adepts of realistic theatre. They came from the adherents of Symbolism, of modern stage expressiveness (which otherwise in the rest of Europe was already slowly fading). Among the adepts of new scenic expressiveness were Sirak Skitnik (his criticism of the state of scenography in Bulgarian theatre is revealed in the 1911 article "Do We Have Art Criticism?"), Boris Espe (his work at the "Free Theatre", where he staged "Oedipus Rex" according the Reinhard's model), G. Milev. The writer Lyudmil Stoyanov and the director Isaac Daniel were also part of the personalities who broadcasted such signals in the public space, and both collaborated in the Theatre Studio

founded by Daniel. It is particularly characteristic of this period in the history of Bulgarian theatre that the issues of directing and stage design (and criticism), and theatre in general, were dealt with by people who saw in it its necessarily synthetic nature - such were both Sirak Skitnik and Geo Milev, in a sense they saw the possibility of expressing their synthetic talents in the theatrical space.

The period between the two world wars can be characterised as a controversial and ambiguous time, in fact quite in the spirit of what was happening throughout Europe. It was a time of social upheaval, of short-lived stabilisation, of autocratic political tensions, but it was also a time of the expansion of the theatrical network in Bulgaria (in the 1930s), a new upsurge in the impulses to modernise society, the rise of radical political movements and, to a large extent, political adventurism. Along with this, it was during this period that the issue of professional directing at the National Theatre was finally resolved (1925). Apart from the categorical and definitive solution of the directing question, it was between the wars and during the Second World War that Bulgarian directors of Bulgarian origin, including Hrisan Tsankov, Boyan Danovski, Nikolai Fol, Isaac Daniel and others, already appeared professionally in Bulgaria. In other words, it can be said that there has been a significant stirring of theatrical life in the direction of professionalization and modernization. With the resolution of the directing question in the National Theatre, the permanent presence of the directing institution was established and the most important question was put on the agenda - that modern theatre is predominantly director's theatre. And the director is the creative person who controls the language of performance and brings the stage space to life.

Bulgaria began to noticeably overlook modern European influences in its cultural life. Although on the periphery of major European events due to its still short life, the new Bulgarian society after the First World War infiltrated more avant-garde ideas in the fields of literature, fine arts and, of course, theatre. It is important to note that, although its national spirit was damaged after the First World War, Bulgarian society now possessed a sufficiently well-developed cultural infrastructure capable of reflecting these ideas, albeit again (mostly)

through the prism of the national. This is not to say that these ideas are out of sync with what is happening with art outside the country's borders. Or when we state that Bulgaria is rather on the periphery, we are claiming that these ideas are being rejected. Rather, we can conclude that this is a period of multiple conflicts at the heart of Bulgarian society, but also of a paradoxical openness to the world. These processes are taking place spontaneously rather than in any hierarchical order.

The directors who left behind performances that modelled the views of space from this period are the already mentioned Isaac Daniel, Hrisan Tsankov, Nikolai Fol, as well as the tragically deceased in 1925 Geo Milev, about whom we have already spoken. Also N.O. Massalitinov, who, although working in the field of stage realism, created lasting attitudes in this plane of stage expressiveness. The line he maintained and developed in his work stemmed from the aesthetic that became the hallmark of the Moscow Art Theatre (where Massalitinov performed as an actor from 1907 to 1919). To a large extent, Massalitinov's work was less concerned with the construction of models in the handling of space or with experimentation with the form of theatrical performance than with the maintenance of a steady line of realistic representation. This enduring creative line relies on creating the illusion of naturalness on stage, of realistic authenticity, even though it often strays into the genre of melodrama.

It is still difficult to speak of a classical tandem between stage designer and director in Bulgarian theatre at that time, but the work of Hrisan Tsankov and Ivan Penkov can be highlighted in such a perspective. They can be referred to as a prototandem from the past. And if the end of the WWII would had not changed the path of Tsankov's career, this tandem would surely have developed in a curious direction. As did, in fact, the work of Max Metzger, but in a reversed paradigm - he appeared to be the prime mover in the imagery of several productions with different directors of the period we are talking about (G. Milev, I. Daniel, Hr. Tsankov).

The Second World War changed living conditions, world diplomacy and reshaped borders across Europe, Bulgaria being no exception. With the advent of totalitarian socialism, a new aesthetic emerged in Bulgarian theatre. It was command-apparatus regulated by state organs and represented a politically oriented aesthetics serving immediate party interests fused with state interests. Socialist realism and its introduction in Bulgaria by command-administrative means halted the development of Bulgarian theatre along the two aesthetic vectors that had been familiar until the end of the Second World War - the realist line and constructivist expressiveness. It wreaked havoc on the personal styles of stage designers as well as on the artistic approaches of directing. On a conceptual level, the change that its introduction effected was that this method actually replaced realistic convention in space with literalism and transformed the theatrical space, along with its adjacent components such as set design, lighting, costumes and make-up, into ideological objects that were subject to control and had to be part of the regime's much desired *wishful, virtual* reality of theatrical performance, because this was how theatre became involved in the peoples' struggle for socialism as a *historical necessity*.

The radical political change of 1944, with its command-apparatus model of introducing polythetics such as socialist realism, actually created a *virtual* space in the theatre that has a direct reflection in the space of performance. The space is removed from its function as a theatrical medium, and the method of socialist realism attempts to eliminate all elements of subjective interpretation. Along with this, *the virtual* space started being governed by the internal workings of the theatre, dominated by the political leadership of the state, outside of any spontaneous movements of the creative process. Despite the existing attempts to leave, or even accidental falls outside this aesthetic, they cannot be proof that it could be overcome so easily.

This *virtual* space manifests itself as completely subordinate to the political element in society and as such has yet to emancipate itself from these dependencies - something that will prove to be a laborious, and even in some ways dangerous endeavor for those artists who decide to embark on the path of

emancipation. In the decades that followed, therefore, any *departure* from the pre-drawn boundaries of socialist realism became a desirable event, and the idea of a plurality of ideas emerged as a core value among the theatrical community as a counterpoint to the greyness that the regime sought. In the end, the so-called *expansion of the boundaries* of socialist realism in the theatre went through painful traumas and scandals for a very large number of directors and stage designers who dared to exploit their desire for freedom. This is why the much desired freedom of form only began to manifest itself without brutal sanction in the 1970s.

Chapter 4, entitled "Manipulating Space: the Persistent Tandems between Director and Stage Designer in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s in Bulgarian Theatre" is one of the two central chapters of the study because it focuses on three significant decades in the history of Bulgarian theatre and the transformations of spatial views during them. The chapter examines a number of significant partnerships between scenographers and directors during these three decades, among the more important of which: Leon Daniel - Mladen Mladenov, Venelin Tsankov - Mikhail Mikhailov, Metodi Andonov - Stefan Savov/Ivan Kirkov, Lyuben Groys - Georgi Nojarov, Nikolai Lyutskanov - Georgi Ivanov, Lyuben Groys - Dobromir Ivanov, Panteley Panteleyev - Svetoslav Genev, Ivan Dobchev - Vyacheslav Parapanov, Zdravko Mitkov - Nevyana Kavaldjieva, Stoyan Kambarev - Violeta Radkova, Slavi Shkarov - Neyko Neykov, Elena Tsikova - Krasimir Valkanov and others.

The generation of directors and stage designers who emerged into the professional field of theatre in the 1950s and were already maturing professionally in the 1960s was placed, metaphorically speaking, in a transgressive position. In order to express its aspirations, this generation must inevitably step outside the established order of socialist realism. And this is a very natural impulse of these artists, in their desire to try out different expressive languages on stage. For example, the director Venelin Tsankov argued the

necessity of this conditional stepping in his article "Conditionality and the Interplay of Traditions".¹¹

In this article, he detailed the necessity of the presence of the much-disputed *conventionality* in staging in the theatre, but he also objected to the trivialisation of the ideas of realism ("The modern theatre demands that the actor should still successfully get down to earth when he needs to, and that the lifelike concreteness of his acting should not be at all disturbed by the fact that he was just a moment ago quite out of character. The contingency of the modern image demands that the image pass quickly from scene to scene, as many as 60 times in a performance, and in the most varied and contradictory situations."¹²).

Tsankov was a very strong advocate of his views. He argued and defended not only his personal aesthetic choices, but also the need for aesthetic pluralism in general in the article "On Scenic-Decorative Narrative", where he claims that "Today, scenic conventionality is already an inherent feature of Bulgarian theatre. Until yesterday, its use always threw into doubt the realistic merits of any spectacle in the principles of which it was more or less used. In fact, the victory of stage conventionality, its recognition as a realistic device, is of great importance. In fact, it means the victory of young contemporary tendencies over conservatism and rigidity."¹³

The decade of the 1960s also established the so-called *Aesopian language*¹⁴, which in the performance system can refer to many elements of stage language. But if we assume that stage language could be divided into certain tropes, in the sense of stylistic figures, then *Aesopian language* could also refer to a variety of figures. Including the space of a performance or some of its elements (such as costume or props). This kind of coded, metaphorical and allegorical language will largely define the language of theatrical performance in the next two decades.

¹¹ Tsankov, Venelin. Conditionality and Interaction between Traditions, Theatre № 8/1962, pp. 16-20

¹² Ibid, p.19

¹³ Tsankov, Vili. On the Scenic-Decorative Narrative, Art, № 7/1962

¹⁴ According to . Nikolova, Kamelia. Directing styles in the theatre in Bulgaria after the Second World War (1944-2018), S., IICC, BAS, 2018, pp. 169

Over the three decades, the nominal designation that all theatre artists must be realists has not been dropped, but there is now plenty of scope for stylistic differences in the work of directors and set designers, and strict supervision is gradually being phased out. However, it should be noted that the political and cultural situation in the country has a huge impact on the spirit of the theatre productions being created as well as the thematic choices. The events of 1968 did not allow all the influences from Western Europe to penetrate the country. In turn, the 1970s, when the Committee for Culture was taken over by Lyudmila Zhivkova, were the time when the aesthetic attitude entered the political discourse. This also served in a sense to rehabilitate the dialectical-materialist basis of the regime. Nationalist themes also emerged and were exposed mostly in the 1980s. This also laid down certain ideological frameworks for the understanding of national culture, which until then had been a delicate point - after the radical political change of 1944, many expressions of nationalism were branded as *fascist*.

In the 1970s the principle of the tandem between director and stage designer continued to develop. But in general, these were years that were marked by a more conservative spirit than the 60s. The creativity of tandems such as Nikolai Lyutskanov - Georgi Ivanov, Lyuben Groys - Georgi Nozarov, Panteleyev - Svetoslav Genev, Neyko Neykov - Slavi Shkarov, Mladen Kiselov - Stefan Savov was directed towards mastering the form, towards spectacle and finding inventive creative solutions rather than changing the status quo. We could say that these are years in which the generations are much more committed to the search for creative ingenuity within already established frameworks. On the other hand, power has also softened and there are other control mechanisms developed, but in general the toolkit that Romyana Nikolova describes - of liberalisation and stagnation, dominated by the outward expression of paternalistic concern - continues to dominate.¹⁵

¹⁵ Nikolova, Romyana. Model of functioning of the Bulgarian theatre in the period 1944-1989, Petko Venedikov, S., 2020, p.144

The next decade, that of the 1980s, already contains the intuitions about the trends that would unfold in Bulgarian theatre, and in the whole Bulgarian cultural space in the 1990s. This time largely coincided with the free entry of postmodern trends in Bulgaria, which had been hindered (or very selectively omitted) due to strict ideological control. It can be said that the 1980s were strongly favoured politically by the Glasnost reforms, which reached Bulgaria as a Soviet satellite within the Warsaw Pact. What is specific, however, is that the atmosphere created thanks to these reforms was largely accompanied by a saturation, in a synchronic way, of the theatrical space with a kind of aesthetic *falseness* from the normative method of socialist realism and the requirements (generally speaking) of nominal realism..

In fact, it was not until the second half of the 1980s that there was a clear opportunity for performances to appear in the public space that were decidedly not in the line of realistic and psychological theatre that dominated the theatrical landscape, but were also not at all interested in realism or psychology as a material for the construction of performance. Here they are already playing with the proxemics of space (V. Viharova's *Ding*, Dobchev/Mladenova's *Seagull*). Examples of such performances, which categorically ignore the realistic approach, are Ivan Stanev's *The Wound of Voitsek*, Elena Tsikova's *Escorial* at the Sava Ognyanov Drama Theatre in Ruse, etc.

Moreover, the principle of the tandem between directors and stage designers was already strongly established in Bulgarian theatre practice at that time. Such are the partnerships between Violeta Radkova, between Neyko Neykov and Slavi Shkarov, between V. Viharova and Zarko Uzunov, between E. Tsikova and Krasimir Valkanov, between V. Parapanov and I. Dobchev, etc., which were permanently established in the late 1980s. It is important to note that the choice of the tandems and performances to be presented was made in order to support our theses as well as to illustrate trends and processes. The text is not intended to provide a panoramic overview, but to concentrate on what seems to

us to be manifestations of development, innovation, and authentic creative inquiry.

The **fifth chapter, "Occupation and Emancipation - Postmodern Space from the 1990s to the Present"**, examines the dynamics of views on space after the fall of the Bulgarian Communist Party regime (1989) in Bulgaria. This period is saturated with multiple relief dynamics that run as parallel processes. The political changes, social crises and changed publics in Bulgaria after 1989 inevitably have their impact on the theatrical spectacle and the processes that condition its ideas and reception. At first, the condition of normative aesthetics and the obligation to think through the realist paradigm fell away. In other words, the obligation for directors and stage designers to make psychological theatre that meets the public reception of it at all costs no longer existed. There were no banned authors anymore, no banned ideas, and no banned practices. The conditions for choosing from all possible available means, avenues and approaches have become free, albeit limited by the country's deteriorating economic indicators and tense social situation.

Cruciality is the basic characteristic of this decade as the old order was collapsing, models and practices inherited from the socialist regime were being dismantled. These processes are fraught with uncertainty, above all with a very high degree of social obscurity and with financial difficulties. The totalizing effect of the socialist system, which could no longer sustain its economic enterprises, is falling away, periods of cyclical crises are occurring, thanks to which society is also confronted head-on with its illusory notions of state functioning outside authoritarian rule. The decade of the 1990s was also the time when postmodern influences entered Bulgaria in full force. This also affected ideological paradigms - "big" ideas were replaced by themes of the intimate, the private became central, and personal experience began to become an event for art.

During these years it became clear that the system of state theatres could not be maintained in the form inherited from the totalitarian state. This stimulated new processes of consolidation of spaces and intensified the

dissolution of the narratives of the past. A very important characteristic of this decade is also that it brings together representatives of several generations of theatre artists - Leon Daniel and Vili Tsankov, Krikor Azaryan, as well as Ivan Dobchev, Elena Tsikova, Margarita Mladenova, Zdravko Mitkov continue to work, new directors debut - Yavor Gardev, Galin Stoev, Lilia Abadzhieva, etc.

Apart from the fact that this decade has seen a kind of "clustering" of directors from different generations, some of the tandems that were established in the 1980s continue to work. Examples are Elena Tsikova and Krasimir Valkanov, Zdravko Mitkov and Nevena Kavaldjieva. New partnerships were also established, some of them for a short time - Margarita Mladenova and Marina Raicinova, Mladen Mladenov and Stoyan Kambarev, Marina Raicinova and Borislav Chakrinov, others for longer - Daniela Oleg-Lyakhova and Margarita Mladenova, Nikola Toromanov and Stoyan Kambarev, it is also important to note the partnership of Svetoslav Kokalov with director Ivan Dobchev.

In the 1990s and the beginning of the new century, many of these tandems were not content with the classical layout of the hall and the audience - they began to experiment with the proxemics of the space, occupying different locations, including turning unowned parts of the theatre building into theatre venues. These strategies of occupation practically precede the emancipation of space. Such performances are the ones produced in partnership between Stoyan Kambarev and Nikola Toromanov - "The Mother: Vassa Zheleznova. 1910" by Maxim Gorky (Stoyan Bachvarov Drama Theatre Varna), "Three Sisters" by A.P.Chekhov (Sofia Drama Theatre), "Bastard", realized by the tandem of Yavor Gardev and Nikola Toromanov (Stoyan Bachvarov Drama Theatre Varna, but performed in Dimyat Cellar), and many others.

The new decade, as well as the first years of the new (21st) century, started witnessing performances that treated space beyond its architectural properties, and beyond thinking of space as necessarily tied to some prior theatrical availability. Sometimes inspired by the space itself, other times with subtle aesthetic interventions in its environment, these are performances that rely on

the independent, "unhooked" from the dramatic imagery. For these performances, the image of space itself as a precondition is much more important than anything else. They can be called *site-specific* performances, but we prefer to use a more general name - performances of emancipated space. These are theatrical acts or installations that interact with an authentic environment, engaging its original image in the play of their theatrical intentions or through other fictional images..

Here we find two tandems that we can say are stable in their attempts. First of all, we can mention Valeria Valcheva in tandem with Marius Rosen ("**200,000 Years**" after Chekhov, "**Deep High**" after Rimbaud, Maeterlinck, Chagall, Klimt, Ivan Milev, Munch, Büchner and Virginia Woolf; Shakespeare's "**Hamlet**") and a variety of artists as well as director Marius Rosen and set designer Petya Boyukova ("**The Venom of Theatre**" by Rudolf Sirera, "**Death and the Maiden**" by Ariel Dorfman, "**The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds**" by Paul Zindel, "**Shopping and Fucking**" by Mark Ravenhill). Valeria Valcheva continues to work independently on performances that are related to space ("**Dreams in Four Seasons**" based on Shakespeare, "**The Thirteenth Month**" based on texts by Geo Milev, "**Kafka Quartet**" based on miniatures by Franz Kafka). It is also necessary to mention the work of the artist Elena Shopova on two standout projects related to space - "**Quark Time**" by Gergana Dimitrova, Ivaylo Milenkov and Peter Meltev directed by Gergana Dimitrova and "**Tunnellers**" by Don Dewey, performed in the basement of Arhostel and the Youth Theatre in Sofia. These artistic facts can also be joined together with the interactive theatrical installation "**NPC shares its stories: a walk among urban legends**" by Zdrava Kamenova and Miroslav Hristov, directed and conceptualized by Gergana Dimitrova and Vasilena Radeva, objects by Elena Shopova.

Conclusion and implications

In an idealistic projection, the space in the theatre should appear as the nutritional environment for the living organism, assuming that the performance

itself is a living organism. We can see that it is space that is charged with that specific role which not only models sensory attitudes, but also creates emotional worlds, rational oppositions, political contexts and more. Despite all attempts at categorization, space could not be a measurable quantity because, in addition to its temporal and architectural characteristics, it changes according to its historical and social context.

The interdisciplinary nature of the subject, which can be extended into the issues of architecture, technology, scenography and staging, has in fact forced us to limit our gaze to something that is quite possible to trace as a historical continuum - the transformations of views of performance space during the period from the late 1960s to the present day. How nowadays we should conceive space from a creative and critical perspective is a question that has yet to take shape, but surely some of the answers to how we might frame a critical perspective in thinking space can be found in the past.

Despite the seemingly disharmonious communication of Bulgarian theatre with the European scene, we can see that the transfer of ideas and practices was still possible along with some specific trends developing in the Bulgarian cultural space. Particularly important in these trends are the partnerships formed in the decades of the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. The principle of the tandem between the director and the stage designer has imposed itself as an invariable creative provocation, giving rise to new stage tongues. In fact, thanks to the principle of the tandem, theatrical performances *accumulate* new spatial ideas, and in turn the performers bring the spaces to life..

The Bulgarian theatre has passed through three different social systems, each of them giving its own socio-political aspect to the perception of space. To a large extent, many of the attitudes as well as practices survive, transposed into new contexts, without meaning that they can be seen by the untrained eye. The basic attitudes about what constitutes theatre and theatrical performance in this country were forged precisely in the interwar period of the past century, and the frequent return to the experience since then is only natural. On the other hand, Bulgarian theatre was rapidly professionalized after the coup of 1944, and with

it came the dogmatization of aesthetic language. The liberation following the political and social changes since 1989 has marked a return to some of the interwar experience, but also the living out of practices and explorations that took place between 1944 and 1989 outside the country's borders. In fact, these processes run through the personalities who set the creative line in certain theatres, in the line of their individual creativity, although these generations have their dialogues in absentia, the extraction of these lines of influence and interaction is rather in the exploration of the tension between the personal creative path and the cultural front in the vicinity.

Contributions of the thesis

- An attempt to introduce verbal and conceptual formulas for space in theatre not only from a practical point of view, but also from the point of view of the conceptual and philosophical nature of the search for space.

- An attempt to explore an understudied research field that, in addition to being an interdisciplinary topic, also represents a historical array of artistic events that are viewed exclusively through the prism of space.

- The study offers an unfolding perspective on the theme of space through the focus of specific tandems between scenographers and directors, thanks to which it draws vectors of unexplored fields and creative interactions.

- The study offers a narrative of space as an ongoing continuum of practices and ideas that are constantly re-actualised in the course of theatre history.

- The study offers insights into the transformations of ideas of space through the prism of a broader social and cultural context.

Publications on the thesis topic:

1. Denchev, Petar. Some of the approaches in the spatial organization of the directorial work of Stoyan Kambarev and Elena Tsikova in tandem with the stage designers Violeta Radkova and Krasimir Valkanov. In. *Motifs, Models, Sketches*. Institute for Art Research, BAS, 2020, pp. 497-503.

2. Denchev, Petar. Space as a Territory of Resistance. Problems of Art, issue 3, 2020, pp. 42-47, ISSN: 0032-9371

3. Denchev, Petar. Time Corridors: creative tandems between directors and stage designers in Bulgarian theatre in the 1980s and 1990s. In. New Art: Journeys. Institute for Arts Research, BAS, 2021, pp. 259-265, ISSN: 0005-4283

4. Denchev, Petar. "Music from Shatrovets" by Konstantin Iliev - the path of the play through three spaces. Problems of Art, issue 3, 2021, pp. 27-30, ISSN: 0032-9371