



research plan

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theatre of civility

Using theatre as an activator for civil engagement in regional Russia.

introduction | relevancy

1. Following an introduction of “Foreign agents law” and expansion on laws on “extremism”, many independent media sources have been under persecution, such as independent media Meduza (“«Meduza» is blocked in Russia”, 2022) and even companies like Meta (“Russia Banned Instagram and Facebook for Extremism. Main”, 2022)

2. (Linder, 2013, p.85)

3. August 2019 protests before elections into Moscow Duma (municipal government); January 2021 protests in support of Alexei Navalny.

4. I witnessed events in my hometown, Rostov, and I could see that the message of the protest was muffled compared to the news of police misconduct and fear of repercussions, which travelled faster and rang louder.

5. I refer to the plays like “The funeral of Stalin” (2016), which does not represent the persona with a caress given by the officials, and “I do not participate in the war” (2022), soon after which the theatre was disbanded.

The authoritarian state in Russia sees little resistance to its internal and external politics. A progressive loss of freedom of speech has grown more apparent in the last decade. Rolling bans of independent media¹ suppression of protests, unwarranted invasion of Ukraine – new tragic events only build up on the history of brutality of the Soviet regime.

Political passivity, inherent to post-authoritarian states², has not had the time to subside in the relatively free 1990s and early 2000s. The lack of political engagement is more apparent in the regional Russia. Protests of August 2019 and January 2021³ has shown that while Moscow and St. Petersburg display political will, the message rings more hollow thousands of kilometres away from the capitals⁴.

Free(er) thinking has been localised to event spaces and cliques. One such place was the famous Gogol centre, a theatre in Moscow. It exercised its freedom to criticise the government, often in commenting on events from an “unofficial” position⁵. But amid the invasion of Ukraine, along with other liberal theatres in Moscow, it predictably saw its directors forced out of their position, out of the country, even persecuted⁶. Such desperate official measures against theatre art form can mean only one thing – a theatre has a solid political sway in Russian society.

Understanding what makes the art and space of theatre open-minded can give us spatial insights into civil engagement. What makes theatre – theatre? An emulation of social play⁷, theatre provokes actions and evokes feelings. Its dynamics consist of the ideas of act, role, and their workings within a spatial setup of its physical form. The internal dynamics of theatre become an analytical framework for me to study what aspects of theatregoing promote engagement.

I apply this framework to case-studies in a regional city of Rostov-on-Don. With a series of analytical drawings, I want to show the inherent theatricality of the urban spaces, specific to this locale. Through the lens of theatre, I aim to find aspects of regional typologies that can promote civic interaction.

problem statement

The authoritarian legacy of Russia forced people to develop a trend towards political passivity. Although there exist civic organisations, the average engagement in civic activities in regional cities of the country is low, even compared to that in the capital.

hypothesis

Theatre can be used as an activator for civil engagement in regional Russia. A creation of space that uses ideas of theatricality, encourages to discuss, participate, and deliberate, would be beneficial for local civil engagement.

research question and subquestions

- How to use theatre as an activator for civil engagement in regional Russia (Rostov)?
- What are the spatial qualities of theatricality that create engagement?
- How can such qualities be added to urban spaces outside places of performative arts?

6. Kirill Serébrennikov has been under house arrest for more than 1.5 years following accusations of stealing funds from the state budget (“Verdict in the Seventh Studio Case. How it was.” 2020). Lots of evidence suggested the case to be political.

By June 2022, 4 theatres in total had seen a change in leadership (Aldasheva, 2022)

7. (Pelletier, 2006, p.78)

method

The research of the internal theatre dynamics and the external social and urban structures requires different approaches. I use literature to explore the internal dynamics of theatre. It forms a theoretical background related to the concepts of “act” and “role” within the art of theatre, and the physical “form”, its spaces, and their interaction in the place of theatre. I use case studies to explore the external structure or the context that influences the internal dynamics. A series of analytical sketches analyses the boundaries between public and private spaces, the sightlines, and the roles that spaces induce upon users. The two angles, that of literature study and of case analysis, come together to formulate the connection between theatricality and public spaces.

In my literature research on internal dynamics, I read works in the fields of scenography, architecture, and the history of theatre. “Theatre and Citizenship” (2011) by a professor of theatre D. Wiles and “Theatre of the oppressed” (2019) by A. Boal provide me with overviews of the social importance of theatre in the civic context, and the connection of theatre and citizenship. In the “Scenography expanded” (2017), edited by J. McKinney, various essays discuss performance and the form it takes to engage the audience in a participatory manner. Architect and professor L. Pelletier in “Architecture in Words” (2006) relates the architectural form of European theatre to societal changes throughout history. Finally, an issue of “Nordic Theatre Studies” (2013) magazine contains essays that explore the role of a spectator, the necessity of their engagement, and its connection to democracy. These and other sources provide a foundation for my chapters on “Act”, “Role”, and “Form” of theatre, so I can relate them to spaces in the case study.

Analysis of the external structures, or the context that influences the internal dynamics, would benefit from a different approach. A case study would not only allow me to balance the literary input in my final essay, rendering it more diverse and persuasive; it would also bring the otherwise theoretical study into a practical realm. This bridge will come in helpful when my vision is carried into a design, a physical intervention.

According to Groat and Wang (2013), a good case study should:

1. be based in a real-life context,
2. have a capacity to explain causal links,
3. be important in the theory development in the research design phase,
4. rely on multiple sources of evidence,
5. have the power to generalise to theory.

A case study can be descriptive, exploratory, or explanatory⁸.

8. (Groat & Wang, 2013, p.419).

My research is focused on how theatricality can increase civic engagement in regions of Russia. I chose the city of Rostov-on-Don (further “Rostov”) for its local phenomena that are relevant to the question - its traditional courtyards (fig. 1-3). Historically, these closed, L- or U-shaped courtyards featured unheated galleries and external staircases that provided vertical circulation, access to individual dwellings, as well as a place for interaction on semi-private grounds⁹. As such, they became places of engagement, social performance or play.

9. (Kishkinova & Lapunova, 2022)

The two cases fit the description outlined above. They are still present places; they provide insights into spatial qualities that cause people to act in specific manners. And when combined with the study of theatricality, they can show its presence within urban and architectural spaces. Thus, a case of a public marketplace together with a semi-private courtyard gives me diverse evidence, upon which I can form my theoretical vision.

I will use sections, plans, and on-site photographs to analyse the spatial characteristics of these spaces. Layout, privacy boundaries, sightlines, and sequence of spaces will give me insights into the dynamics within them. Connecting it with the theoretical part of the research, I will then relate them to the dynamics of theatre, to form a vision of the theatricality or social play of public spaces .



Figure 1. Old Rostov courtyard. Galleries and stairs. Credit: M. Alexandrova (2020)



Figure 2. More galleries and stairs. Credit: M. Alexandrova (2020)



Figure 3. Spatial elements of a courtyard. Theatricality of spaces.

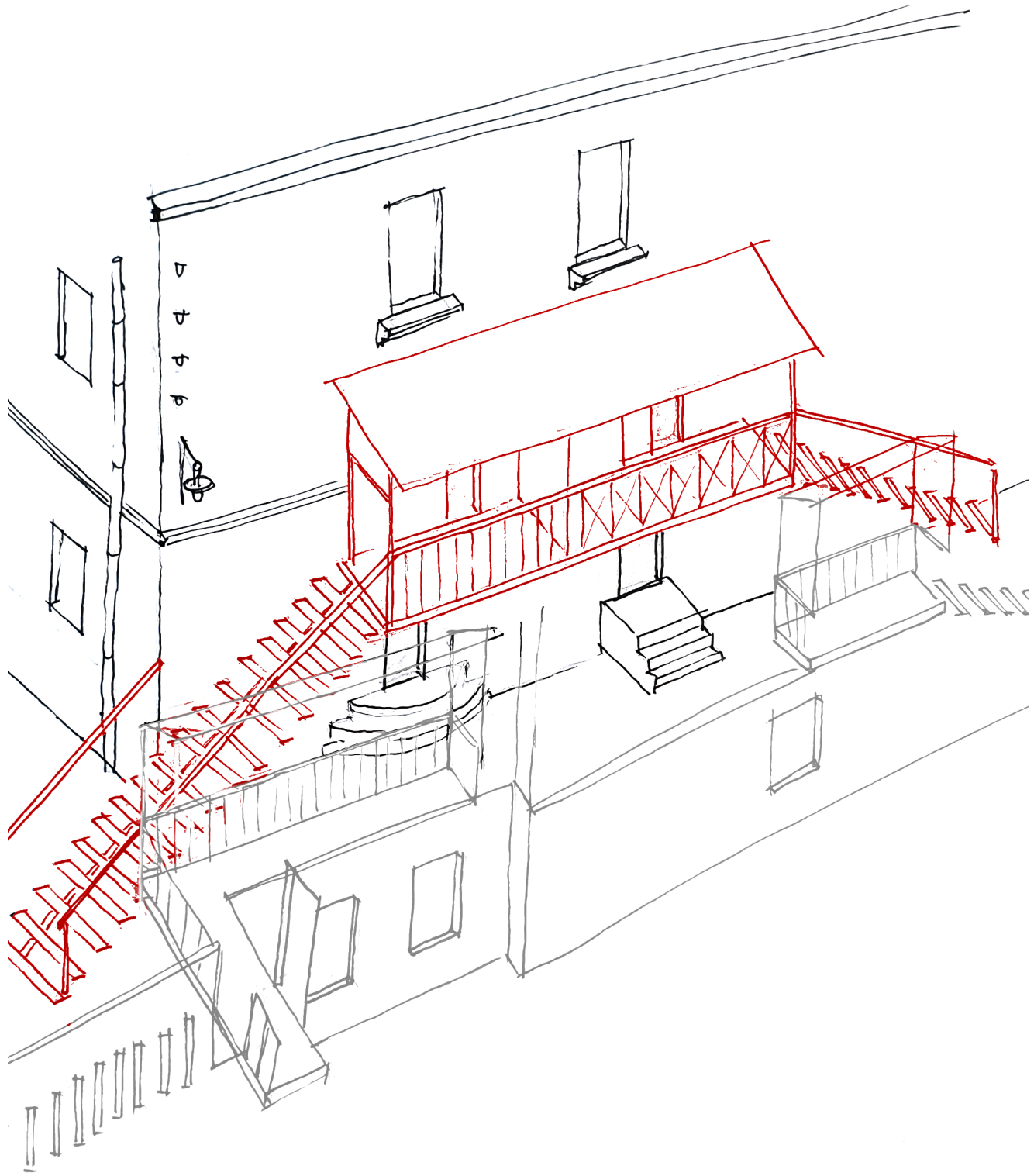


Figure 4. Spatial elements of theatricality. Courtyard analysis example

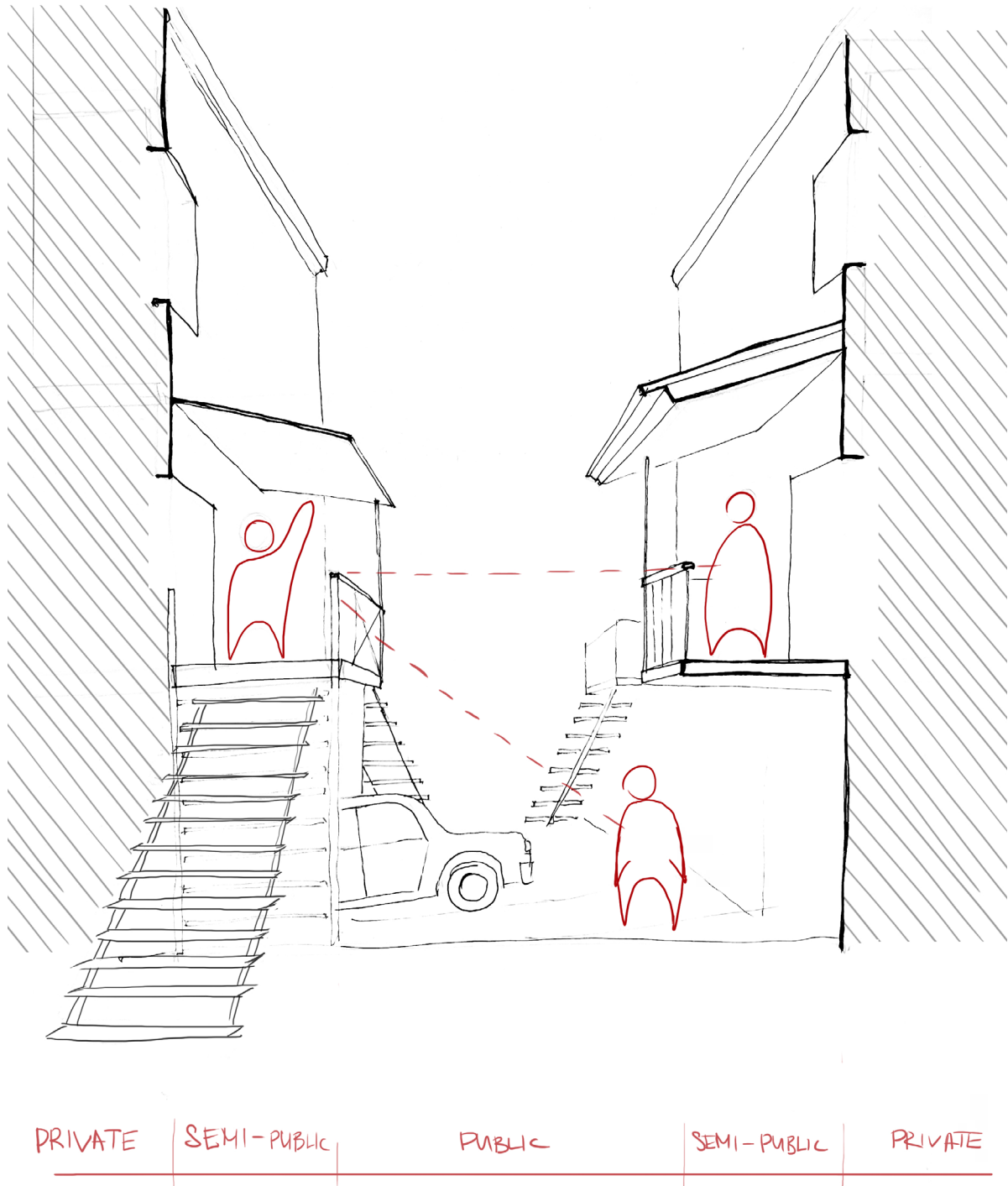


Figure 5. Layers of privacy. Courtyard analysis example.

framework

In the first section of my research, I study what aspects combine into the internal dynamics of the theatre. These would then be applied to the urban case studies in the section that follows. Here you can find a short overview of what I am planning to discuss in these chapters.

Act

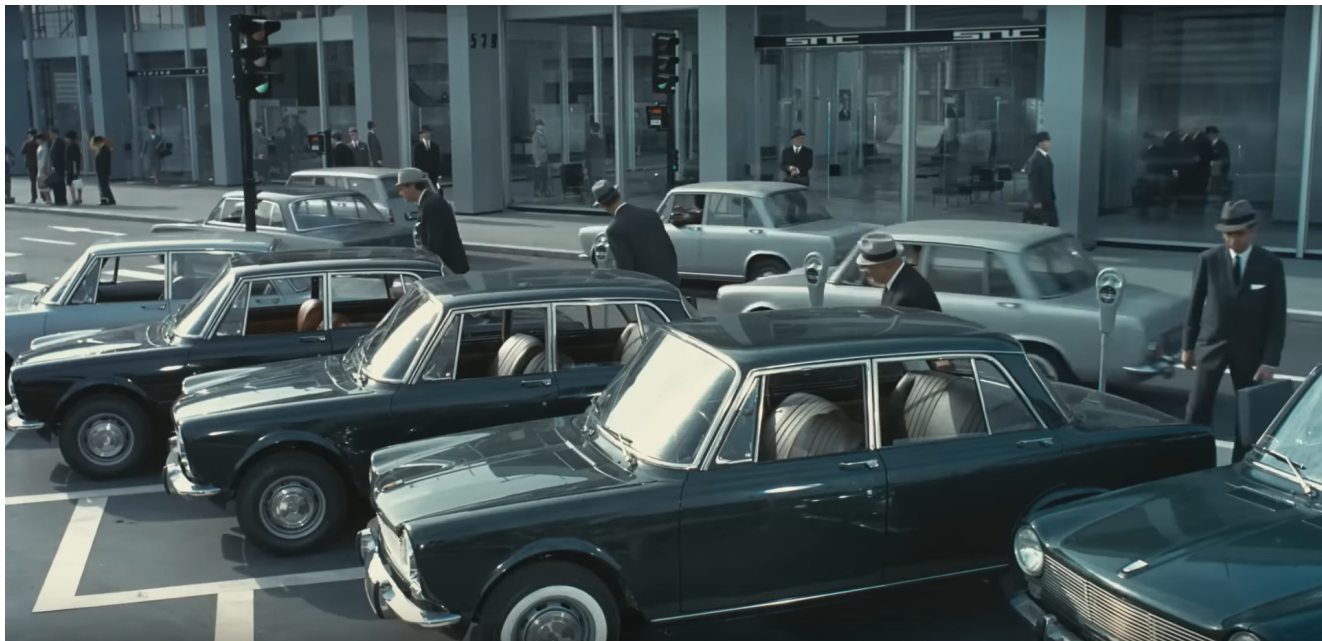
Though the performance on stage seems to be the central part of a theatregoing experience, the idea of play extends beyond the confinement of the auditorium. This larger play involves everyone, for interaction with others is a form of public acting. As this interaction and speech help us to find the meaning of ourselves¹⁰, an act is an element of theatregoing that is relevant to the spaces outside of the theatre-box. While the play on the stage may carry a message, it may not be the end goal, but rather it is the process of participation and gathering that is the important value to learn from the theatre.

10.(Arendt, 1998, p.4)

Role

Following the idea of the “larger play”, everyone is an actor in their own right. I study this notion with a reference to the Baroque period when the theatre was an institution of social and political interaction rather than entertainment. The seating in the hall emulated the classist social order. But once the play begins, a conflict between the roles of the spectator and the actor prevails. Who acts and who allows to be represented – the capability of theatre to assign and let play roles to all who are present is relevant to the question of civic engagement.

Figure 6. We each act out a role in a larger play.
PlayTime (1967)



Form

The experience of a performance may be unique; the spaces that surround the stage create the rest of the experience of theatregoing. I leave the form of what happens at the core of theatre art to those professionals that deal with it, and I direct my speculations to the surrounding spaces. The topic of this chapter is a backdrop to the aspects of theatricality discussed in the previous sections. The spaces of the theatre-place, their layout and order, provide grounds for complicated social and political plays to unravel. Though it can be argued that an empty square suffices for a vivid social life, I believe that complex spatial characteristics and their relations create a wider and more fruitful landscape for human interaction to happen. I study these spatial qualities of a theatre type to bring them out to the city.

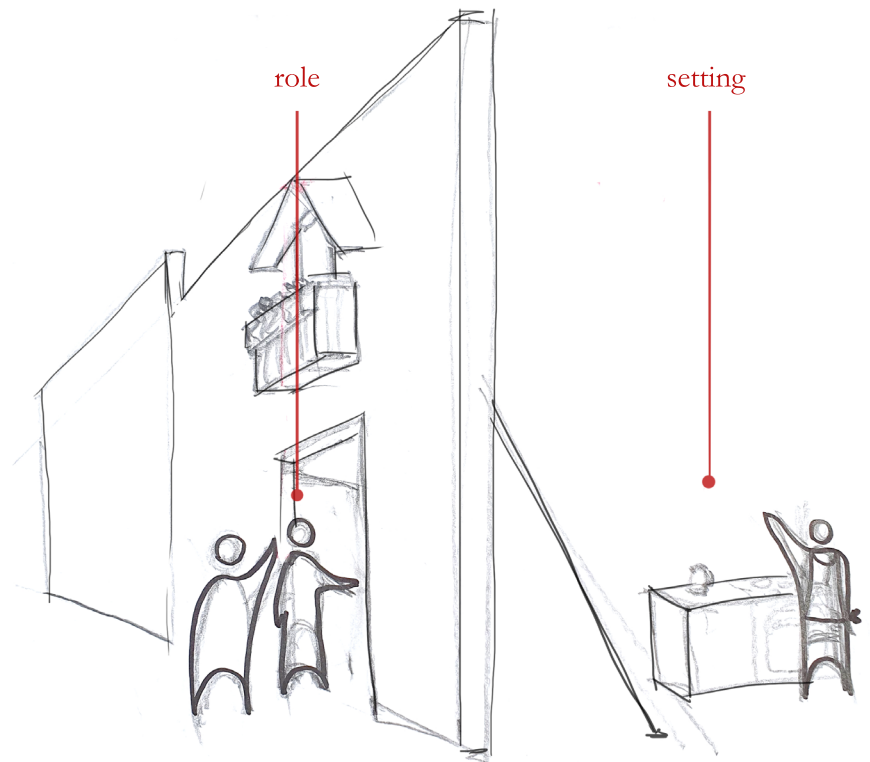


Figure 7. Settings, spaces, and roles within.

expected research outcome

I plan to complete my research with a vision of how spatial qualities of theatre-art and the place it occupies can help develop local civic engagement, when applied to local typologies of Rostov.

By overlapping the dynamics inherent to the art and place of theatre with the phenomena from the locale, I aim to find spatial ways to engage the people in civic processes in settings that are specific to the region. By tapping into the regional identity, I encourage the local action. I ground myself in the supposed federal structure of Russia and reinforce the power of regionalism. The sense of responsibility for one's locale and a sense of belonging could be the start of creation of a new idea of citizenship, which would focus on critical thinking and responsibility for local action, rather than a nationalistic outlook.

potential design outcome

With my vision, I would design a public building or space that uses the theatrical dynamics I studied. I would like to create a place in the city - a place of public play/performance, which gives meaning to the citizens of the town; a place to construct oneself; a platform for their interaction, public discussion, and, if need be, protest. Since my cases are traditional old Rostov courtyards, I think an intervention that is based on this typology would be a logical step to ground me in the context.

In this way, the project would help to preserve and re-evaluate rapidly delapidating historic structures, while creating a desired space of engagement. This could be an architectural statement to a contemplation of the past, re-evaluation of present local values, and establishing future goals – a civic process in itself.

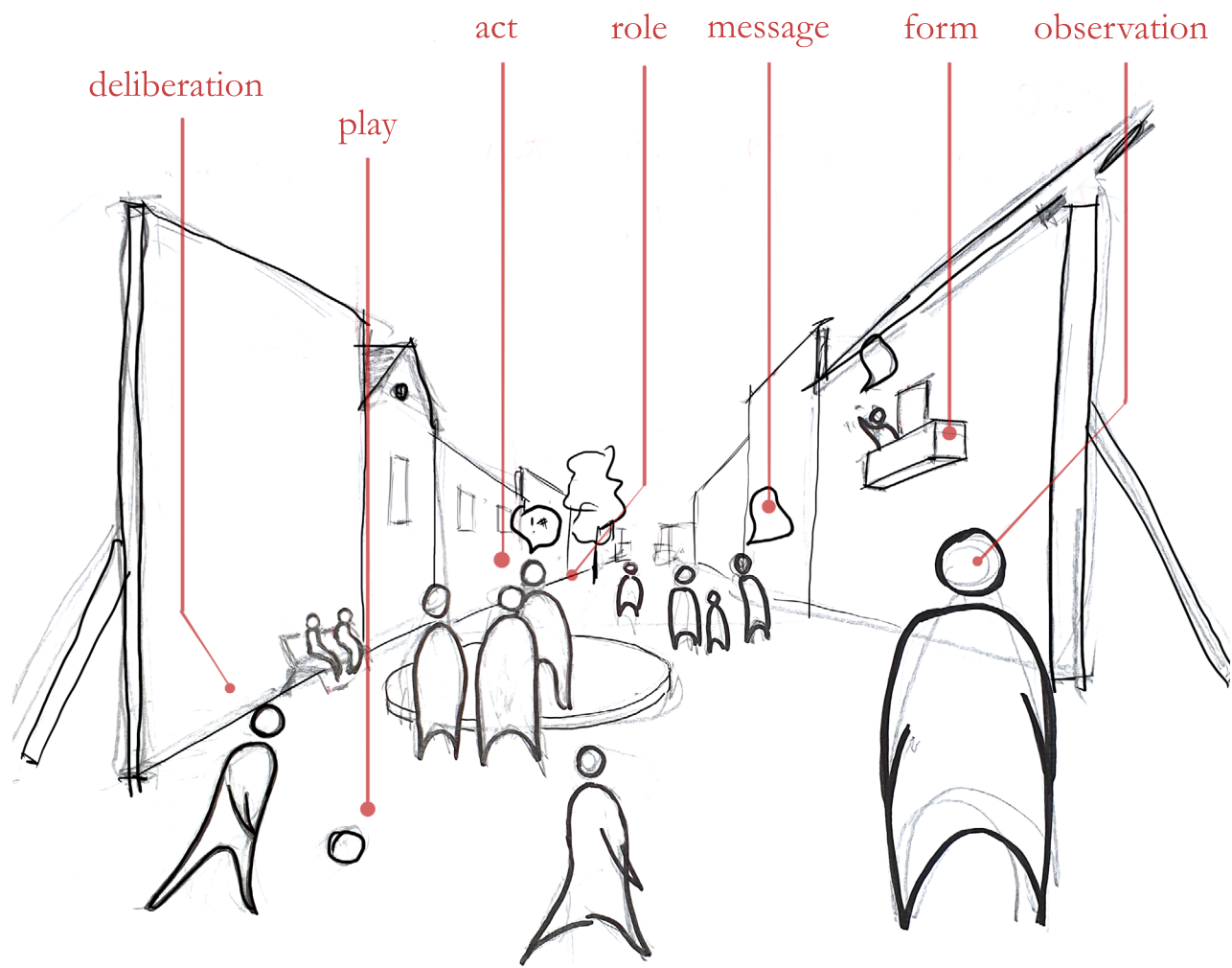


Figure 10. Theatricality of public spaces.

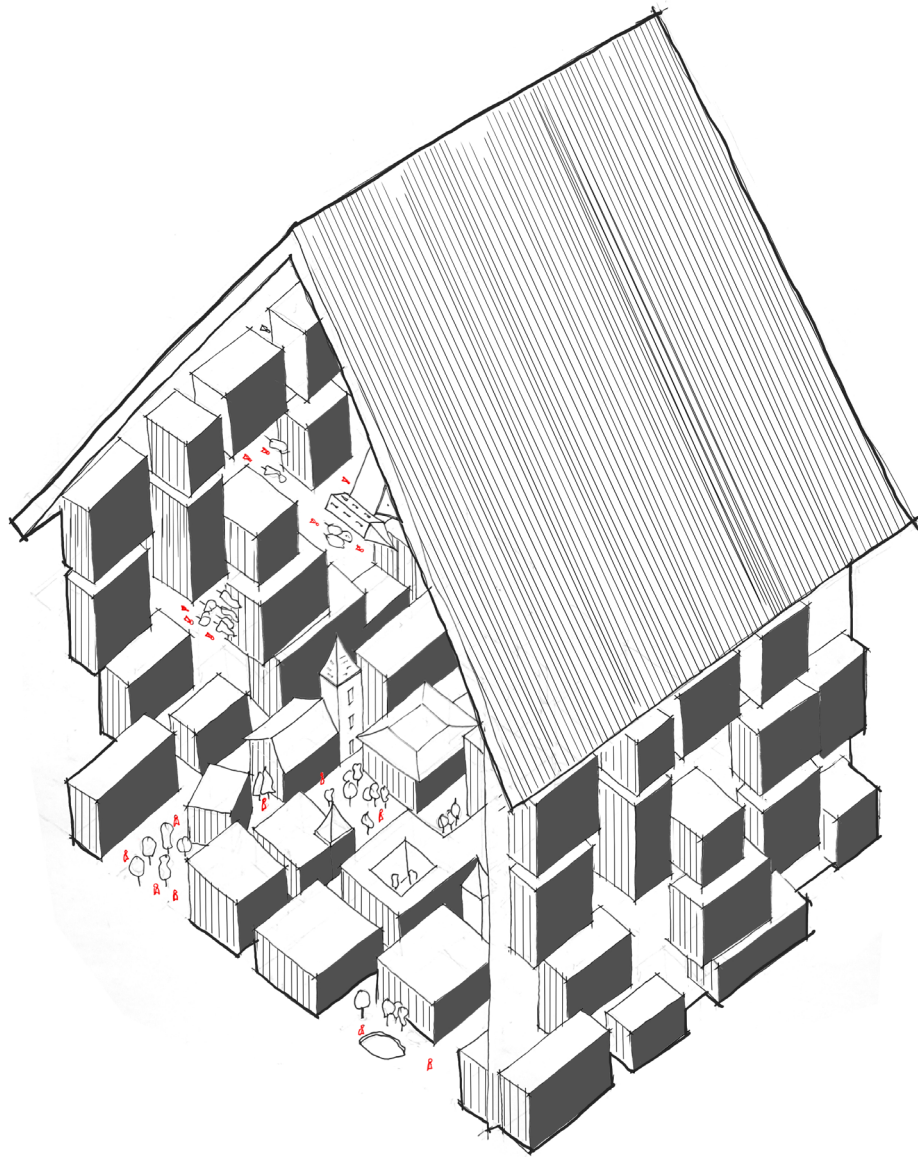


Figure 11. A place in the city. A place for the city. A place as the city.

essay structure

I. Introduction

Background, introduction to the civic theory and political context

II. What makes theatre – theatre. Internal dynamics.

a. **Act**

b. **Role**

c. **Form**

III. What makes spaces theatrical. External structures

a. **Context**

(Do I need city parameters? Local social strata, political situation?)

b. **Locality (case studies in drawings and writing)**

i. **Sightlines – seen / unseen**

ii. **Privacy**

iii. **Role in space**

iv. **...**

IV. Vision – on civic engagement through the theatricality of spaces

Conclusion / reflection / future design

CIVIL ENGAGEMENT
RUSSIA

problem s

THEATRE = ACTIVE
ENGAGEMENT FOR A
CITY

hypot

WHAT MAKES THEATRE
- THEATRE?

INTERNAL THEATRE
DYNAMICS

THEATRICAL
PUBLIC

theoretical background
related to the concepts
of "act" and "role"
within the performance
and "theatre-art", and
the physical form of
"theatre-place", its
spaces and their inter-
action

visi

APPLYING THE
TO LOCAL

literature

conclu

act role form civic
values

ENGAGEMENT THROUGH
REGIONAL IDENTITY

reflection/discussion

A PLACE
CITY

design for
engage

WHAT IS OUTSIDE
THEATRE?

keywords:
civil, participation, citizen-
ship, performance, regional-
ism, reflection, nation, public

statement

QUALITY OF
SPACES

thesis

QUALITY OF
SPACES

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THEATRICALITY
QUALITY

usions

IN THE
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a place of
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WHAT IS OUTSIDE
THEATRE?

EXTERNAL
STRUCTURES

case studies

courtyard

drawing

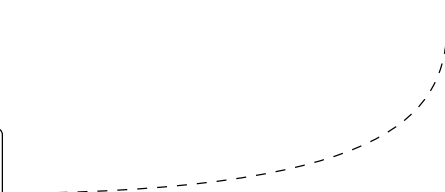
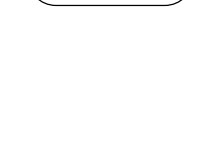
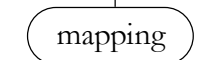
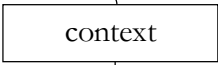
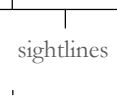
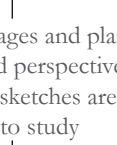
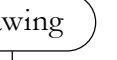
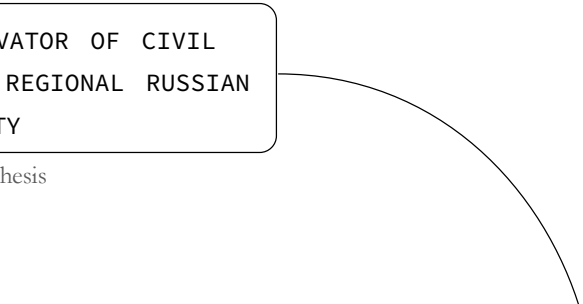
based on images and plans,
section and perspective
analytical sketches are
made to study

privacy visibility sightlines role in
space

context

local social, political...
background

mapping



annotated bibliography

On civic theory / background

- Putman, R.D. (1993). *Making democracy work*. Princeton University Press.

A comprehensive study of how changes in systems of local governance affected civic engagement. Describes the potential requirements for a formation of a civic society. Insightful comparison of the effects of the changes between the regions with monarchical and republican history.

- Fishkin, J. S. (2011). Deliberative democracy and constitutions. *Social Philosophy and Policy*, 28(1), 242–260.

Introduces the concept of deliberative democracy and what is required to achieve it (methods of forming a civic society).

- Konczal, P. A. (1997). *Critical Citizenship: A Theory on the Foundations of Legitimate Government*. Res Publica.

Interesting points of what citizenship is and how it reacts to the government, when it is legitimate and when it is not.

- Gage, M. F. (2019). *Aesthetics equals politics: New discourses across art, architecture, and philosophy*. The MIT Press;

A conversation with Jacques Rancière about architecture taking a political stance, and if that is even possible. Also, the interesting distinction between instating something that does not yet exist and saying that something does not exist - a sort of “show not tell” argument.

On theatre

- Linder, E.-L. (2013). How Theatre Develops Democracy: The Case of Theatre NO99. *Nordic Theatre Studies*, 25(1), 84–96.

A very insightful article about how a single theatre created performances that shook the political sphere of Estonia. Discusses the blurred boundaries between performances and politics. Mentions the social passivity in a post-authoritarian country.

- Ejgod Hansen, L. (2013). Theatre Talks as Micro-Democracy. *Nordic Theatre Studies*, 25(1), 10–21.
- One of the key articles that formed my idea of the research, it discusses the democratic potential of theatre-going, and what it is missing for it to be more a more participatory and reflexive activity.

- McKinney, J., & Palmer, S. (2017). *Scenography expanded: An introduction to contemporary performance design*. Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc;

Various essays discuss the relationship between scenography and architecture, describe the developments in theatre as an art form, and discusses the boundary between the spectator and the actor.

- Pelletier, L. (2006). *Architecture in words: Theatre, language and the sensuous space of architecture*. Routledge;

Relates the architectural form of European theatre to societal changes over the course of history; interesting insights into how theatre developed as a place of social performance that expanded beyond the hall into the foyer and the staircase.

- Boal, A. (2019). *Theatre of the oppressed*. Pluto Press;

Allegedly a theatre studies classic, it discusses the theatre as a social bottom-up movement.

- Wiles, David. (2011). *Theatre and citizenship: The history of a practice*. Cambridge University Press; Very interesting book that connects the development and the changes in the concept of citizenship in different European countries to the contemporary developments in theatre. Raises interesting points about citizenship vs nationhood.

- von Osten, M. (2005). Politics beyond the white cube. In *Architecture and Participation* (pp. 207–210). An essay about art exhibitions, and how changes in the role of spectator, allowing them into the creation process, creates a more complex and resourceful interaction. Coins the idea of “linear speaking structures” vs “communicative structures”.

On act and role

- Arendt, H. (1998). *The human condition* (2nd ed). University of Chicago Press.

I found this influential work to be useful for me in thinking about the “act”. Its discussion of the human as a political being due to their ability to converse with others will come useful in defining my vision. Since I am looking to create a place that adds meaning to the city, the idea that humans find the meaning of themselves and others through speaking is very interesting.

- Tati, Jacques (Director). (1967). *PlayTime*.

I found this movie very entertaining in its portrayal of society as a mechanism, where everyone is a little cog that moves according to a defined path. In its exaggeration, it brings attention to the behavioural tendencies of people in large cities.

On local vernacular

- Kishkinova, E., & Lapunova, K. (2022). К вопросу о вернакулярной тенденции в застройке Ростова-на-Дону второй половины XIX века. [On the question of the vernacular trend in the development of Rostov-on-Don in the second half of the 19th century]. *Engineering Journal of Don*, 5.

This article relates the creation of galleries and external circulation of Rostov’s courtyards to the traditional Cossack vernacular of the Rostov region.

- Lazarev, A., & Protoporova, D. (2012). Традиционное народное жилище-донской казачий курень [Traditional folk dwelling—Don Cossack kuren’]. RGSU.

This monograph of Cossack kuren’ (hut) discusses the formation of this regional typology and describes the role of the gallery in it.

motivation

I would like to have it noted that this project is very much a social study, attempted to be written by someone rather ignorant on the topic. Not only am I an architecture student, but I also come from a background of fascination with physics and mathematics, with engineering and science-oriented courses. Only in the last three years or so I discovered my fascination with the history of arts first, and then theatre, to begin frantically informing myself on the subjects. I found them to be very much relatable to my own field, or at least the parts of architecture and of its impact that I appreciate the most.

Thus, I began this study, not as a student of architecture, but as a citizen of my country. I have been born months into the making of the new, Putinist regime, in Russia, and have grown up, both in- and outside of the country, witnessing its actions. I have watched the activism and protests be suppressed, more and more violently with time, I have seen their power dissolve and the required courage to start them anew only dwindle.

I have now lived a third of my life in various European contexts, comparing the behaviour and the actions of people to where I came from. I questioned myself, why people “here” are living differently than “there”. Almost giving up on my country aligning with my moral compass, I am still debating internally if I ever get a chance to see this come to fruition. Thus, I approached this study and the essay to answer a question, often ringing in my head, - “how can my country be fixed? Be normal?”.

What I really meant was to ask – “when will my country be civil, if ever?”. And following this question, and my growing appreciation of the social impacts that art has on society, I thus pursued my study in the direction it has now taken - “what can be done to make that country civil (again)?”.

- *Artem*
15.03.2023