

# Scenarchitcture: A Methodology for Investigating the Role of *Genius Loci* in the Reading, Understanding, and Interpretation of Architecture and Heritage

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## ABSTRACT

The essay focuses upon the process of reading, understanding, and interpreting the inner character (*Genius Loci*) and performative attributes of architecture, through the modality of site-specific performance. It explores Scenarchitcture, the author's methodology, which utilises theatre form as a medium to blend historical research with the perceptual, emotional response to a given site, during the live experience of architectural places and their contexts in nature. Combining local history with a physical, dialectical relation with *Genius Loci*, the method can reveal the multiple strata of intangible cultural heritage to a broader audience through sited performances deeply rooted in the place. The final goal is to foster place awareness and community engagement, but also to help stakeholders and urban developers to create design interventions that are respectful of places. The meth-

odology has developed through repeated testing in different contexts: in Research-led teaching at University of Rome La Sapienza and Nottingham Trent University, in professional practice for performance and architectural design in association with Archabout, and in live events in marketing and communication with SmartJokes. Through a series of case studies in Italy and UK, the essay illustrates Moneta's site-specific, trans-disciplinary methodology for investigating the relation between architecture, theatre and heritage. Feedback collected during case studies in the form of live events and performances, evidenced the engagement of the audience with the themes and methods of the research; furthermore, all sited activities enhanced visitors' experience and the understanding of sited tangible and intangible cultural heritage in Italy and UK.

Keywords: site-specific, intangible heritage, *Genius Loci*, scenar- chitecture, scenography

## Introduction: Place, Character, *Genius Loci*

The essay summarises fifteen years of research on the hybridisation of the disciplines of architecture and scenography in both educational and professional areas, which has been called "scenarchitectture". The research arises from a societal need to rediscover the anthropic values of places investigating the interaction which occurs between us and our environment. Scenarchitectture is a methodology which combines the analytical and compositional methodologies of architecture with the poetic sensibility and visionary nature of theatre practice. It allows both disciplines to go beyond their limits to generate meaningful, original performative interventions in the built environment while revealing

the intangible cultural heritage. It is aimed at expanding and integrating immersive and site-specific theatre practice with a deeper relation to the place through the *Genius Loci*, the Latin phrase for the guardian deity of a place, which in contemporary usage refers to a place's distinctive character. It is also aimed at fostering a deeper relationship with the people who have a connection with the place today, and the people that historically lived there. The interaction between place and people brings to life the essence of the architectural space, unfolding the stories that are embedded in it. When theatre goes out of the traditional theatrical space, it reaches out to the built environment to find its own performative space; here, scenography and architecture leave their old roles and become "scenarchitecture", an interdisciplinary innovative method with the final goal of reading and interpreting architecture and heritage. The methodology is supported by studies on phenomenology by the architectural theorist Christian Norberg-Schulz, who defined the *Genius Loci* and its fundamental role in architecture in his seminal book: "The spaces where life occurs are places. A place is a space which has a distinct character".<sup>1</sup> Highlighting the role of Scenarchitecture in the interaction between theatre, scenography and architecture, the methodology invests and utilises the social, urban, and environmental phenomena happening around us, to re-establish the socio-political role of both disciplines.

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1. Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1980), 5.

## The (R)evolution of Two Sister Disciplines

In the past, architecture had the role of “Mother of the Arts”, made explicit through a universal and stable language during history, able to embrace in its complexity all the arts. At the same time, scenography has represented a synthesis between theatrical text and actor through the construction of a performative space, the stage: a physical link that hosts the scenic action, containing it and supporting it in its flow. Yet, in 1913, the influential theatre practitioner Edward Gordon Craig was already witnessing a revolution occurring in the relation between scenography and architecture: “Once upon a time, stage scenery was architecture. A little later it became imitation architecture. Still later it became imitation artificial architecture. Then it lost its head, went quite mad, and has been in a lunatic asylum ever since”.<sup>2</sup> Fifty years later, the passivity of audiences, the decadence of theatre’s societal commitment in favour of a banalisation of its role, was depicted by French theorist Guy Debord in his powerful book *The Society of the Spectacle*.<sup>3</sup> The growth of “spectacle” within the entertainment industry changed scenography’s communicative power within theatre, as the result of its weakened socio-political role and influence on society. The decadence of theatre practice into commercial, mainstream spectacle was stigmatised by Peter Brook in his seminal book *The Empty Space* in 1968.<sup>4</sup> Brook’s definition of “Deadly Theatre” includes the theatre productions that fail to modernise, instruct, or even entertain, those that rely on old schemes instead of exploring deeper meanings, and the ones

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2. Edward Gordon Craig, *Towards a New Theatre* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Limited, 1913), 29.

3. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (London: Rebel Press, 1967), 28.

4. Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (New York: Penguin, 1968), 11-13.

that then as now continue to rage in the majority of theatres worldwide. The dominance of “Deadly Theatre” over alternative productions goes hand in hand with the difficulty that the latter has in reaching an audience and keeping it. The “Deadly Theatre” is increasingly less open to experimentation yet more interested in “audience satisfaction”, which guarantees solid revenues. Nowadays, the search for funding pushes theatres to look for economically safe productions, which can attract the greatest number of spectators. In this scenario, scenography acts as the sacrificial victim: pimped, and boosted with technological attractions, or reduced to the bone, to cut on costs. Out of mainstream theatre, many independent theatre realities survive under the umbrella of “Applied Theatre”: small productions, alternative festivals, cultural and educational initiatives which often realise their expressive power through a deep relation with place in urban and suburban areas, and in the landscape. A recent development is the so-called “Immersive Theatre” and related theatre companies like “Punchdrunk” and “WildWorks”<sup>5</sup> which are built upon the use of found spaces and landscape, to foster audiences’ interaction and participation. Their success must be interpreted as a rediscovery of the founding communicative and relational value of theatre practice, which expresses the relationship between place, actor and spectator. For this complex and varied form of alternative theatre practice, which is often generically designated as “site-specific”, it is, therefore, necessary to recognise and reveal the relations between traditional scenography, conventionally linked to the closed space of the theatre stage, and the modalities and experiences achievable in a sited performance. This essay is aimed to present “scenarchitecture” as a methodology to analyse, interpret and reveal the interconnections and in-

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5. To see their work: [www.punchdrunk.com](http://www.punchdrunk.com) and [www.wildwoks.biz](http://www.wildwoks.biz).

teractions between place and people, filling a gap in the design for performance literature.

## Architecture or Scenography?

For centuries, architecture has been known as the art and science of “forever”, while scenography represented a sort of “temporary” architecture. For some time now, architecture has no longer been able to build an identity for itself, just as the transformations of communication methods and the digital revolution are changing the very essence of scenography.<sup>6</sup> Architecture and scenography are already contaminated to such an extent that it is not easy to distinguish between them. As passive spectators, we are witnessing a phenomenon that sees the two disciplines colliding together, with unexpected and complex results. The author's research aims to investigate this area; it identifies three aspects of the interaction between architecture and scenography in relation to time. Time, in fact, not only affects not only the final physical product of this interaction but also defines the essence of its functions.

*Architecture becomes “temporary”.* This situation happens when scenography is immersing architecture in its drama: buildings look mutant, kaleidoscopic, in the shape of large scale “machines” or made of evanescent, impalpable materials with a limited existence in time; these big artefacts are outlining a new era of the art-architecture relation under the push of the age of the image. Outer and interior spaces of these sculptural buildings are biomimetic, transparent, unpredictable, thanks to the support of CAD. Software now can allow any shape to be physically realised,

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6. Alessandro Mendini, “La sintesi delle arti”, in *Costruire* 205 (2001): 142-143.



Figure 1. Diller Scofidio + Renfro – The Blur Building,  
Exposition Pavilion, Swiss Expo, Yverdon-Les-Bains, Switzerland, 2002  
(source: <https://publicdelivery.org/blur-building/> Creative Commons)

hence the possibility to convert architecture into art: no more physical limits and rules, each conceptual design can become a phantasmagorical building, a “performing architecture”. The “Blur” building (Figure 1), created by Diller Scofidio + Renfro, is the perfect example of a design that makes explicit the interdependence between art and architecture, technology, and performance: an ever-changing, permanent scenography built in relation with the context of Lake Neuchâtel in Switzerland.

*Scenography becomes “forever”*. This is another new approach to design building which has transformed the ideological concept of architectural language and typology in favour of a self-referential, iconic identity developed through visual contaminations. The result of this process is a sort of “crystallised scenography”, which is temporally and physically immutable, and can be under-

stood as the result of design actions aimed at framing an evolving shape in its three-dimensional representation (real or virtual) in the scale of a building. The controversial project in Seoul by MVRDV (Figure 2) is an example of this borderline expression of Scenarchitettura: a “photo-frame” of the Twin Towers collapsing during the attacks of 9/11, turned into a building that transforms destruction into construction, with the dust cloud of the explosions turned into “living” spaces. This is one extreme result of the globalisation of architecture and the Starchitecture:<sup>7</sup> iconic, self-referential buildings as giant scenographic interventions trumping the needs of citizens and destroying the identity of places around the world.

*Scenography as hybridisation of architecture.* For centuries, the protagonist of scenography has been the stage, the internal “sacred” space of the theatre which, paraphrasing the Italian architect Bruno Zevi, “could not be fully represented in any form, and not be learned and experienced except through a direct experience”.<sup>8</sup> When theatre practice moves out the “virtual world” of the theatre building, it explores and meets the real world; here, a different form of spatial experience needs to be considered, being related to an architectural space which contains its *Genius Loci*, its history and its stories. When live performance invades architec-

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7. Deshpande Tejashri explains that “starchitecture is split as ‘Star + Architecture’ and this is the architecture of the Starchitects or the ‘Star-Architects’. The term stands for iconic, out of the box designs that stand in the glory of their self, redefining the skyline of a city. Here, function definitely follows form. These designs are ambitious, which in turn make them popular, making them reach the list of ‘must visits’ for that particular city or country”; see Deshpande Tejashri, “Starchitecture: Is It a Worthwhile Concept?”, accessed January 3, 2023, <http://squareone.blog/starchitecture-is-it-a-worthwhile-concept/>.

8. Bruno Zevi, *Saper vedere l’architettura* (Milan: Einaudi, 1948), 90.



Figure 2. Twin towers project in Seoul by Dutch architect company MVRDV (source: MVRDV website/CBS News website available at: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/9-11-similarity-puts-korean-tower-plan-in-doubt/>)

ture, it gives scenography, architecture, and audience a completely new role. Since the 1960s and 1970s, the revolutionary work of Richard Schechner and his *Environmental Theatre*,<sup>9</sup> and the work of Julian Beck and Judith Malina with *Living Theatre* in USA and their motto “Theatre is Life”,<sup>10</sup> theatre has been freed from the chains of its theatre stages, pushed into non-traditional venues to explore its relation with place. These artists had the urge to bring societal matters into their live performances and to make them happen in found spaces, streets, and squares, or any place where people could gather. This third aspect of Scenarchi-

9. Richard Schechner, *Environmental Theatre* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1973).

10. John Tytell, *The Living Theatre: Art, Exile and Outrage* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1997).

tecture, which is the focus of my research and practice, is activated when live performance abandons the designated theatrical spaces to explore architectural and urban spaces. In this case, the place -considered to be a unicum of spatial and social relationships- cannot be regarded just as a simple container of performances, as usually happens with street theatre or some generically sited performances; nor can it be reduced to a passive subject of the scene, as happens, for example, with re-enactments in heritage sites. With this exception, the place can function as a fundamental, proper dramaturgical element, necessary to the performance because directly connected to it, animating, and characterising the substance of a pre-existing theatrical text and/or defining and devising an original narrative for and about the place.

## Scenarchitecture: A Methodology

Scenarchitecture has been defined as “a complex of design actions aimed at transforming an architectural or urban space to communicate a content with which to establish a dialectical relationship”.<sup>11</sup> This is a design methodology to engage with the character of a place using a multidisciplinary approach that blends architecture, theatre, and sociology. A peculiar aspect of it is that it can also be used as a propaedeutic step to inspire sustainable scenarios for future architectural design, urban design, and Placemaking interventions in a given site. Scenarchitecture is fostering Peter Brook’s manifesto included in his seminal book *The Empty Space*, arguing that each play has its own space and needs its own special place because space and concentration are

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11. Andrea Moneta, *Scenarchitettura* (Rome: Nuova Cultura, 2012), 35.

inseparable and specific to the performance event. This is not a way to look back; rather, this is a way of acknowledging the fact that “era after era the most vital theatrical experiences occur outside the legitimate places constructed for the purpose”.<sup>12</sup>

Scenarchitecture methodology can be applied to any space that possesses an architectural character, including streets, squares, heritage sites and even the landscape, considered as a form of natural architecture. To intervene in this context, we need to consider the strata of historical processes that defined the place. As Norberg-Schulz states, “the structure of a place is not a fixed, eternal state, but this does not mean that the distinct character of a place changes or gets lost because identity can be conserved”.<sup>13</sup>

Scenarchitecture is grounded in the work of French phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard on Topoanalysis and the possibilities of conjuring memory from buildings.<sup>14</sup> It also draws upon Situationist Psychogeography's dialectical interaction between people and human environment. It includes the strategy and instrument of *Dérive* put forward by Guy Debord, which investigates the laws and effects of the geographical environment on the emotions and behaviour of individuals.<sup>15</sup> Scenarchitecture is also based on studies about the phenomenology of place and architecture, which demonstrates how the interior world of consciousness and our surrounding spaces are tightly linked together, investigating the emotional response to architectural places and their contexts in nature.<sup>16</sup> It also investigates the role of *Genius Loci* in Placemak-

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12. Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (New York: Penguin, 1968), 79.

13. Norberg-Schulz. *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, 18.

14. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (London: Beacon Press, 1964).

15. Guy Debord, *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1955), 8-12.

16. Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976).

ing, a collaborative process by which inhabitants can shape their public realm to enhance the “sense of place”, its distinctive and unique qualities and attributes, found in studies by Lynch, Alexander, Brooks and Golan.<sup>17</sup> Finally, it includes more recent approaches to spatial practices, which describe the tactics and possibilities left to inhabitants to operate their own self-determination and autonomous action within the limitations imposed by commerce, politics and culture.<sup>18</sup> As an art-based project, Scenarchitcture utilises exploratory, speculative, questioning approaches, as well as experimental approaches, including the design and use of wearable artefacts, called CosProps, a type of “portable scenography” that can be moved and transformed in real-time by the performer, and that interacts with both the space and the audience during the performance. Scenarchitcture is creatively delivered through cross-disciplinary research and production, which includes research-led teaching (students as researchers) and socially engaged relational practices (performances) to communicate the research findings while improving participation and community engagement.

Figure 3 illustrates the Scenarchitcture Methodology, which is divided in two distinct yet interacting phases: Phase 1 (Analysis) and Phase 2 (Design). Phase 1 (Analysis) is aimed at researching the site history with a focus on the origins of the chosen building, heritage site or found space, including its original purpose,

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17. See Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1960); Christopher Alexander et al., *A Pattern Language*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); Isis Brooks, “Can Spirit of Place Be a Guide to Ethical Building?”, in Warwick Fox (ed.), *Ethics and the Built Environment*, (London: Routledge, 2000), 139-149; and Gan Golan, “Space for New Stories”, in Rick Bell et al. (eds), *Beyond Zuccotti Park* (New York: New Village Press, 2012).

18. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

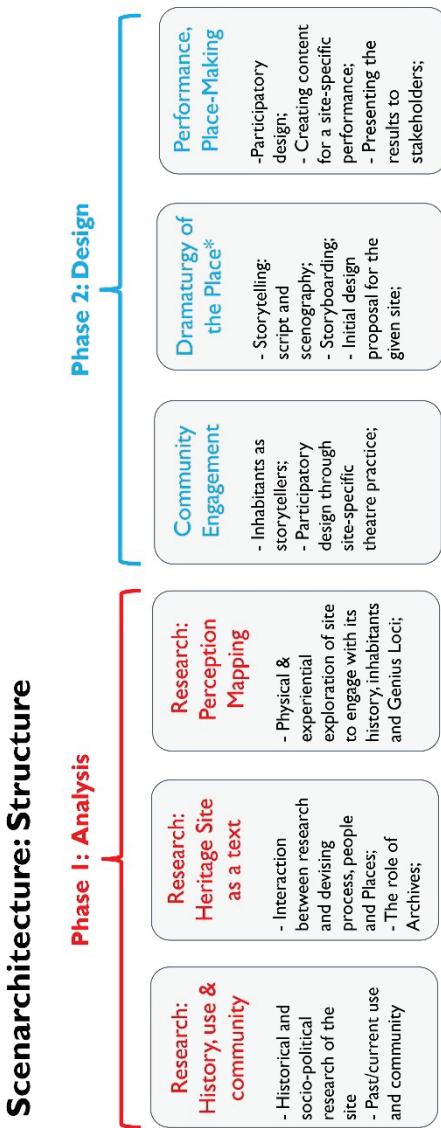


Figure 3. The two phases and activities of Scenarchitecture methodology

use and re-use, and how the site has evolved over time. Research here includes a series of physical and perception explorations aimed at experiencing a given site and architectural space to connect with the *Genius Loci*. To do so, it is crucial to abandon any rational approach to the investigation and to explore architecture through our senses. As an old anonymous expression goes, “we see things not as they are, but as we are”, because our perception is shaped by past experiences, according to our consciousness. Recent studies on neuroscience confirm that “reality” is in fact constructed by our brain and that the “stories” our brain tells us are influenced by life experience.<sup>19</sup> Phase 1 utilises a combination of tools and urban explorations derived from Psychogeography’s *dérive*,<sup>20</sup> including location-based technologies.

A very important aspect of Phase 1 is communities: who lived there in the past, if the site belongs to a particular community and, if so, what relationship do they have or had with the site; if the site is important to one particular group of people in the surrounding community and, eventually, if regular events are/were held there. The connections with the current community which

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19. Brian Resnick, “Reality Is Constructed by Your Brain. Here’s What That Means, and Why It Matters”, accessed December 22, 2022, <https://neuroscience.stanford.edu/news/reality-constructed-your-brain-here-s-what-means-and-why-it-matters>.

20. As Debord explains, “one of the basic situationist practices is the *dérive* [literally: ‘drifting’], a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. *Dérives* involve playful-constructive behaviour and awareness of psychogeographical effects and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll. In a *dérive* one or more persons during a certain period drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there”; see Guy Debord, “Theory of the *Dérive*”, UbuWeb Papers, accessed March 28, 2023, <http://arch243spring2021.luaad.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/derivedebord.pdf>.

is still using the site or lives close to it, are essential not just to collect stories and information to devise a performance inspired by the site (to build its dramaturgical content), but also to detect if a live performance could engage those people as storytellers. There is a big difference between actors who are impersonating a character, and citizens that are not acting, but are just revealing their own life stories with their own voice. Their participation in the devising process and performance is a peculiar contribution of Scenarchitecture to deliver authenticity within interpretation, creating a powerful, unique experience for the audience which is immersed in both the real physical place and its real inhabitants. All people involved in the process, performers and audience, become “spect-actors”: as defined by Brazilian playwright and activist Augusto Boal, they are spectators who take on the role of actors while engaged in the performance as active participants.<sup>21</sup>

Phase 2 of the methodology (Design) investigates the interaction between historical and contemporary fragments of stories, memories of the people that live or lived there; it is aimed at determining the direction of the devising process and the development of a script and a storyboard to describe all scenes of the final performance. These are the fundamental visual communication tools to design and illustrate the “dramaturgy of the place” for the given site. The “dramaturgy” of the place is aimed at highlighting meanings, contents and dynamics that were found while exploring the site, the people that live there and its history. Its focus is to unveil feelings and to tell stories, to reveal invisible links between places and people through a live performance, using all senses and sensibility. The design in Phase 2 is participatory: designers are co-creating the content for the site-specific

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21. Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (London: Pluto Press, 1979).

performance with all people involved in the process (inhabitants, volunteers, students). The final performance, open to the public, is not only a way to reveal stories about places and people, but also an opportunity to socialise and share the intangible cultural heritage linked to the people who have direct or indirect connections with the site.

## Performing Heritage Through Scenarchitecture

The case studies presented below are a selection of projects which applied Scenarchitecture methodology to heritage and the built environment in order to analyse, understand and interpret the inner character and performative attributes of places. I have refined my methodology in different contexts in Italy since 2007, and in the UK since 2014, using theatre practice as a medium to blend historical research with the perceptual, emotional response to architectural places. Combining local history with a physical, dialectical relation with the *Genius Loci*, the method revealed the multiple strata of intangible cultural heritage to a broader audience through sited performances deeply rooted in the place. The final goal was to foster place awareness and community engagement, but also to help stakeholders and urban developers, when engaging with the character of the place, to create designs that are respectful of places. My methodology was developed in different contexts: in research-led teaching at the University of Rome La Sapienza (Case study 1) and at Nottingham Trent University (Case studies 2 and 3), but also in professional practice for architectural design and live performance in collaboration with Archabout,<sup>22</sup> and for live events in marketing and

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22. Archabout, accessed December 12, 2022. <https://www.archabout.it/>.

communication with SmartJokes, an ethical communication company based in Rome, Italy.<sup>23</sup>

*Case study 1: Site-specific project Tramandala at Garbatella district, Rome, Italy (2008-2009)*

The Project was funded by Festival Teatri di Vetro 3, Romaeuropa, and Rome XI Municipality; it was developed in collaboration with the MA in Digital Theatrical Urban Scenography at the University of Rome La Sapienza, and with Archabout Association. The research enquiry involved experimental research using location-based digital technologies (Geo-Blog) and perception mapping as a further methodological development of Scenarchitecture. It was based on recent work by Italian archaeologist Giuseppe Lugli and his son Pier Maria Lugli concerning the “*Altera Forma Urbis*” of Rome, which investigates the hidden, “secret” structural urban form of Rome in the shape of a star.<sup>24</sup> By analysing the nodes, axes and vertices of the star, it is possible to recognise that all main buildings (including the Coliseum, all the Baths and temples) and all the consular roads of ancient Rome were not randomly placed; instead, they are located in the aforementioned crucial points of the star (nodes, axes and vertices) which define its shape (Figure 4). The research was aimed at investigating if a similar correspondence of the main buildings and roads of modern Rome was also maintained in an extended version of the star reaching the seven-mile radius of the current city borders.<sup>25</sup> To do so, we selected as a case study the Garbatella district

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23. Smartjokes, accessed November 2, 2022. <http://www.smartjokes.it/>.

24. Pier Maria Lugli, *L'agro romano e l'“altera forma” di Roma antica* (Rome: Gangemi Editore, 2007).

25. Mario L. R. Leante, “L’interazione analisi progetto. Area studio: Roma. Progetto di un centro servizi per la produzione cinematografica”, accessed March 20, 2023, <https://xoomer.virgilio.it/maleante/tesi.html>.

and XI Municipality in Rome, as the place in which there is a concentration of Rome's urban modifications, uncovering its old and recent history, with the aim of finding its connections with the seven-mile radius star. A phenomenological approach was used to interpret not just the physical position of Garbatella's landmarks, roads, and main buildings,<sup>26</sup> but also the experiences as they are lived during the interaction of the researchers with the district and its inhabitants. The research revealed both physical and intangible connections between the "Altera Forma Urbis" of Rome and its extended, contemporary urban structure within the area of study. Findings highlighted the fact that, if we extend the shape of the star from the original one-mile radius of ancient Rome to the seven-mile radius of the contemporary city limits, there is a correspondence between the area of study's main monuments and not only modern roads but also the social landmarks and gathering places created by inhabitants within their community.

Evidence of the originality of the findings was an exhibition (*Segni Percorsi*) commissioned and funded by Urban Centre-Municipio Roma XI, and a sited performance (*Tramandala*) commissioned and funded by Festival Teatri di Vetro 3 (a renowned Festival of the performing arts) and Fondazione Romaeuropa, one of the most prestigious cultural institutions in Europe. The Project delivered a promenade performance inspired by the project's research on the historical, social and morphological reading of the territory of Garbatella district, including the collaboration with its inhabitants during the devising process (Figure 5). Posi-

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26. The phenomenological approach to research is here intended as the direct investigation and description of phenomena happening in urban context as consciously experienced by the researcher, in this specific case, the MA students involved in the research project.

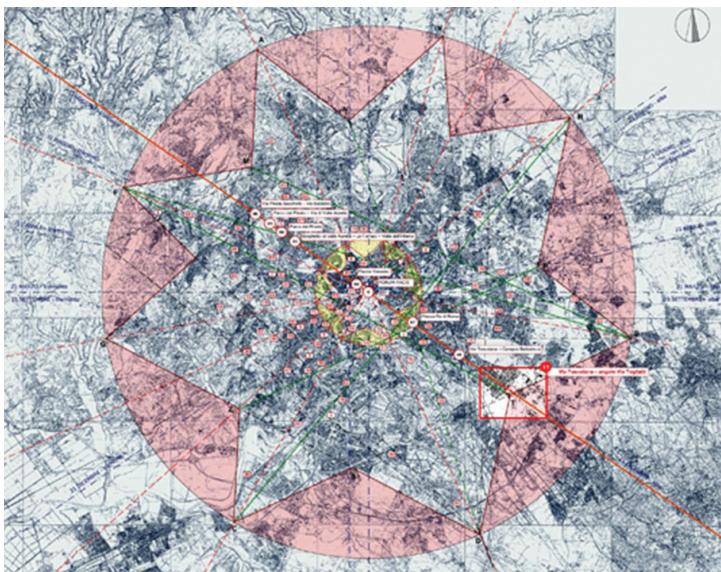


Figure 4. The “secret” structural urban form of Rome in the shape of a star extended to the seven miles radius of the contemporary city limit.

Image: arch. Mario L. R. Leante

tive feedback collected during the exhibition and after the performance evidenced the engagement of the audience with the themes, meanings and methods of the research. The dissemination of the work included the authored book *Scenarchitettura*.<sup>27</sup>

#### *Case study 2: Heritage design projects for National Trust at The Workhouse, Southwell, UK (2015-2019)*

The Workhouse is a National Trust place located in Southwell, Nottinghamshire, the most complete workhouse in existence in UK. The Heritage Project was a five-year long collaboration funded by National Trust and Nottingham Trent University, enabled

27. See Moneta, *Scenarchitettura*.



Figure 5. Different stages of the Project Tramandala  
in Garbatella district, Rome, Italy

by National Trust's Research Strategy 2017-2021 that aimed at "fulfilling the role of heritage in the modern world, realising experiences that move, teach and inspire".<sup>28</sup> The project was focused on The Workhouse building and outdoor spaces in order to reveal its *Genius Loci*, to unearth forgotten, denied, and unexpressed stories of paupers segregated in the building, and to reveal them through architecture and performance so as to provoke the Workhouse's visitors to think differently about its history, identity and today's world. The projects were developed through research-led teaching. From 2015 to 2016, a number of Theatre Design students at Nottingham Trent University were involved as active researchers for content creation and performance design and delivery. They were paired with the Workhouse's volunteers to engage with the building and its archive material, and

28. National Trust, "Research Strategy 2017-2021", [www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk), accessed 05 22, 2017, [www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk).

together they devised different paupers' stories inspired by the Workhouse's archive. During the first two years of development, the project created installations. Since 2017, after gaining interest from The National Trust, stories have evolved from installations into collective, costumed promenade performances open to the public inside and outside the Workhouse, with the volunteers as storytellers. The project became a regular and popular feature of The Workhouse's Public Programme inspired by a different theme for each edition. Outputs of each year's project included photos and video, websites and blogs, newspaper articles, exhibitions; in 2019, a documentary captured the development of the project and final performance. Performances of the projects of different years were devised on the themes of welfare, mental health, the homeless, gender: in 2019, the performance "Poorhouse for Lunatics" used the theme of mental health to highlight contemporary issues of mental health in today's young generations. This gave a voice to the vulnerable housed young women of yesterday and today, working in collaboration with The Workhouse Volunteers. In 2018, the performance "Who Cares?" was inspired by The Workhouse's yearlong celebration of the centenary of "Women's Suffrage" in the UK. The research project picked the opportunity to highlight some contemporary issues in women's enfranchisement, working in collaboration with young homeless people from "Newark Emmaus Trust" and The Workhouse Volunteers. In 2017, the performance "Re-Imagining the Workhouse" followed a project enabled by The National Trust Creative Fellow Programme of Residencies, which was aimed at supporting the production of new creative work, in collaboration with researchers, responding to the site and engaging audiences in its history through creative means (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Images from Heritage Projects performances at The Workhouse, Southwell, UK

*Case study 3: Ghosts! Heritage design project for Nottingham Castle Trust, UK (2021-2022)*

The project secured a collaboration with Nottingham Castle, UK, for the realisation of public activities to improve the visitors' engagement while exploring the connections of Scenarchitecture with recent studies on Performing Heritage about identity, memory and belonging.<sup>29</sup> The work was funded in kind by Nottingham Castle Trust with supporting staff and the use of spaces and facilities. The enquiry was about researching and then revealing historical characters that had a role in the history of Nottingham Castle, with the aim of helping audiences engage with them on a perceptual level through storytelling, site-specific performance and CosProps (wearable artefacts) as the medium. The project involved six students of the BA (Hons) in Theatre Design of Nottingham Trent University as part of their Realised Design curriculum; they selected and designed a CosProp for each historical character chosen during the Scenarchitecture analysis. They then devised different performances in collaboration with six performers of The Television Workshop, a BAFTA award winning drama group and TV casting resource with a strong focus on diversity and inclusion based in Nottingham. Characters included: Empress Matilda, and the besieging of Nottingham Castle in 1140; Daniel Diggle, one of the Luddites in Nottingham, and his execution on April 2, 1817; the fictional character Amelia, a citizen of Nottingham witnessing The Great Cheese Riot in October 1766; Joanne of Navarre, Duchess of Brittany and Queen of England between 1403 and 1413; Duke Henry Pelham-Clinton, and the burn down of the Castle after Reform Bill Riots of 1831; the fictional character John, a servant of Isabella of France during the cap-

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29. Anthony Jackson and Jenny Kydd (eds), *Performing Heritage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011).

ture of her lover Roger Mortimer on October 19, 1330 (Figure 7).

The outcome was a series of scheduled promenade performances illustrating the six characters' stories in different places

Designer	Character	Theme	Performer	Place	Durati on	Photo	Order
Manon Bailey- Rosse,	Empress Matilda	Besieging of Nottingham Castle 1140, Battle of Lincoln in 1141	Ella Mitchinson	Path leading to Bandstand/ Trees			1
Emma Bullman	Daniel Diggie	Luddites in Nottingham, his execution on April 2nd, 1817	Dumo Mk	The Battlements/w all around the Castle			2
Lucy Carney	Amelia, a citizen of Nottingham	The Great Cheese Riot: October 1766	Paige Turton	Main entrance/ behind wall			3
Mea Fenwick	Joanne of Navarre	Duchess of Brittany and Queen of England 1403-1413	Justine Moore	Middle Bailey (Castle green)			4
Hardy Gruduls	Henry Pelham- Clinton	Burn down of the Castle after Reform Bill Riots of 1831	Nagaiyah Dad	Entrance of Duke's Palace			5
Freya Willows	John, servant of Isabella	The capture of Mortimer on 19 October 1330	Thomas Unsworth	Mortimer hole			6

Figure 7. Performance Ghosts! at Nottingham Castle. Schedule and information about the characters, performers, and locations

of the Nottingham Castle Grounds (Figure 8). The performances took place outdoor during the Covid-19 pandemic to adhere to Covid-19 regulations. The results confirmed the importance of adopting a multidisciplinary approach to enhance the use of perception and emotions in heritage sites. Heritage sites, in fact, with their peculiar identity and character (*Genius Loci*) which enhance the quality of place, provoke intense spatial experiences to those who engage with them. This combination of tangible and intangible heritage, of intrinsic and extrinsic qualities of place can help portraying human experiences and actions spatially, thus creating a powerful immersive journey for the audience. The characters' stories depicted not just historical facts but their connections with today's societal struggles on similar themes, a short-circuit in the temporal development of our lives. A questionnaire after the performance evidenced the success of the project, which brought characters from different eras to life, linking them with our contemporary world. Comments included: "I felt wrapped up in the Castle's history, and totally engaged in the individual stories"; "it enabled me to see the castle and grounds from a different perspective"; "this was an excellent way to learn about Nottingham's historic rebellious characters"; "the performance enhanced the experience of the Nottingham Castle grounds".<sup>30</sup> The project also produced a video teaser published on YouTube.<sup>31</sup>

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30. Andrea Moneta, "Ghost! Heritage Design Project and Performance at Nottingham Castle Grounds", accessed January 2, 2023, <https://www.research-catalogue.net/view/1501963/1501964>.

31. Andrea Moneta and Bill Newsinger, "Ghosts: a Site-specific Performance at Nottingham Castle", YouTube, accessed November 28, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g5dstG3gljc>.

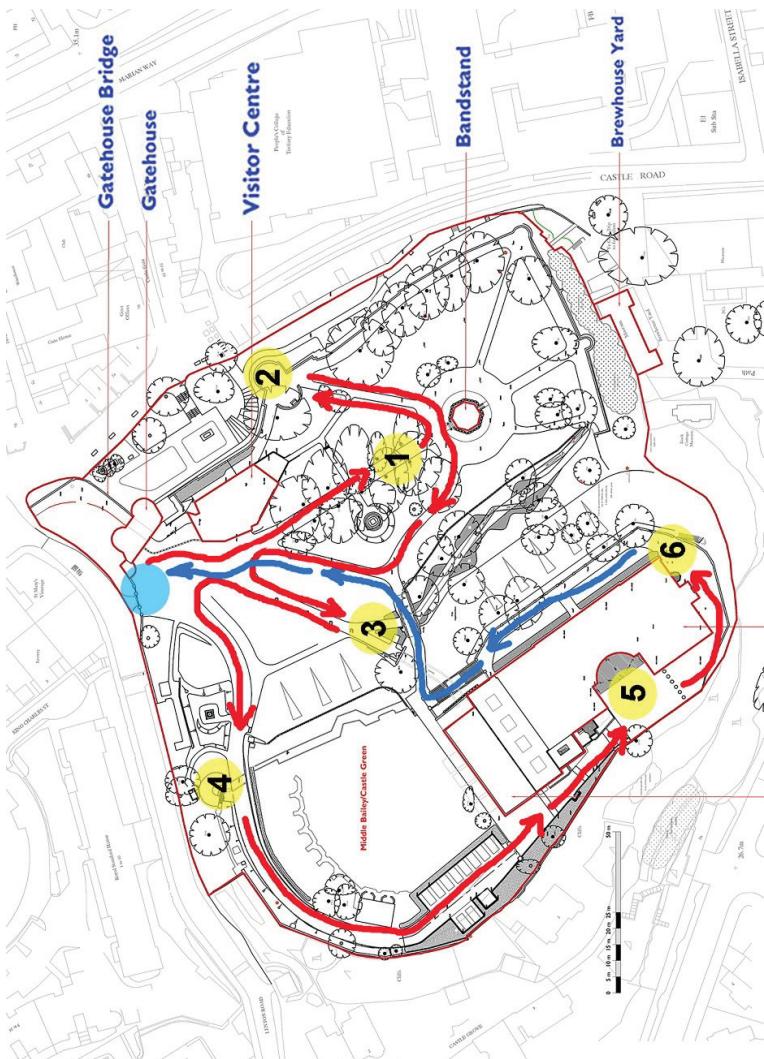


Figure 8. Map of Nottingham Castle Grounds showing the promenade and the locations of the six characters and performances of Ghosts.

## Conclusion

Scenarchitecture theory and practice has been developed into a bespoke methodology for sited performances and has demonstrated its ability to connect and bring to life history, people and places in a variety of different contexts in Italy and the UK. The new findings that this methodology brings to the fore are centred on the hybridisation of the disciplines of architecture and scenography as an original contribution to knowledge in immersive and site-specific theatre, which also advances theories in architecture, heritage and performance. Specifically, Scenarchitecture involves a combination of tools and methods not often used in site-specific theatre practice, which are selected from architecture, social sciences, participation, psychogeography, human geography, phenomenology, spatial practices and placemaking. Its distinctiveness, as the result of the combination of different approaches, resides in its adaptability and response to the context through a deep connection with the *Genius Loci* of the given site. This essential element of the analysis of the site and its phenomenological approach interact with the design, enhancing it and producing unique meaningful performances that are life experiences. The final goal is to foster place awareness and community engagement, but also to help stakeholders, architects, and urban developers to create design interventions that are respectful of places. Furthermore, the original involvement of students, citizens and volunteers as active researchers and participants in both the creative devising process and the final performance acts as the necessary guarantee to balance authenticity with interpretation. Scenarchitecture, in fact, abhors re-enactments where historicism plagiarises authenticity; it also refuses the dictatorship of the text, where authenticity is unbalanced with respect to the director's interpretation. Scenarchitecture

performances are open to the public -the revelatory and cathartic moment in which all people and all elements of the methodology are put together and are shared- and are not just the final testing of methodology but also its legacy for the place itself, opening a debate about its essence, its role in current society and its future evolution as tangible and intangible heritage.

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