

# Urban Scenography

## *Re-Framing Public Space*

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**ABSTRACT:** The following thesis aims at forging new connections between the disciplines of architecture, scenography and urbanism and explores their potential in the making of public space. In its contemporary reading, scenography can provide specific transdisciplinary methods and strategies in the conceptualization and construction of space. Urban scenography puts these methods into practice within an urban context: from scripting and performing, to embracing the ephemeral and the fake. The research looks into projects that aim at involvement, while creating new urban landscapes between reality and fiction. Towards this direction it can become a crucial addition to contemporary debates regarding architecture, urbanism and nature.

Defined here as the transdisciplinary practice of the design of performative spaces, scenography, like all spatial practices, is concerned with the unfolding of a physical or virtual figure in relationship to an existing and intended narrative over time<sup>1</sup>. It is rather its fluid articulation of staging spaces between the disciplines of theatre, architecture, installation and exhibition that renders it particularly suitable to formulate speculative spaces of potentiality. Departing from the above disciplines informed by architectural and urban design theory, the thesis' first part constructs an original theoretical-historical backbone.

The second part focuses on developing a method for considering the ideas under review. The research attempts to isolate specific qualities of the 'scenographic'<sup>2</sup> in order to examine how these apply in contemporary architectural discourses. Peter Greenaway's unfinished urban installation *The Stairs* from 1994 will serve as the main case study. In this project Greenaway enhanced the descriptive function inscribed in the architecture of the stairs and, deploying their narrative potential, generated the activity of re-viewing the city.<sup>3</sup> In his exploration of cinematic language outside of the cinema, in more dimensions and in varying relationships with the audience, this dissertation finds a method to open up new perspectives when designing for public space. Part of the thesis will be a set of in situ experiments carried out in the city of Vienna, whose documentation and analysis will constitute the foundations to:

- \_ identify scenographic approaches in the design of urban spaces within their socio-political contexts,
- \_ establish a framework for future architectural practice, situated at the intersection of scenography and urbanism and predicated on the agency of incompleteness in architectural and urban design
- \_ develop urban scenography as a theoretical tool that can decode the complexities of contemporary urban environments,
- \_ attempt conclusions that derive less from an understanding of form and more from an understanding of process.

1\_ Brejzek, T. 'Scenography or Making Space', published in Arnold Arnoldson (ed.) *The Disappearing Stage*, Prague: The Theatre Institute, 2012.

2\_ Hann, R., *Beyond Scenography*, Routledge, 2018. p.4.

3\_ Bruno, G., *Atlas of Emotions*, Verso New York, 2002. p.311.

