

CFP: International Conference

**BEYOND GENTRIFICATION:
PERFORMING SPATIAL TRANSFORMATION**

Dates: June 24-25, 2027

Venue: Seminarraum 1+2, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna

Keynote Speaker:

Sharon Zukin, Professor Emerita of Sociology
Brooklyn College and Graduate Center of the City University of New York

Since the late 1990s, scholars working across the different disciplinary contexts of Theatre and Performance Studies, Urban Studies, and Cultural Geography have converged around a key question: how do the arts transform urban spaces in tangible and intangible ways? In Theatre and Performance Studies, this question has led to discussions around the *agency* of theatre and performance, with scholars outlining both the transformative political potentials of theatre and performance practices, and the material dynamics - like changing cultural policies, decreasing funding opportunities, and political pressures - that limit these potentials. Meanwhile, in Urban Studies, scholars have examined the impact of cultural producers and cultural institutions, and the role played by the symbolic economies that they generate in urban space. Research on art as an agent of urban change has been particularly strong in scholarship on gentrification, where otherwise differing approaches have agreed on the pioneering role of culture.

This conference seeks to build on this budding interdisciplinary conversation to re-examine the relationship of theatre and performance to spatial history, development and transformation. Rather than taking the question of agency or causality as a given, however, we seek to think expansively about the *many* roles that theatre and performance play in altering, developing, and negotiating both urban and non-urban space. While open to scholars working across Theatre and Performance Studies and Urban Studies, we also intend for our use of the term “performance” to function expansively, and invite proposals that examine a range of cultural forms, including dance, music, festivals, art biennials, and nightlife. In that light, paper proposals could consider:

- Processes of urban transformation that involve but also look *beyond* gentrification, including:
 - o Deindustrialization and the adaptive use of industrial sites for performance
 - o The impact of infrastructural change (such as new spaces of transit) on performance
 - o The securitization and surveillance of cultural and performance spaces
 - o The impact of climate adaptation on performance spaces and practices
- Historical periods that *precede* the classic late-twentieth-century timelines of gentrification research, including:
 - o Performance spaces during the heyday of industrial urbanization

- Interwar and socialist-era urban planning and performance
- Colonial urban design and performance spaces
- Performance in the midst of postwar reconstruction
- Forms of urban transformation that *differ from* Euro-American models, including:
 - Postcolonial urban transformations
 - State-driven redevelopment in mega-cities
 - Performance in informal urban settlements
 - Performance in the context of reconstruction following periods of conflict or war
- Examples of spatial transformation that take place *outside* the city, including:
 - Rural performance in contexts of agricultural change and/or depopulation
 - The experiences of sub-urban, regional, or touring performance networks in an age of expanded urbanization
 - Performances in borderlands, contested zones, or other spaces of discontinuity

Additionally, we are interested in proposals that approach performance and the transformation of space via novel and/or mixed methodologies. These could include what are variously labeled arts-based, participatory, or practice-as-research approaches, forms of visual ethnography, or practices of participatory mapping and cartography.

Submission Guidelines:

Proposals should be submitted to emine.fisek@oeaw.ac.at by October 15, 2026. Submissions should include (in a single file):

- The author's name, affiliation, and contact information;
- The title of the proposed paper;
- An abstract of 300 words;
- A short biography of up to 150 words.

Selected papers will be published in a peer-reviewed collection.

Schedule:

Proposal Deadline: October 15, 2026

Invitations Sent: November 30, 2026

Conference Dates: June 24-25, 2027

Funding:

A limited number of partial bursaries for travel and/or accommodation may be offered, subject to available funding. If you would like to be considered for a bursary, please let us know in your proposal.

Organisers:

This conference is organized by the members of “Theatre and Gentrification in the European City” (THEAGENT), a multi-year research project funded by the European Research Council (Grant #101043740). For details, please see:

<https://www.oeaw.ac.at/projects/theagent>

The “Theatre and Gentrification in the European City” project consortium includes the Austrian Academy of Sciences, the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama of the University of London, the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan and the American University of Paris.

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