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Original Research Article

Spatial Mise-en-Scène and Narrative in Architecture: A Comparison of Tschumi's Event-Based Approach and Psarra's Narrative-Centered Approach*

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Abstract

Problem statement: Attention to narrative and spatial mise-en-scène in contemporary architecture has provided new possibilities for the interpretation and interactive organization of space.

Research purpose: This study aims to comparatively examine two prominent theoretical approaches, event-centeredness in the thought of Bernard Tschumi and narrative-centeredness in the theory of Sophia Psarra, in order to elucidate the capacities of spatial mise-en-scène in narrative-oriented architectural design.

Research method: The present study employed a qualitative methodology, grounded in comparative theoretical-conceptual analysis and discourse analysis. Data were collected through a review of specialized literature and the analysis of exemplary cases (such as Tschumi's Parc de la Villette and selected projects discussed by Psarra), and were compared using the criteria of narrative structure, user action (agency), and spatial form.

Conclusion: The findings indicate that Tschumi's event-based architecture emphasizes the production of discontinuity, tension, and interaction between space and event, whereas Psarra focuses on multilayered narrative, interpretability, and experience-centered spatiality. The comparative analysis suggests that integrating these two approaches can offer novel models for contemporary cultural and public architecture. The study underscores the necessity of rethinking the architectural design process through a narrative-oriented approach and employing semiotic and analytical tools to create meaningful and participatory spaces.

Keywords: *Spatial event; narrative-oriented architecture; spatial mise-en-scène; semiotics of space; conceptual design; narrative form.*

Introduction

Architecture is an art form that, through the organization of spaces and the arrangement of elements, provides a framework for meaning-making, experience, and interpretation. Beyond purely structural or aesthetic functions, architecture can act as a multilayered

medium that shapes the user's experience and interaction with the environment in a dynamic and meaningful way (Barthes, 1974; Pallasmaa, 2005). In recent years, with the expansion of interdisciplinary approaches, the concepts of narrative and spatial mise-en-scène have gained increasing prominence

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in contemporary architecture. Space is now regarded not merely as a physical setting but as a narrative text endowed with the capacity for interpretation, experience, and the reproduction of meaning in the encounter with users (Tschumi, 1996; Ryan, 2004; Kimber, 2010).

Narrativity in architecture is a concept rooted, on the one hand, in linguistic and literary traditions, and, on the other, expanded into new domains such as cinema, video games, and digital environments (Barthes, 1974; Ikonomi, 2022; Brey, 2023). This approach transforms architecture from a static, form-oriented system into an interactive and dynamic medium in which the audience is not merely an observer but also an actor and narrator of space (Tschumi, 1996; Kimber, 2010). Within this framework, the notion of spatial *mise-en-scène*, borrowed from theatre and cinema, plays a key role in the organization, experience, and interpretation of space; the arrangement of elements, light, movement, and even memory and the body can set multiple narratives and meanings in motion (Heath, 1981; Pallasmaa, 2005; Pérez-Gómez, 2016).

Among contemporary theorists, Bernard Tschumi and Sophia Psarra offer two distinct yet complementary perspectives on the relationship between spatial *mise-en-scène* and architectural narrative. Tschumi, emphasizing event-centeredness and the theory of event–space–movement, conceives of architecture as a stage for the experience of the body and event, underscoring the role of discontinuity, tension, and dynamism in meaning-making (Tschumi, 1996; Vesnić et al., 2024). In contrast, Psarra, focusing on narrative-centeredness and the semiotic analysis of architecture, presents space as a text that is readable and multilayered, whose meanings are formed through engagement with the audience and in the context of culture, history, and signs (Psarra, 2021; Psarra et al., 2023). These approaches, particularly in projects such as Parc de la Villette or the analysis of works by John Soane and Carlo Scarpa, enable a deeper understanding of narrative in space (Tschumi, 1996; Psarra, 2021). The importance of this subject is heightened in an era when public, cultural, and digital spaces are increasingly becoming venues for narrative construction, lived experience, and social participation. Architectural

narratives today not only enrich users' aesthetic experiences but also influence collective identity, historical memory, and patterns of social interaction (Molinari & Bigiotti, 2014; Robillard, 2023). Accordingly, research into spatial *mise-en-scène* and architectural narrative can provide valuable theoretical and practical foundations for designers, scholars, and architects, opening new horizons for innovation in the design of future spaces.

Problem Statement

Despite significant growth in theoretical and empirical studies on narrative in architecture, ambiguities remain concerning the relationship between spatial *mise-en-scène* and the narrative-oriented capacities of architectural design. Although the body of literature, especially in recent decades, has addressed various dimensions of narrative in architecture, spatial semiotics, and the bodily experience (Barthes, 1974; Tschumi, 1996; Pallasmaa, 2005; Kimber, 2010; Psarra, 2021), comparative and critical examinations of event-based and narrative-based approaches in organizing space and shaping user experience have been less explored. Key questions remain: How do Tschumi's event-based and Psarra's narrative-based approaches conceptualize spatial *mise-en-scène* and architectural narrative? What capacities and limitations does each approach present for the narrative organization of space and user interaction? And how can the integration or adaptation of these perspectives contribute to developing meaningful, polyphonic, and participatory models in contemporary architecture? The necessity of such research lies in the fact that, in today's world, architecture no longer confines itself to creating form and function; it requires new theoretical frameworks that can account for the complexities of spatial experience, multilayered narratives, and the active presence of the audience in design (Molinari & Bigiotti, 2014; Ikonomi, 2022). A comparative elucidation of these two approaches not only deepens theoretical knowledge but also offers pathways for innovative ideas and practical strategies in designing cultural, urban, and public spaces (Brey, 2023; Robillard, 2023). Accordingly, this article is an attempt to conduct a comparative analysis of

two models of spatial *mise-en-scène* and architectural narrative from the perspectives of Tschumi's event-based approach and Psarra's narrative-based approach, and to clarify their implications for designing the spaces of the future.

Theoretical Background of the Study

With an interdisciplinary orientation, the literature of the present research traces the relationship between narrative and spatial *mise-en-scène* in architecture across three key intellectual streams: classical semiotics, contemporary philosophy, and experience-oriented theories. First, structuralist narratology, represented by the works of Barthes (1966) and Genette (1980), emphasized the syntactic analysis and semantic codes of architecture. This perspective conceives of architecture as a "text" whose layers of meaning can be understood through the decoding of signs. Although this approach offers strong theoretical potential, as Lyotard and Deleuze (Lyotard, 1984; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) have argued, it often remains at an abstract and linguistically oriented level, detached from lived experience and the body. Such critiques paved the way for post-structuralist approaches, which, through Derrida's (1978) thought, stress polyphony, interpretability, and the disruption of signification within the architectural text. These perspectives view architecture not as the product of form, but as a living and open process in relation to the audience, the event, and the context. In this regard, Bruner's (1991) cognitive approach and Eco's (1994) cultural semiotics highlight the active role of the user in meaning production. Eco, in particular, considers meaning as the result of user-space interaction and, with his open reader model, critiques closed and static narratives. This approach has formed the theoretical foundation for the development of interactive narratives and participatory architecture in contemporary literature. Additionally, Hillier & Hanson (1984), with the Space Syntax model, for the first time conceptualized the relationship between spatial organization and social narrative—a perspective that, while effective in analyzing macro-structures, as Deleuze and Lyotard also noted, tends to overlook bodily experience and individual user differences. In contrast to these abstract streams,

theories grounded in experience and functionalism & phenomenology have emerged, particularly those drawing on the phenomenology of Husserl (1913) and Merleau-Ponty (1962), emphasizing the importance of the body, movement, and sensory perception in understanding architecture. Pallasmaa (2005) and Norberg-Schulz (1980), adopting a critical lens, argue that spatial narrative is impossible without the active presence of the body and memory. This stream provides an important critical complement to abstract structuralist and post-structuralist narratives, stressing that architecture must serve as a platform for tangible, participatory, and multisensory experience. In the field of narrative architecture studies, Kimber (2010) and Qadir (2011) assert that meaning and narrative in architecture are shaped not only in structure and form, but also in spatial circulation, movement paths, and the user's sensory interaction with space. Their analyses, critiquing strict functionalism, reveal that lived experience, movement trajectories, and spatial memory are foundational to the creation of meaningful narratives. Sierra's (2013) analysis, emphasizing postmodernity, demonstrates that architectural narrative is not merely a reflection of formal order but also a site where history, identity, and culture intersect. The main critique of Sierra's work, however, is its occasional weakness in linking theory with concrete design examples. In contrast, Molinari & Bigiotti (2014) and Sezen et al. (2022) conceive of space as a language of storytelling and narrative experience, and through analysis of the architectural design process, highlight the importance of meaning in shaping space. More recent studies, such as those by Wu (2022) and Ikonomi (2022), have examined the role of narrative in revitalizing abandoned urban spaces and in virtual reality experiences, stressing meaning transfer through digital experience and user participation—although their main limitation lies in the difficulty of fully transferring narrative experience from digital spaces to physical architecture. Likewise, Barut (2020) and Itani (2022), focusing on the intersection of cinema, gaming, and architecture, underscored the potential of interactive and cinematic narratives in designing new spaces. In the realm of competing theories, critiques grounded in functionalism

and user experience have gained prominence in recent literature. These critiques, particularly in response to purely abstract and language-based narratives, stress the need to consider actual user behavior and social contexts (Till, 2009; Groat & Wang, 2013). This stream emphasizes linking architectural narrative with empirical data, behavioral analysis, and design scenario planning. Finally, in studies related to Psarra, *Architecture of Twists and Turns* (Psarra, 2021) and *Architecture and Language* (Psarra, 2022) present semantic layers and a three-act structure, offering a robust conceptual model for reading narrative in contemporary architecture. Her collaborative work with Steiger and Sternberg (Psarra et al., 2023) also effectively highlights the role of narrative in institutional and political architecture through discourse analysis of power and spatial signs. In Table 1, previous studies are summarized based on indicators such as source type, narrative positioning, methodological approach, and degree of relevance to the present research.

• Narrative, narrativity, and narrativism in architecture

At its core, narrative refers to the representation of sequential events within a temporal framework, a concept rooted in literary and linguistic studies (Genette, 1980; Ricoeur, 1984). In architecture, however, narrative is not confined to literary or storytelling expression; rather, it becomes a spatial and experiential structure that acquires meaning through interaction with the user (Kimber, 2010; Sezen et al., 2022). From this perspective, architecture is not merely a physical product, but a medium for reproducing narratives through movement, spatial sequencing, and sensory experience (Tschumi, 1996; Pallasmaa, 2005). In contemporary studies, the concept of spatial narrativity, with its emphasis on the “readability” of space, has gained a prominent position (Barthes, 1977; Eco, 1984). Influenced by structuralist and semiotic theories, this view holds that the physical elements of architecture, much like the vocabulary of a language, help convey meaning and messages to the audience (Foucault, 1977; Chandler, 1994). The three main levels for analyzing narrative in architecture are presented in Table 2.

In architecture, narrativity can be explored in three dimensions: spatial sequencing, narrative signs (such

as light and material), and bodily–sensory experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Norberg-Schulz, 1980). Spatial sequencing, similar to literary narrative, allows the user to have either a linear or non-linear experience through movement in space (Tschumi, 1996; Psarra, 2022). Narrative signs, such as light, color, and form, perform functions analogous to literary metaphors within architectural space (Eco, 1984; Coates, 2012).

A narrativist approach, through the analysis of spatial structures, enables the discovery of polyphonic and diverse narratives (Bakhtin, 1981; Sierra, 2013). In this sense, architecture is not merely a formal or functional product but a system of signification that communicates messages about power, identity, and collective memory (Foucault, 1977; Lefebvre, 1991). This feature is particularly evident in the architecture of museums, urban spaces, and even digital environments (Barut, 2020; Brey, 2023; Robillard, 2023).

From a critical standpoint, architects such as Bernard Tschumi do not regard narrative merely as a tool for meaning transmission, but as a framework for unpredictable events and bodily–social actions (Tschumi, 1996; Vesnić et al., 2024). In contrast, Psarra analyzes architecture as a multilayered text with syntactic and semantic rules, which the user must read and interpret (Psarra, 2021; Psarra et al., 2023). Ultimately, narrative-centeredness in architecture has opened a new horizon for designing interactive, meaningful, and user experience–based spaces, an approach that transforms space beyond its physicality into an open and multilayered system of meaning, action, and narrative.

• Mise-en-scène in theatre and its translation into architecture

The concept of *mise-en-scène*, which first gained currency in theatre studies and later in cinema, refers to the deliberate arrangement and composition of visual elements within a scene. These elements include the position and movement of actors, lighting, set design, stage décor, sound, and the empty space between objects and bodies (Heath, 1981; McAuley, 2000). In cinema and theatre, *mise-en-scène* goes beyond a mere decorative technique; it becomes a fundamental tool for non-verbal storytelling and for conveying concepts, emotions, and

Table 1. Selected studies. Source Authors.

Author(s) & Year	Title of Article/ Thesis	Type of Source	Key Topic	Approach to Narrative	Narrative Positioning	Methodological Approach	Relevance
Barthes (1966)	An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of the Narrative	Theoretical article	Narrative structure	Analysis of narrative structure	Language and meaning in the text	Semiotics, structural analysis	High
Bruner (1991)	The Narrative Construction of Reality	Theoretical article	Narrative and reality	Cognitive, linguistic	Meaning-making through narrative	Narrative psychology	High
Eco (1994)	Six Walks in the Fictional Woods	Book	Narrative reading and audience	Reader model, textual choices	Narrative time and reading	Literary narratology	High
Hillier & Hanson (1984)	The Social Logic of Space	Book	Spatial configuration	Analysis of spatial structures	Social-spatial relations	Theoretical-analytical, space syntax	High
Kimber (2010)	Truth in Fiction: Storytelling and Architecture	PhD dissertation	Storytelling in architecture	Space as narrative	Design as writing	Theoretical and case study analysis	High
Qadir (2011)	Spatial Effects: Narrative Structure in Architecture	Master's thesis	Spatial narrative	Narrativity in architectural design	Narrative structure in space	Case study, theoretical	High
Sierra (2013)	Literature, Architecture, and Postmodernity	PhD dissertation	Architecture and postmodernity	Architecture in modern storytelling	Interrelationship of space and literature	Comparative analysis	Medium
Molinari & Bigiotti (2014)	Storytelling in Architecture	Book chapter	Reading and writing space	Narrative-making in space	Space as language	Textual and cultural analysis	High
Sezen et al. (2022)	Narrative Processes in Architectural Design	Scholarly article	Narrative design process	Design as narrative	Meaning through process	Design process analysis	High
Wu (2022)	Urban Leftover Space and Narrative	PhD dissertation	Abandoned urban spaces	Narrative regeneration	Spatialization through narrative	Qualitative – case study	High
Ikonomi (2022)	Creative Space in Virtual Reality	Master's thesis	Space and digital narrative design	Space in games and virtual reality	Narrative in digital design	Design and narrative-centered	Medium
Barut (2020)	Architecture and Cinema: The Dark Knight Trilogy	Master's thesis	Space and cinematic narrative	Reading space through cinema	Experiencing space as narrative	Cinematic-spatial analysis	High
Itani (2022)	Fog Machine: The Video Game and Architecture	Article	Video games and space	Digital narrative in architecture	Interactive narrative-making	Conceptual design, graphic analysis	Medium
Robillard (2023)	Museum's Politics of Space	Master's thesis	Politics of space and Indigenous art	Representation of colonialism through narrative	Spatial discourse in museums	Critical and spatial analysis	Medium
Brey (2023)	Digital Dialogism: Space, Time, and Queerness	PhD dissertation	Narrative, gender, and space	Nonlinear and queer narrative	Narrative digital spaces	Theoretical-cultural	Medium
Psarra (2022)	Architecture of Twists and Turns	Scholarly article	Space, time, narrative	Movement and spatial experience	Museum and narrative architecture	Comparative analysis	High
Psarra (2022)	Architecture and Language: Morphosemantic Relations	Conference paper	Language and architecture	Linguistic analysis of space	Narrative as a language structure	Interdisciplinary, theoretical	High
Psarra et al. (2023)	Parliament Buildings: Architecture of Politics	Book	Political architecture	Narrative-making in institutional architecture	Policy-making spaces	Comparative analysis	High

Table 2. Narrative analysis in architecture. Source: Authors.

Concept	Definition	Key Feature	Key References
Narrative	Representation of a chain of events with temporal and causal organization	Sequence of events, temporal structure	Genette (1980), Ricoeur (1984)
Narrativity	The capacity or quality of a text, image, or space to convey meaning through narrative structure	Not merely storytelling, but the potential for narrativization	Herman (2002), Ryan (2004), Sezen et al. (2022)
Narrativism	An analytical–theoretical approach to the structure and function of narrative in text or space	Analysis of narrative structure, narrator, point of view, and time	Chatman (1978), Rimmon-Kenan (2002), Psarra (2021)

psychological states (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013). In this approach, every detail of the scene has the potential to communicate part of the message or overall atmosphere of the narrative: lighting may evoke suspense or calmness, spatial arrangement can reflect the relationships between characters or even their psychological states.

With the expansion of interdisciplinary perspectives, *mise-en-scène* has entered the realm of architecture, giving rise to approaches that regard architectural spaces not merely as functional or structural containers, but as stages for the enactment of actions, emotions, memories, and movement (Groat & Wang, 2013; Pérez-Gómez, 2016; Khan & Hannah, 2008). Similar to theatre, in architecture, the audience (user), through movement in space and sensory engagement, experiences and interprets the layered meanings of space (Böhme, 2017).

It is noteworthy that in many contemporary projects, the designer assumes the role of a director: by using materials, light, color, sound, and movement paths, they orchestrate a gradual, emotional, and narrative experience (Norberg-Schulz, 1980; Pallasmaa, 2005). This perspective can be seen in the works of Sophia Psarra, who emphasizes that spatial *mise-en-scène* in architecture, similar to editing in cinema, can guide the user’s movement path and visual sequence, thus shaping meaning (Psarra, 2021). Contemporary museum and gallery designs are vivid examples of this idea, in which the spatial experience of the audience is organized according to a narrative and the sequence of visual events (Melanidis & Hagerman, 2022). In this approach, the user, like an actor on stage, contributes to the creation and completion of the spatial narrative through movement, pausing, or even moments of stillness (Rasmussen, 1959; Zumthor, 2006).

Table 3 demonstrates that architecture, like *mise-en-scène*, can create symbolic, emotional, and critical narratives through the deliberate arrangement of space (Ryan, 2004; Till, 2009). In examples such as Daniel Libeskind’s Jewish Museum in Berlin or Bernard Tschumi’s Parc de la Villette, the configuration of space, light, form, and void helps to convey historical and cultural concepts, generating a multilayered experience grounded in the user’s bodily participation and perception (Tschumi, 1996; Holl, 2007; Libeskind, 2008; Pérez-Gómez, 2016). From a phenomenological perspective, *mise-en-scène* is connected to the lived experience of space; architectural spaces become meaningful and interpretable only through the presence and movement of the human body (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Heidegger, 1971). In this view, architecture is not a simple imitation of the theatre stage, but a setting for the formation of perceptual and semantic layers through the user’s direct encounter with space (Pallasmaa, 2023).

In critical analysis, spatial *mise-en-scène* can become a tool for representing power, resistance, or cultural identity. Projects designed with this approach have a high capacity to evoke collective emotions, reinterpret history, or expose social discourses (Foucault, 1977; Harvey, 2000; Robillard, 2023). In sum, translating *mise-en-scène* into architecture, by employing narrative and emotional tools, opens up new horizons for designing spaces rich in meaning, experience, and social engagement; a horizon that transforms architecture into an interactive, multilayered, and living medium.

• **Architecture as a narrative text**

In the final decades of the twentieth century, under the influence of structuralist and post-structuralist linguistic theories, architecture, like literature, came to be understood through a renewed conception of the text: not

merely as the product of an architect’s creativity, but as the result of a complex interaction between space, user, and cultural context (Barthes, 1974; Eco, 1984). This approach views spatial structure and organization as analogous to the structure of language, with its grammar, vocabulary, sentences, and even style, thereby enabling multiple readings and interpretations of architecture (Culler, 2002; Chandler, 2007). Within this framework, the user or occupant of space is not merely a “consumer” of architecture, but, as a “reader” or even “secondary author,” plays an active role in the legibility and reproduction of the spatial narrative (Barthes, 1974). This concept aligns with the theory of the death of the author and the reader’s role in meaning-making, turning architecture into a dynamic, living field of interpretation. Thus, the experience of space in narrative-oriented architecture is a fluid and evolving process that, through movement, sight, touch, and even memory, leads to the re-creation and extension of spatial narratives (Jencks, 1981; Tschumi, 1996). Bernard Tschumi (1996) explicitly articulated this relationship between architecture and text in his works, particularly *Architecture and Disjunction*. He conceives of architecture as a structure with grammar and syntactic capabilities, complex and multilayered, and open to interpretation, much like a text. For Tschumi (1994), the user, moving through space and experiencing sequences of elements -light, sound, boundary, symbol, and path- is akin to a reader interpreting and giving meaning to the

architectural text. Psarra similarly demonstrates, through her analysis of spatial narrativity, that architecture invariably constructs its narrative structures for the user through movement sequences, intersections, visual hierarchies, and the integration of functions (Psarra, 2021; Psarra et al., 2023). A critical reading of this approach reveals that interpreting architecture as text enables attention to the multiplicity of meanings, cultural readings, and even the re-examination of identity and collective memory (Frampton, 1980; Eco, 1984). Table 4 presents a comparative comparison of textual and spatial elements in architecture as text.

Accordingly, each space, like a sentence composed of semantic and functional elements, is decoded within its cultural and social context (Eco, 1984; Culler, 2002). The user’s movement through architecture is equivalent to reading a narrative, it evokes a beginning, a path, a climax, and an end, producing a temporal and meaning-making experience (Chatman, 1978). From a semiotic perspective, architectural spaces carry both explicit and implicit signification (Chandler, 2007). For example, a staircase in the context of a church may signify ascension or transcendence, whereas the same staircase in a public building might signify passage and social flow. This perspective redefines architecture as a text embedded within culture, history, and power (Barthes, 1974; Bonta, 1979). Furthermore, the literary concept of rewriting also applies to architecture: over time, and with changes in function or audience, a

Table 3. Correspondence of mise-en-scène components in theatre/cinema and architecture. Source: Authors.

Component	Mise-en-Scène in Theatre/Cinema	Mise-en-Scène in Architecture
Lighting	Creates a dramatic atmosphere	Creates ambience, directs attention
Actor’s movement	Expresses character, builds suspense	User movement, spatial reading
Set and stage design	Thematic representation	Expression of spatial-cultural concepts
Sequence arrangement	Linear or nonlinear narrative	Movement paths, spatial sequencing
Point of view	Camera placement and angle	Definition of spatial and visual frames
Ultimate goal	Conveying meaning and narrative	Experiential perception of spatial narrative

Table 4. Comparative analysis of textual and spatial elements in architecture. Source: Authors.

Textual Elements	(Architectural Elements (Spatial Equivalent	Description
Word	Spatial element (room, doorway, column)	The primary unit of spatial structure
Sentence	Spatial composition (plan, circulation)	Functional and visual sequencing
Paragraph	Spatial sequence (set of spaces)	A coherent narrative of function and meaning
Syntax	Spatial grammar (arrangement, orientation, sequencing)	Rules for connecting architectural components
Writing style	Architectural style (form, material, light)	Mode of expression and meaning transmission
Reader of the text	User of space	The ultimate perceiver and meaning-maker of space

building may acquire new interpretations and meanings (Frampton, 1980; Lefebvre, 1991). This dynamism signals the inherently narrative nature of architecture, that space is a site where personal, collective, and historical narratives intersect.

In conclusion, the concept of architecture as text offers a lens for analyzing, interpreting, and even critiquing contemporary architecture from a narrativist standpoint. With its emphasis on the active role of the user, this approach allows architecture to be understood as a multilayered, dynamic, and participatory field, an approach exemplified in contemporary projects such as the Jewish Museum Berlin and Parc de la Villette, where architecture becomes a living, interpretable text.

• The concept of “event” in architecture and its connection to narrative structures

In contemporary architecture, particularly in postmodern and post-structuralist readings, the term event refers not merely to a temporary occurrence, but to a spatial, temporal, and bodily experience that unfolds within the architectural setting and through human interaction with space (Tschumi, 1996). Unlike modernist approaches that regard space solely as a container for function, the event-oriented approach positions the event as a meaning-generating and dynamic element of architecture (Vesnić et al., 2024). Bernard Tschumi (1994), as a prominent architect and theorist in this domain, considers

the role of the event to be fundamental in shaping the meaning and experience of architecture. He emphasizes that meaning in architecture does not reside solely in its physical structure but emerges through the interaction between space, movement, and event. Accordingly, he defines architecture not as a static product but as a process of happenings and human actions within space (Itani, 2022). Narrative structures in architecture, much like those in literature, comprise sequence, logic, knot, climax, and resolution (Chatman, 1978). Within this framework, the event functions as a “narrative knot” that influences both the spatial movement and the mental experience of the user (Psarra, 2021) (Table 5).

According to Psarra (2021), narrative architecture contains points of “intensity” or “emphasis” that function as spatial events, moments that anchor spatial memory and become the foundation of the narrative (Fig.1). These points may involve changes in scale, light, direction, material texture, or sound (Barthes, 1974; Tschumi, 1996). Spatial events can be categorized into several conceptual types, as Table 6. In contemporary architecture, certain projects fundamentally integrate the event into their spatial narratives (Table 7).

The concept of the event in architecture is deeply influenced by post-structuralist thought, particularly the ideas of Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault. In this theoretical framework, the event is not

Table 5. The concept of “event” in architecture and its connection to narrative structures. Source: Authors.

Narrative Element	Spatial Equivalent in Architecture	Spatial Example
Character	User or occupant of space	A visitor in a museum or a passerby on a street
Narrative	Spatial experience (movement sequence)	Circulation path in a park or gallery
Event	Point of spatial change, dramatic element	Transition from narrow to open space, special daylighting, sound, or physical movement
Narrative knot	Intersection points, pauses, turns in experience	Central hall, staircase, doorway



Fig. 1. The concept of “event” in architecture and its connection to narrative structures. Source: Authors.

something external but something that occurs within the text and structure, transforming space from within (Foucault, 1977; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). From this standpoint, the spatial event is an action that challenges coherence and opens the possibility for multiple readings of space (Tschumi, 1994). For example, Tschumi (1996) used collage and movement diagrams in his architectural design to reveal a fractured structure of spatial narrative. Consequently, the event becomes a key concept in contemporary narrative-oriented architecture, elevating the spatial experience from static to dynamic, dramatic, and meaningful. Spatial events can serve as narrative knots, climactic moments, or interpretive gaps that invite the user into mental and sensory engagement with space. In contemporary practice, attention to the event as a design tool has fostered the creation of multilayered, interactive, and contextually embedded narratives.

Methodology and Data Analysis

This research adopts a comparative–conceptual approach, employing semiotic and structuralist analysis. The methodological structure is presented in two distinct parts:

- Theoretical and critical analysis of texts and theories: In this stage, specialized sources related to narrative,

mise-en-scène, spatial semiotics, and architecture as text were examined through document review and thematic analysis (Barthes, 1966 ; Eco, 1994; Tschumi, 1996; Psarra, 2021). The theoretical analysis focused on identifying narrative structures, spatial meaning-making processes, and extracting conceptual tools such as “removing form through program” or “intersecting event and movement.” Strengths and weaknesses of each approach, and their relationship to the philosophical and interdisciplinary foundations of architecture, were also highlighted.

- Comparative–conceptual analysis of architectural projects and case studies: In the second part, selected key projects, such as Tschumi’s Parc de la Villette (as a paradigm of event-based narrative) and several museums and galleries analyzed by Psarra (as examples of structured architectural narrative), were examined using a descriptive, analytical, and semiotic approach.

The analysis of these projects followed a designed comparative–conceptual framework. The criteria for project comparison included:

- Predominant narrative type (event-based or structured)
- Method of spatial organization and mise-en-scène
- Role of the user and experiential engagement with space
- Interaction between form and program

Table 6. Classification of spatial events. Source: Authors.

Type of Spatial Event	Characteristics	Role in Spatial Narrative	Architectural Example
Movement event	Change in route or direction	Narrative knot, creating suspense or climax	Central staircase in the Guggenheim Museum, New York
Sensory event	Change in light, sound, temperature, or texture	Stimulates the senses, anchors the experience	Light–dark spatial contrast in Ronchamp Chapel
Functional event	Intersection of functions or multi-use configuration	Redefines space function	Parc de la Villette, modular and multifunctional design
Narrative event	Reference to symbolic or historical meanings	Carries meaning, connects to memory	Jewish Museum Berlin, narrative of loss through fractured spaces
Interactive event	Space reacts to user presence	Enhances user participation	Interactive space in Tokyo Digital Art Museum (Itani, 2022)

Table 7. A comparative analysis of events in spatial narrative. Source: Authors.

Project	Architect	Key Event	Narrative Structure
Parc de la Villette	Bernard Tschumi	Simultaneous collision of paths, functions, and forms	Nonlinear, multilayered narrative (Tschumi, 1996)
Jewish Museum Berlin	Daniel Libeskind	Disjointed lines, voids, fractured light	Narrative of loss and insecurity (Psarra, 2021)
Sydney Opera House	Jørn Utzon	Gradual entry, sea view, sonic sequence	Ritual and visual narrative (Pérez-Gómez, 2016)
Tokyo Digital Art Museum	teamLab	Light and movement changes responding to user presence	Interactive and dynamic narrative (Itani, 2022)

- Use of semiotic tools (light, circulation, materials, symbols)

For project analysis, secondary data were utilized, including drawings, tables, spatial diagrams, and textual and visual documentation. The architectural samples were evaluated using comparative tables and graphic diagrams (Hillier & Hanson, 1984; Groat & Wang, 2013; Psarra, 2022). Due to the theoretical nature of the study and the lack of access to field data, the primary focus was on document analysis and secondary reading of selected projects. It is recommended that future research incorporate field methods, such as direct observation and interviews with space users, to strengthen the operational and experiential dimensions of narrative in architecture.

Conceptual Framework of Mise-en-Scène in Architecture

• Analysis of mise-en-Scène as a tool for spatial organization

In cinema, mise-en-scène is regarded as a set of choices and scene arrangements, including lighting, placement of elements, set design, and camera movement (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008). In architecture, the concepts of mise-en-scène go beyond the level of visual representation, becoming a tool for organizing space. In this context, the architect, like a director, creates a narrative and multisensory experience for the user by arranging space, controlling sightlines, directing movement, and positioning the body within space (Penz & Thomas, 1997). Studies such as Psarra (2022) have shown that spatial organization in museum architecture not only has a functional aspect but also plays a narrative role by designing sightlines and sequences of spaces. In other words, spaces act like sequences that, through spatial connections, gradually and comprehensibly construct the narrative for the user (Groat & Wang, 2013). In narrative architecture, mise-en-scène is not merely a visual arrangement but a strategic organization of meaning in space. According to Hillier & Hanson (1984), spatial configuration has a direct impact on the user's perception of spatial experience and meaning.

Furthermore, physical elements such as light, sound, materials, and color, similar to cinematic elements, can play a role in defining the quality of mise-en-scène in architecture (Zumthor, 2006) (Fig. 2).

• The role of the audience and action in spatial staging

In the literature on mise-en-scène, the presence and movement of the audience are considered key elements in completing the narrative (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). This view is prominently reflected in architecture, where the user is not a passive spectator but an active participant in shaping the spatial and semantic experience (Tschumi, 1996). Spatial mise-en-scène in architecture requires the design of action positions, spaces that, through the arrangement of elements, scale, spatial sequencing, and level of interaction with the environment, evoke specific behaviors, movements, or emotions (Sezen et al., 2022). Therefore, designing a staircase, a narrow entrance, or skylight openings can, depending on the aim of the mise-en-scène, evoke experiences of presence, uncertainty, movement, or contemplation (Lynch, 1960). In this approach, space becomes a platform for interactive narrative; similar to video games or virtual reality environments, the audience intervenes in the narrative through their actions (Ikonomi, 2022). Brey's (2023) research shows that queer or nonlinear spaces are designed with uncertainty and flexibility to allow a wide range of encounters (Fig. 3).

• The relationship between semiotics, narrative, and architectural form in the

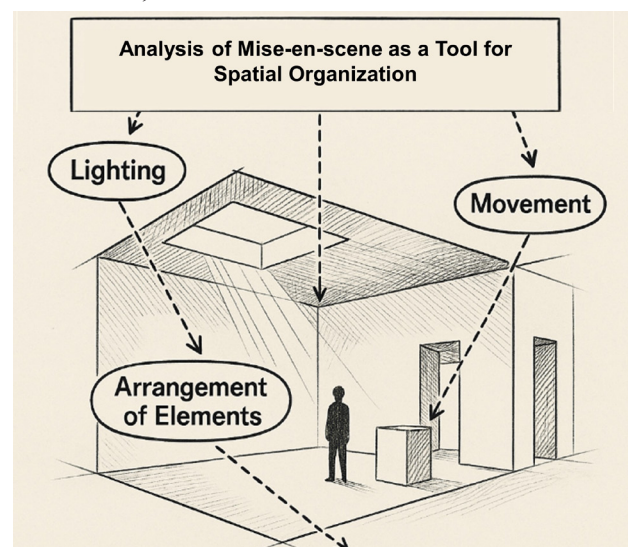


Fig. 2. Analysis of mise-en-Scène as an organizational tool. Source: Authors.

context of mise-en-Scène

Theorists such as Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco have considered narrative to be a semiotic system that conveys meaning through sign structures (Barthes, 1966 ; Eco, 1994). In architecture, this perspective has led to an understanding of space as a readable text, where the structure of form, materials, paths, and symmetries all act as signs in the process of reading and interpreting architecture (Perez-Gomez & Pelletier, 1997). Within this framework, mise-en-scène serves as the link between form and meaning, responsible for organizing signs within a specific spatial setting. For example, the specific placement of light or the geometric form of an element along a sightline can function like a dramatic cue in a sequence (Kimber, 2010). This semiotic structure, through spatial sequences and spatial relationships, communicates narrative not in words, but through the body, movement, and spatial experience (Pallasmaa, 2005). Thus, architectural form, within the context of mise-en-scène, transforms from a static condition into a meaningful, signifying system. This becomes particularly prominent in the design of cultural architecture, museums, public spaces, and galleries, that have a communicative function (Psarra, 2022). In such spaces, signs function like the vocabulary of a language, guiding the audience from one narrative position to another, thereby transmitting meaning nonverbally (Fig. 4).

A Comparative Analysis of Two Narrative Approaches

• Bernard Tschumi and event-based architecture

Bernard Tschumi (1996) is one of the prominent figures of postmodern architecture whose view of architecture as a stage for events provides a new point of departure in understanding space and narrative. In Tschumi’s approach, three fundamental concepts -space, movement, and event- are at the core of the architectural design structure, and meaning arises not merely from form and function but from their collision and contrast. In his landmark project Parc de la Villette (Paris, 1982–1998), this perspective can be observed at three spatial–technical levels:

- **Grid Diagram:** Tschumi designed the park based on a checkerboard grid of focal points without centrality, allowing free interaction between spaces and functions. The diagram below illustrates the relationship between movement paths, event spaces, and folies.

- **Spatial–Technical Reading:** Users moving through the intersecting network of paths can experience heterogeneous events. Each folie acts as a narrative knot, with no fixed function, serving instead as a setting for diverse occurrences. This approach, rooted in the principle of disjunction and the contrast between function and form, emphasizes movement, repetition, and the dynamism of the user’s body in space.

- **Visual Analysis:** In Tschumi’s architectural sketches, the intersections of movement lines and points of disjunction generate a dynamic and unpredictable space. The user is not a passive audience member but an active agent of the narrative; by passing through folies and open spaces, they create a new experience of spatial narrative each time.

Tschumi’s (1994) perspective, as a critique of modernist formalism and functionalism, seeks to break away

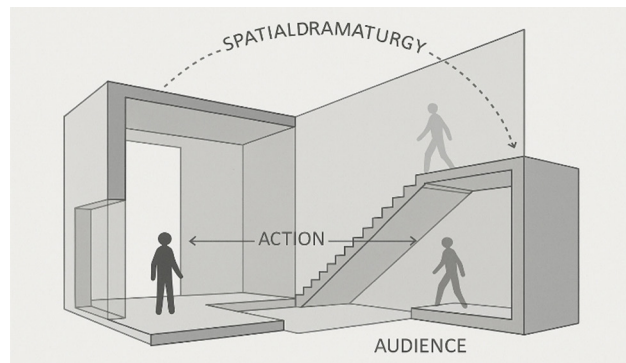


Fig. 3. The role of the audience and action in spatial staging. Source : Authors.

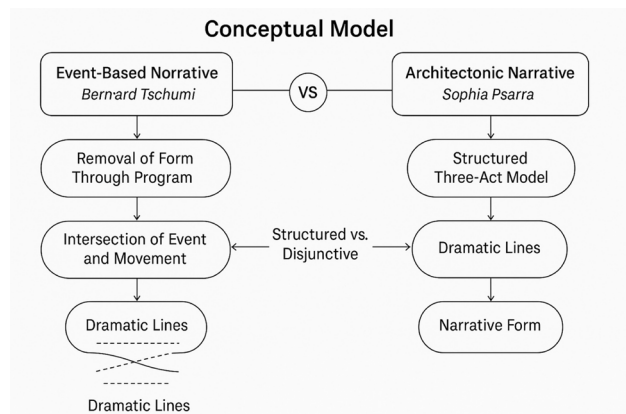


Fig. 4. The conceptual model of the study. Source: Authors .

from linear design models. He sees architecture as a setting that must accommodate unexpected events and human interventions. From this standpoint, architecture is less a static result than a living process reflecting social, political, and bodily tensions (Frampton, 1980; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Tschumi’s approach places strong emphasis on disjunction, the conflict between function and form, and the bodily experience of space. In his theoretical works, such as *Architecture and Disjunction*, he extensively employs cinematic models, collage, and montage to convey his spatial ideas, all of which overlap with contemporary narrative tools in the arts (Eisenstein, 1949; Tschumi, 1987). In this project, the grid diagram, the absence of centrality, and the emphasis on spatial disjunction are all signs of event-based architecture, creating the potential for constant transformation and reinterpretation of space (Fig. 5).

• **Sophia Psarra and multilayered narrativity**

Sophia Psarra (2021), with a philosophical–linguistic approach to architecture, understands space as an open and multilayered text in which the user plays an active role as reader and interpreter. Unlike Tschumi, Psarra emphasizes the concept of a network of meaning and the role of signs and cultural codes in shaping architectural narrative. In her analyses of the Scarpa Museum and the European Parliament (Psarra et al., 2023), Psarra seeks narrative structure not only in physical elements but also in movement patterns and sightlines:

- **Diagram of Spatial Narrative Structure:** In designing movement paths, spatial sequences, visual layers, and lighting, architecture functions as a multilayered text. Fig. 6 illustrates the non-linear, multi-path circulation structure of the museum.

- **Visual–Spatial Analysis:** In these projects, Psarra uses semiotic analysis to examine how light, spatial framing, and functional sequences act as the narrative vocabulary of architecture. Intersecting paths and movement knots enable multiple, polyphonic readings for the user (Psarra, 2021).

The user, by moving through space and passing key

points, reproduces the spatial narrative according to their cultural and mental context. This architecture is based on the dynamism of signs and the active interaction of the user with space. In this approach, architecture creates narrative not only through physical structure but also through semantic and semiotic layers. Movement diagrams and non-linear structures in Psarra’s projects enhance the potential for multifaceted and interactive narratives for the audience.

In summary, the fundamental difference between the two approaches lies in the degree of emphasis on the event (Tschumi: event-based, disjunction, spatial dynamism, Psarra: layered narrative, semiotics, and multi-level reading). This distinction is evident not only at the conceptual level but also in the spatial and technical interpretation of projects. Tschumi’s architecture, with its disjointed network and event-oriented spatial design, relies on continuous change and user interaction with space, while Psarra grounds the experience of spatial narrative in complex structures, sightlines, and semantic layering (Table 8).

Fig. 6 illustrates the spatial–narrative structure with non-linear movement paths, semantic knots, and spatial sequences, clearly demonstrating how the user’s interactive and multilayered experience in space is formed. The combination of diagrams, movement maps, and technical readings in analyzing these two approaches contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between architecture and narrative (Fig. 7).

Conclusion

The present study, aiming to elucidate the narrative and spatial mise-en-scène capacities in architecture, conducted a comparative analysis of two distinct approaches, Bernard Tschumi’s event-based perspective and Sophia Psarra’s multilayered narrative orientation. The findings revealed that narrative is not only an expressive tool but also a foundation for organizing space, form, and lived experience. Tschumi, emphasizing event, movement, and disjunction, envisions architecture as a platform

Movement Paths	Event Spaces	Folies
Continuous and non-linear lines, free passage	Open squares for gathering, performance, and interaction	Red elements, symbols of pause points, and spatial disjunction

Fig. 5. Relationship between movement paths, event spaces, and folies. Source: Authors.

for the occurrence of diverse and unpredictable actions. In contrast, Psarra, with her interpretive and semiotic approach, focuses on the layering of narrative, the active role of the user, and the multiplicity of readings within the architectural context. The outcome of this theoretical and technical comparison demonstrates that narrative-oriented architecture can lead to the creation of dynamic, flexible, and participatory spaces that, in addition to meeting functional needs, carry meaning and offer polyphonic experiences for users.

For designers, it is recommended to draw inspiration from multilayered and flexible approaches, envisioning architecture as a stage for events and narratives. The use of semiotic tools, spatial mise-en-scène, and the layering of function and meaning can significantly

enhance the quality of spatial experience. Researchers can extend this conceptual framework to explore new dimensions, such as narrative in digital architecture, interactive spaces, or the role of narrative in smart cities. Comparative analysis of contemporary projects, development of methods for assessing users' narrative experience, and the study of narrative's impact on sense of belonging and place identity are among valuable directions for future research. For architects and professional practitioners, it is advised to prioritize the teaching of semiotic literacy and spatial storytelling, and to consider the narrative-making potential of space in the design of public, cultural, and urban environments as a tool for enhancing lived quality, fostering social interaction, and ensuring the semantic sustainability of the environment.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that narrative-oriented theories, in conjunction with practical tools such as spatial mise-en-scène, can play a key role in transforming architectural design. Future architecture, if based on narrative, agency, and layered meaning, will not only meet functional requirements but also serve as a medium for creating memory, identity, and new experiences in spatial encounters. This approach paves the way for the expansion of interdisciplinary research, innovation in architectural education, and the enhancement of the quality of urban and cultural environments on a broad scale.

Declaration of No Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest in conducting this research.

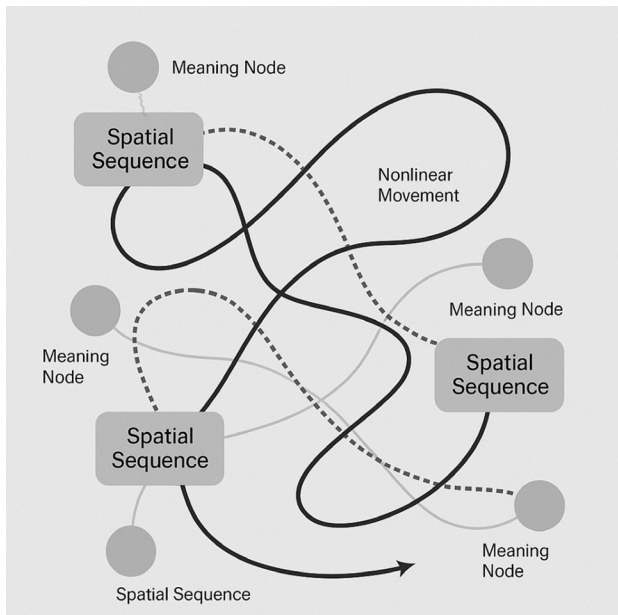


Fig. 6 Spatial-narrative structure with non-linear movement paths. Source: Authors.

Table 8. A comparative analysis of Bernard Tschumi (event-based) and Sophia Psarra (multilayered narrativity). Source: Authors.

Comparative Index	Bernard Tschumi (Event-Based)	Sophia Psarra (Multilayered Narrativity)
Type of Narrative	Narrative based on disjunction, contrast, montage, and event	Structured, layered, and interpretive narrative
Role of User	Active agent in creating narrative experience	Reader and interpreter of the spatial text
Architectural Space	Stage for events, movement, conflict of function and form	Multilayered semiotic system, setting for meaning-making and representation
Conceptual Emphasis	Event, movement, body, disjunction	Semiotics, interpretation, memory, and cultural context
Mode of Representation	Visual and cinematic tools, conceptual diagrams	Linguistic structures, textual analysis, hermeneutic and linguistic theories
Intellectual Influences	Deleuze, Foucault, Eisenstein, Bataille	Barthes, Foucault, Merleau-Ponty, Derrida, Norberg-Schulz
Architectural Examples	<i>Parc de la Villette</i> , Acropolis Museum	Analyses of cultural, political, and museum spaces (<i>Soane</i> , <i>Scarpa</i> , European Parliament)
Ultimate Design Goal	Creating free spaces for events and human action	Enhancing meaningful spatial understanding based on audience interpretation

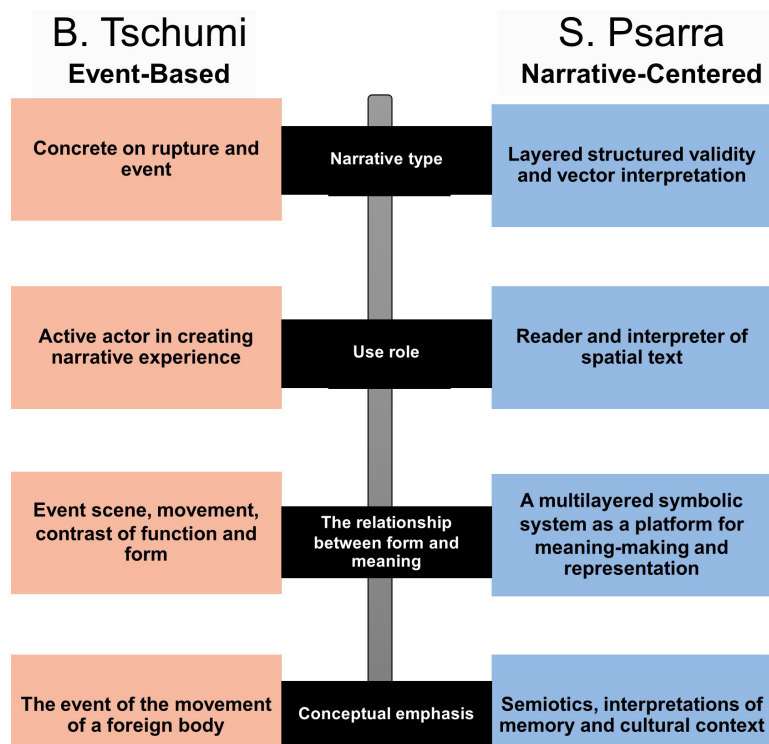


Fig. 7. The conceptual framework of narrative. Source : Authors.

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