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Staging the Intermission

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This paper considers the intermission of a concert night as a time-space for different forms of waiting and encounters with the outside city. By combining on-site observations from the foyer of the concert hall Casa da Música in Porto, with a theoretical discussion on temporality and rhythms in the city, the paper analyses how the interstitial moments of waiting is constructed in this building. The paper uses the concept of “waiting niches” to consider what kind of waiting that the building affords, either through programmed spaces for waiting, or as spaces discovered by inhabitants. Rather than describing a specific location or form, a niche describes how something or somewhere is appropriated by a particular species at a particular time. The paper identifies three main kinds of waiting niches in the concert hall foyer: Firstly, the lounge niche, which is a space designed and furnished for waiting during particular lengths of time. Secondly, the micro niche which is an ephemeral and temporary niche for shorter forms of waiting, appearing in smaller and secluded places around the foyer. Thirdly, the threshold niche that happens on the entrance stairs to the building, where the concert audience and people passing by are exposed to each other and where the correct form of waiting is less clear than on the inside. These niches are not unique for the concert hall foyer, but could be considered in many other building typologies and for many other types of events. In conclusion the paper argues that to better understand and explore the formal and informal waiting niches of a lobby can be a way for architectural practice to support unexpected encounters between the inhabitants of a building and the people on the outside.

Keywords: temporality, foyer, niches, waiting

Introduction
The late-summer night in Porto begins with the end of a long and warm afternoon spent in bars or behind workstations. People drink beer in small iced glasses or gaze into the depths of a computer screen while counting the minutes left of the workday, all to the rhythmic humming of air conditioners. If they step out on to the street and happen to find themselves standing on the south part of Avenida da França, they can see the contours of Porto’s new concert hall, Casa da Música, towering behind a long blind wall circumscribing an empty plot. In the end of this street is Rotunda da Boavista, a more than 200-metre wide traffic circle commemorating the Portuguese colonial wars, from where the concert hall appears in full view. It is laid out like a white, sharply cut gemstone on a blanket of beige-tinged marble that forms a trapezoid-shaped square next to the traffic circle. The creases along the edges of the blanket create a topography that is sometimes leveled with the sidewalk, sometimes lifted up to expose the obscure depths of an underground garage.
Something is about to happen here. An event in the concert hall, still unclear when or what, but soon enough for people to gather in groups nearby or to stand on the entrance staircase. Those who cross over the marble square to enter the concert hall foyer will be informed that there is a performance tonight, starting very soon, at 6pm. Pedestrians on their way past notice the change. If they break off from the sidewalk and step onto the marble they enter a space that is both part of the city and distinguished from it. A space in-between two conditions where there is always the freedom to hesitate, to wait for something to happen, to buy tickets, to have a beer, or to just leave. Stepping onto the square the pedestrian is also a potential consumer of experiences. Drinks, food and culture await those who have the time and money to spend. At the same time as this space in-between the performance and the sidewalk curates a potential moment of consumption reserved for some, it can also act as a public space that binds together programmes and activities otherwise separated. Unifying what Mattias Kärholm in a recent study of thresholds has called “different spatio-temporal claims”, the entrance can embody the ambition of a project to interact with the surrounding, while still serving an economic logic based on consumption (Kärholm, 2016, p.234).

Looking at the foyer of Casa da Música, a project designed by Dutch architects OMA, this article investigates one such entrance and how it constructs the interaction between interior and surrounding through a set of waiting time-spaces. The analysis will focus on the intermission of the concert, using Mattias Kärholm’s and Gunnar Sandin’s research on waiting niches as a starting point. (Bishop, 2013) (Kärholm and Sandin, 2011) To study the concert hall foyer is to look at one internal boundary of the city, what this boundary permeates, when it does so, and ask how it defines the difference between the city life and the life inside the building. What kinds of waiting niches are constructed during the time-space of the intermission, and to what extent do these niches allow for exposures and encounters between the audience and the outside city? The purpose is to investigate what kind of behaviour a foyer admits during interstitial time-spaces such as for example the intermission of a concert. In doing so I hope to make a contribution to a broader discussion on entrances as possible spaces for encounters and co-existence between users of a building and inhabitants of the city. The empirical study consists of two sessions (on July 25th and July 26th 2014) observing the foyer space at Casa da Música before, during, and after the event of the concert, as well as analyzing photographs, plans and section drawings of the building.

The foyer as extended public space
Before returning to the concert night in Porto I want to discuss what I identify as the key ideas of the entrance, and by doing so point to why Casa da Música is interesting to consider. The foyer of the concert hall relates to what I argue is a notion of the entrance as an extended public space. It finds its roots in Enlightenment ideas of the public space that echoed the Classic Greek agora, idealised by philosophers like Rousseau in what Sven-Olov Wallenstein calls a “retroactive fantasy”. (Wallenstein, 2012, p.18) The public space was here understood as a democratic forum where a more profound form of community, or Gemeinschaft, could occur through a debate between rational citizens, all without the interference of a sovereign power. Much of the critique of the disappearance of public space within capitalism today conveys the grief of a lost state of harmony, in a way that resembles how the concept was discussed during the Enlightenment (Sorkin, 1992).

An example of the entrance as an extension of public space is the foyer of Charles Garnier’s Paris Opera, completed in 1875. Foyers like these were
part of a new set of urban public spaces designed to stage a freethinking subject capable of engaging in debate with other equals. As Thomas van Leeuwen notes in an article on theater buildings during the Enlightenment, the interior of the Paris Opera was a city turned inside out, where the Parisian societé could expose itself. (Leeuwen, 1996, p.84) The main staircase of the Opera, the “Grand Escalier”, was used to stage the audience while waiting for the performance to start or to continue. (Mead, 1991). Emphasising a seamless transition between exterior and interior public space, the interior was designed to be experienced as a continuation of the street. The low, flowing steps of the staircase formed an internal boulevard, lit with candlelight instead of street lamps and paved with marble instead of cobblestone. This meant that the social order of the outside, with all its inequalities, could be reproduced on the inside.

The idea of entrances as extensions of outside public spaces continues into modernistic architecture, here as spaces that expose materiality and tectonics in a transparent manner, provide purview over spatial layout, and construct environments for social encounters. As John Peponis notes, spaces like corridors, hallways and atriums can provide a “purview interface” between “ordinary spaces confining perception to a limited part of the interior, and prominent spaces providing overview not only of area but also of connections” (Peponis, 2012, p.11f). A foyer with high purview articulates the possible different access points for the visitor, where to move, and where encounters and co-presence occurs in the space. Such foyer provides a sense of orientation and layout intelligibility, but also a way to connect to other people. In a publication on his theatre projects, Dutch architect and pedagogue Hermann Hertzberger states the following when discussing an ideal foyer:

The secret of a good foyer is articulation. Articulation and a view of other theatregoers. There must be plenty to see, you must see people you know or could introduce yourself to and you need places from where you can do that. A theatre is a space for looking, a space where the act of looking is celebrated (Hertzberger, 2005, p.53).

As Wallenstein notes, public space has often been perceived as a space for both “undistorted intellectual exchange” and an environment where we are subjected to the gaze or voice of others (Wallenstein, 2012, p.17). It is in this celebration of looking that Hertzberger anchors his definition of the foyer within the Enlightenment tradition of public space. The foyer in Hertzberger’s reading articulates the visible access points for the visitor, where to move, and where encounters with other members of the audience can occur. It attempts to construct a space that continues the social codes and vistas of a public space based on transparency, exposure and dialogue with others, in this case a category limited to the “other theatregoers”. At the same time, Hertzberger argues that the theatre foyer today also has an inevitable commercial side:

And these days the foyer often not only serves the auditorium but leads a life of its own. Just as more money is earned at airports by shopping than by flying, or as merchandising is the biggest source of income for museums, so the theatre foyer is steadily becoming the venue for something of a parallel economy with bar sales, special events, exhibitions, receptions and so on (Hertzberger, 2005, p.51).

In making a comparison to the importance of airport shopping, Hertzberger points to the foyer as more than a transitional space to the auditorium. It is also a venue for consumption, part of
a “parallel economy”, that is at least equal in size and importance to the incomes generated by the main event. Hertzberger’s discussion reveals a double-sidedness in his understanding of the role of the entrance. On the one hand this is a public space for citizens to socialise with others, on the other hand it is a space for an economy based on the consumption of experiences.

The current development of consumer spaces has been located within what business consultants Joseph Pine and James Gilmore calls the “experience economy”, referring to an economy based on selling experiences and memories rather than commodities (Pine and Gilmore, 2011, p.45f). In the experience economy, spaces are designed to trigger sensations and memories in order to construct consumer fantasies and desire. This strategy is found in the foyers of hotels, restaurants, casinos and other entertainment venues that form part of a global industry sometimes labelled “hospitality design” (Shoemaker Rauen, 2015). These entrances catapult the visitor into an interior world of leisure, play and fiction. Unlike the foyer as a space for social exposure and dialogue, this is a haven for fantasies radically different from the outside. In these entrances, the moment of transition from exterior to interior entails entering a fictitious world with a given narrative for the visitor to read. Foyers like these are constructed as a scripted sequence of spaces that defines a particular trajectory rather than promotes free spatial exploration. They are spatial products, repeated all over the world by business designers such as Jon Jerde, Hirsch Bedner Associates and Paul Steelman. I argue that the experience economy has impact on many different kinds of architectural projects today, such as for example Casa da Música.

OMA has designed several projects that operate within the experience economy, such as the Prada Epicenter in New York and the now closed Guggenheim pavilion inside the Venetian casino in Las Vegas. At the same time, the office often claims to have a critical social and political agenda with their design work, through operations of juxtaposition, layering and collage. The practice in this way epitomizes the shrinking distance between commercial and critically reflective practices (Klingmann, 2007, p.122).

It is in the tension between the idea of the citizen and the idea of the consumer that the logic of the concert hall entrance must be understood. This tension consists in two different rationales around how an entrance should manage the transition between exterior and interior, and what kind of subject it constructs in doing so. On the one hand promoting exposure of space and social encounters, on the other hand promoting immersion into space and desire for consumption. As will be discussed towards the end of this chapter these two strands inevitably conflate under the pressure of expansive global capitalism and form a public space that is trying to do both.

Casa da Música, is a good example of an entrance that acts as both a public and a commercial space. The project is also representative of the ambiguity that surrounds architecture’s relation to the experience economy. In their 2004 publication Content, OMA states that most cultural institutions only allow a minority of the population to experience the inside of the building. In contrast to this Casa da Música is an attempt to construct a new form of public space. The project is presented as a way to democratize the relationship between the concert hall and the public in the way the building “reveals its contents without being didactic; at the same time, […] casts the city in a new light” (Koolhaas and OMA, 2004, p.304). This can be read as a claim to produce a hybrid between the activities of the concert hall (the concert performance, the bar, the gift shop, the cafeteria, the waiting spaces, the restrooms) and the public space that the building and the marble square outside signifies.
The Foyer of the Concert Hall

In the main auditorium of Casa da Música the scheduled silence of violins, cellos, oboes and brass horns, happens according to programme, at 7.45pm. Following a round of applause and some polite gestures of appreciation from the orchestra, the audience exits the auditorium and enters the intermission. This intermission marks the beginning of a different performance.1 Outside the scene is set and ready – a late-summer evening at that transitional hour of dusk, where the electric lights of lamp posts, buildings and cars start to emerge, but daylight is still lingering. As the audience exits the auditorium, the foyer becomes the center of attention. Facing the city through the large windows, the audience stop by the cocktail bar, seat themselves among the various groups of chairs, invade the restrooms, meander along the continuous stairs leading up through the building, or exit through the main entrance for a cigarette.

There is seemingly freedom in the intermission. Obviously this is a moment of intellectual and bodily pause from the concentration required in both performing and listening to a musical composition. But the intermission is also a staging, a situation in which the audience is suddenly put in the limelight. As Gösta Bergman notes, the Renaissance intermezzo was “visually designed interludes” manifested through dance and fire. (Bergman, 1977, p. 46).

The Rhythms of the Intermission

In dissecting the rhythmical composition of the contemporary urban landscape, Marco Mareggi points to a number of temporal components that define everyday life in the city: for example working hours and time schedules, new life styles and consumption habits, the emerging evening/night-time economy, 24 hour services and infrastructural nodes that provide transitional points for mobility throughout the urban landscape at various hours (Mareggi, 2013, p.15f). In this context the intermission is part of the rhythm of the concert event that produces a set of effects onto the physical spaces of city and conflates with other external rhythms, what Henri Lefebvre refers to as the “polyrhythmia” of the city (Lefebvre, 2004, p.16). Elaborating the different kinds of rhythms in specific urban situa-
tions, Filipa Matos Wunderlich suggests a distinction between social rhythms and cultural rhythms. The social rhythms describes the regular flow and habits of time-space, for example commuters always passing an area at a given time and space, shops opening and closing at the same time every day, or reoccurring queues for the movies every night at 8:45pm. In comparison, the cultural rhythms are sets of codes, gestures and rituals related to an event and expressed through assemblages of people or specific ways of dressing.

Using Wunderlich’s distinction the event of the concert has both a social rhythm (e.g. the crowd gathering outside the concert building every night) and a cultural rhythm (e.g. the suits, the dresses, the printed concert programmes and similar paraphernalia). In this sense, the intermission, as well as the time-space before and after the musical performance carries implications in the socio-political context of the city. The act of attending a philharmonic concert is a way to empower a certain lifestyle. If waiting in line at a soup kitchen or in front of the social service office is socially stigmatising, waiting for a concert implies to have the time for the pleasures of night-time culture. The intermission can therefore be understood as a time-space that both constructs the identity of the audience and differentiates this group from others outside of the event.

The members of the audience are here because they have the time to spend an evening not working or recuperating from hard labour. Waiting during the intermission is reserved for those who have a ticket to the performance and a full evening of free time. For the bartender working in the foyer the intermission is most likely one of the busiest times during the entire evening, for the members of the orchestra it is a break from work rather than from entertainment; and for the cleaning staff the end of the concert signals the start of the working shift.

The Material Semiotics of Waiting
In a recently published article, Peter Bishop attempts to outline a “critical phenomenology” of the waiting room through applying a number of different perspectives on the concept of waiting (Bishop, 2013). Despite the fact that waiting is a pervading feature of the daily life, its implications are underestimated in existing research according to Bishop. Waiting thus is a concept in itself waiting to be explored. Not limited to the typical physical spaces of waiting, such as airports, hospitals or train stations, the waiting room according to Bishop is just as much an ephemeral zone. Standing in the line to the supermarket counter, waiting to cross a heavily trafficked road or impatiently counting the seconds outside a public restroom can all be seen as experiences of a waiting room.

The traditional waiting room attempts to stimulate the correct act of waiting through signs, queues and spatial sequences, often with the subtext that an incorrect manner will result in longer waiting time for everyone. To minimise waiting one must then wait in a correct way and subordinate oneself to the pace defined by the waiting room. Following this, Bishop suggests that the traditional kind of pre-programmed waiting room entails the suppression of certain temporal aspects; the experience of objective clock time, the rhythm of the city outside or the shifting sounds and noises of the workplace in which one is waiting. The waiting room can even attempt to produce a certain affect in order to take attention away from its primary functions as for example a room where you can be held and frisked for an indefinite period of time.

Mattias Kärholm and Gunnar Sandin discuss the social and psychological effects of the temporal in-between spaces that waiting produce (Kärholm and Sandin, 2011). For the authors, the time-space between programmed activities is a chance for improvisation, creativity and transgression, as the interstice presents a relief from the demands of the
scheduled activities. The interstitial time-space can therefore be understood as an actor with an immediate effect on the experience of waiting. Following Bruno Latour’s actor network theory, the authors suggest that waiting is the result of a complex interrelationship of a number of different actors such as humans, material objects, physical spaces, juridical regulations and specific time-spaces. Because the actor is defined as someone or something that makes a difference in a given situation, there is always a degree of unpredictability in its actions and output. Waiting situations can in other words have a transformative role on the environment they help to construct (Kärrholm and Sandin, 2011, p. 2).

Similar to Peter Bishop’s argument, Kärrholm and Sandin point to a tendency in the design of contemporary waiting rooms to pre-programme the act of waiting and to attempt to limit the possibility of alternative activities (or lack of activities) (Kärrholm and Sandin, 2011, p.3f). The blankness of the waiting spaces becomes an act that needs to be filled with content, which in many cases entails consumption. In trying to understand the mechanism behind this, the authors turn to the concepts of “affordances” and “niches” as developed by psychologist James J. Gibson (Gibson, 1977). In the work of Gibson, the term “niche” signifies a combination of certain latent possibilities, or affordances, available for a particular species to appropriate in a given environment. The niche does not define a specific location, but rather answers to how something is appropriated. Kärholm’s and Sandin’s use of the term focus less on the evolutionary aspects of the concept and more on “culturally induced waiting niches” as a way to distinguish what kind of activities that a waiting space allows and blocks (Kärholm and Sandin, 2011, p.4).

Using the term “material semiotics”, Kärholm and Sandin underscores that one criterion for a niche is that it can be read as such by a potential user. The material features of a niche can resemble other niches, and form part of a semiotic system of waiting spaces, recognisable in many different locations. A park bench in front of a lake signals the possibility of resting the legs or feeding birds, and can be identified by many regardless of its precise geographical location. Through materials, location and form the user can identify a niche for talking, smoking or eating. In this cognitive process there is also a degree of inventiveness. The waiting niche can be a space designed for waiting, with specific qualities to support this, such as for example objects for sitting, information billboards or the framing of a particular view. But the niche can also be the result of one or several unforeseen affordances discovered by people waiting.

For Kärholm and Sandin the niche as an actor can have an impact on the use of a space, but also transform through the changes of the context, for example by a pervasive commercialisation of waiting spaces. The authors suggest dividing the degrees of control over a waiting time-space into four main categories: the settled, the pre-settled, the unsettled and the non-settled (Kärholm and Sandin, 2011, p.6). The settled form of waiting is a voluntary break, for example someone taking a pause from working. The pre-settled waiting is a pause where one is aware of the temporal boundaries, but not in control of them, such as for example a student having a break between classes according to a given time schedule. The unsettled waiting describes an unexpected form of waiting, outside of the control of the individual and with unknown extension. A typical example would be the delayed departure of a flight. The fourth category, non-settled waiting, is the time-space following a large-scale incident or disaster, such as for example the waiting one would experience during the aftermaths of an earthquake. These four concepts define certain kinds of time-spaces and situations in relation to waiting, but also very different definitions of the concept of waiting. Against this schema I argue that the act of
a voluntary break (the settled waiting) is not in the same range of experience as for example waiting for a delayed train (the unsettled waiting), or the horrors following a natural disaster (the non-settled waiting). One could ask if not the true potential with this distinction is in the possible transitions back and forth between the second and the third category, i.e. between the pre-settled and the unsettled forms of waiting. It appears that any shift between the waiting situations happens here and only here.

In the context of the concert intermission waiting is a pre-settled moment, a scheduled pause where one knows the length of the break, but cannot change it. The members of the audience keep an eye on the rest of the crowd in case it begins to move back in to the performance hall, they listen for a bell signaling the start of the second act, and as the minutes go by they look at their watches more frequently in order to be able to get back in time. In the event of something unforeseen happening, such as for example an instrument breaking or a power black-out, the intermission of the concert becomes an unsettled waiting time-space. The intermission of the playhouse is not always directly aimed at buying things – as will be discussed below there are a number of other waiting spaces than the bar – but it does provide a temporal and sensorial framing for the consumption of experiences.

The foyer of Casa da Música

With this set of analytical tools I will now look at the foyer space of Casa da Música and discuss the different kinds of potential waiting niches. With a total surface on 22,000 square-metres, Casa da Música includes two auditoriums, a sound studio, an educational room, a restaurant, a café, a gift shop and a number of smaller rooms for various programmed activities (Koolhaas and OMA, 2004) (Koolhaas and AMO, 2006). These functions are accessed via a foyer space consisting of a series of non-orthogonal and oblique spaces – the negative shape of on the one hand the core programs, and on the other hand the envelope of the building. Beginning at the main entrance and continuing up to the very top balcony, the circulation space of Casa da Música is a continuous vertical sequence wrapping itself around the central programmes of the building. The space is a combined staircase and foyer, but bears little resemblance to the traditional layout of any of these space. After entering the building through the main entrance on the south side, the visitors face a broad staircase on the left leading to the north-west, a set of elevators in an adjacent space on the right and a corridor-like space straight ahead that ends up with a large window and a turning staircase bearing to the east. On the second floor both the west and the east staircase connects to a bar on the west side, some sitting areas and entrances to the auditorium. On the third and fourth floor the two circulation systems rejoin again through the east and west gables, both high spaces with panoramic windows overlooking the city.

In his analysis of the baroque traits of shopping malls, churches and casinos, art historian Norman Klein notes how architecture has been used to generate a number of special effects that orchestrates the viewer’s movement through space. In this way the sequence of the foyer can be read as a scripted space designed to produce a number of sensorial experiences in relation to time and movement. The scripting of the foyer space at Casa da Música begins with the outside stair leading up from the surrounding square to the narrow main entrance, into a high and window-less interior space where parts of the load bearing construction is exposed. The spatial effect of a vast entry hall is followed up by a set of maze-like and narrow corridors and staircases that often end with a panoramic view of the city or access to the main concert hall. In the sequence of spaces unfolding, the foyer presents a spatial drama to the visitor. To quote Sophia Psarra, en-
tering here becomes similar to “opening a book to read a story” (Psarra, 2009, p.87).

In comparison to Garnier's Opera, the interior staircase of Casa da Música's foyer does not in the same way allow for a single and directed gaze towards a central movement. Its maze-like layout is too fragmented to provide a clear one-way relationship between the stage of the staircase and the spectators of this staircase. Instead the foyer appears as a number of plateaus for waiting, a topography for interstitial time-spaces, where a series of different acts of waiting are happening simultaneously.

Following Kårrholm's and Sandin's reading, this topography consists of different kinds of waiting niches, with several types of affordances (Kårrholm and Sandin, 2011). Some niches are more open ended than others and different waiting niches are good for different things. The observations at the foyer of Casa da Música presented three typical kinds of waiting niches, each with varying levels of programmed content and affordances (Drawing 1). I call these three types “lounge niche”, “micro niche”, and “threshold niche”.

The lounge niche is the most clearly defined space for waiting. It is a space with groups of chairs and sofas, adjacent to the main staircase. Four of these groups are placed in a diagonal sequence adjacent to the landings of the staircase. The first two groups of seats are adjacent to a bar on the first landing after the main entrance. The second landing has one group of chairs, and the bar behind the main auditorium has stools and an extruded sofa along the wall facing the windows. Two of these designated seating areas are placed overlooking parts of the foyer, giving a good view of the vertical space. One of the seating areas on the first landing is placed under the main stair, providing a more hidden location for waiting. The lounge niche is recognisable in that it presents a programmed form of waiting that includes sitting next to a bar and having a view over the city or parts of the interior space. This kind of niche is for pre-settled waiting, but its position close to a bar (or in one case a big screen) also makes it suitable for sitting longer than an intermission. It is also noticeable that the stairs adjacent to these niches have a lower rise and wider steps. The waiting niche here becomes framed by the slowing down of pace. The scripting of this space seems to suggest that the audience approach it with slow, majestic strides.

Micro niches are less clearly defined in terms of purpose and often dependent on another adjacent function in the building. These niches are the areas outside of a restroom, some smaller landings and single sofas or chairs placed on different locations throughout the foyer. A common feature of this category of niches is that they happen in the residual spaces of the foyer, without a viewpoint or tucked away from the circulation path. If the first category suggests a place for spending more time than just an intermission, this second category seems to allow breaks shorter than the intermission, such as waiting for someone to come out of the auditorium, having a quick conversation on the cell phone, or standing in line for the restrooms, etc. Peter Bishop refers to these kinds of situations as “micro-waiting zones”, and suggests that they are spaces based on a continuously flowing mobility (Bishop, 2013, p.136). These waiting spaces are a part of the staging of the intermission, but the austerity also seem to encourage the visitor not to linger, and to move on to the more traditional waiting spaces. The balcony on floor 6 (called the “VIP Terrace”) is the uppermost end point of the stairs and does not fall into either the first or the second category of waiting niches. Although it has a roof window overlooking the city and steps forming into benches, its remote location from the auditorium makes it somewhat dubious as a pre-programmed intermission waiting space. Instead it appears more like a getaway from the choreography of the intermission, a niche for hiding while waiting for the concert to continue.
The third and most open-ended category of waiting niches, the threshold niche, is the outside staircase leading up to the building, including the landing and the entrance door in itself. Before and after the concert, as well as during the intermission, a number of people can be seen standing, sitting or slowly walking on the steps up to the main entrance, and in front of it. The outside staircase is a viewing point overlooking the square, the adjacent streets and the Boavista roundabout. This staircase appears to be the most frequently used of all niches during the intermission, at least when the weather allows it. The outside part of the staircase provides a roof for a temporary stage under it, used for performances on the main square. Even parts of the square closest to the entrance appear to be frequently used both by the concert audience and other people – skateboarders are passing by on the side and people are sitting on the adjacent slopes of the square facing the main entrance. In comparison with the other two types of niches, the threshold niche allow for a more loose form of waiting, without a predefined programme or behaviour. If the two previous kinds of waiting niches are both defined through what they allow, this appears to be a stage for an improvisation of the intermission. The threshold niche is located on the very edge between interior and exterior. It is a position where the user can see part of both outside and inside, and can also be seen. The threshold niche could entail waiting close to either side of the entrance door, sitting at a stair or other element leading up to an entrance, or moving back and forth between interior and exterior during the intermission. In the case of Casa da Música this kind of improvised waiting is partly made possible by the physical properties of the staircase in itself.

In considering the grand stairs outside the central railway station of Marseille, Henri Lefebvre suggests that a staircase sometimes operate as a “link between times” (Lefebvre, 2004, p.97). The stair acts as a physical element between different paces; the rhythm of the building and its interior, and the rhythm of the street, the squares and the exterior city. To move down the stairs is to accept a change not only of bodily position and the topography of the terrain, but also of time. The stairs are regulators of pace. The upper and the lower landings of the staircase are located in different worlds, each with their own set of conditions and rhythms. The stairs in Marseille produce, to quote Lefebvre, “the obligatory - one could say initiatory - passage for the descent towards the city, towards the sea” (Lefebvre, 2004, p.97). To consider the physical object of the stair as a mediator between different kinds of rhythms is also to begin a discussion about how architecture can design new forms of encounters between the protagonists of the intermission and the rhythms of the city. Through its location, steps, railing, lights, height and width the external staircase frames the intermission time-space. Instead of simply intermediating a set of encounters, it shapes these encounters and provides the starting point for an infinite number of stories of the relationship between the rhythms of the interior and those of the external city, during the intermission.

This condition is comparable to the transgression Jacques Rancière points to when discussing the barrières, the physical borders delimiting 19th century Paris from the countryside, that opened up for a vital interaction between the life of the bourgeois and that of the worker. The bars and cheap wineries adjacent to the city gates allowed for a “half-real and half-fantastic geography of inter-class exchanges” where different social groups temporarily could conflate while drinking, singing and dancing (Rancière, 2011, p.325). As Mattias Kärrholm notes, thresholds can be places for transgressions between spaces and activities usually separated in the city (Kärrholm, 2016, p.236). As borders between inside and outside they can condense, connect and perhaps even emancipate, Kärrholm
suggests. In the space in-between two conditions there is a possible leeway that can allow for the emergence of new identities.

There are probably a number of explanations as to why the threshold niche is the most commonly used of all the waiting niches in Casa da Música. One possible reason can be found in what Kärrholm and Sandin has pointed to as the familiarity of a certain kind of niche (Kärrholm and Sandin, 2011, p.4). The authors suggest that a waiting niche is constructed through a set of affordances, its connections to other actors, and its kinship to similar kinds of niches. In the context of the concert hall the kinship of the staircase to other stairs in similar settings helps constructing this niche. The familiarity of a certain kind of niche can also be paired with a familiarity of the intermission situation from previous experiences or from books, movies, and paintings describing the habits and movements of this time-space.

Conclusion: The Intermission as a Stage

This paper ends with the call announcing the beginning of the second part of the concert. There is a collective movement in one direction now, back into the auditorium as the tangible crowd is suddenly dispersed and the curtain falls for the stage of the intermission. It is of course not the end. To think of the intermission as a stage is also to consider its impact on the surroundings through a set of rhythms, and the temporal duration of this impact. The people waiting in front of the building before the performance, the faint sounds of the orchestra fine tuning their instruments, the conversations during the intermission, the shifting lights from the main auditorium reflected in the pavement outside, members of the audience loudly reviewing the show on the subway ride home – these are fragmented echoes and rhythms from the time-space of the event that continue to reverberate into the nighttime city. At the time of closing, the foyer slowly dissolves into the arteries of urban infrastructure and the concert night leaks into the surrounding city.

The staging of the intermission entails a pre-settled time-space for consuming the experience of the city. Its physical stage, the foyer, directs the attention of the audience toward the urban weave of Porto. It is in this act of pause that Koolhaas identifies Casa da Música as a democratic, cultural institution open to everyone. When the intermission allows for the audience to enter the outside square via the staircase, it opens up for an access to the concert night for those who were not part of it from the start. However, this purported interface between the audience and the surrounding must be critically questioned. What are the experiences that the intermission can engender for others, not part of the audience? The mere existence of this time-space seems to allow for a juxtaposition of several different kinds of rhythms. Just like Henri Lefebvre suggests the possibility for a specific group to transform their situation by “imprinting a rhythm on an era, be it through force or in an insinuating manner” (Lefebvre, 2004, p.14), the previously unseen subjects of the night could use the waiting space of the staircase to give voice to the presence of other rhythms.

In this paper I have identified three types of waiting niches during the intermission of a concert at the Casa da Música: the lounge niche, the micro niche and the threshold niche. The lounge niche is a space programmed for waiting. It includes a group of furniture for sitting, in some instances access to a bar and a viewpoint of the city or of the interior. This is a waiting niche scripted for the grandeur moments of the foyer, framed by low stairs, high ceiling and views. The second kind, the micro niche is a space for a shorter period of waiting, such as waiting for a friend to come out of the auditorium, queuing outside a restroom or making a quick phone call. These kinds of spaces appear to be scripted to prevent the user from lingering. The third type of niche, the threshold, is the external main entrance staircase.
and landing. Here the waiting time-space is mixed with other rhythms and behaviours independent of the intermission. Compared to the lounge and micro niches, the staircase is an open-ended space for waiting. It affords various kinds of uses, and connects both visually and spatially to the exterior.

The three niches have different degrees of predefined content and describe different ways of waiting. During the time-space of a concert night, the micro niche belongs to the category of settled waiting, whereas the lounge and threshold niches can be both settled and pre-settled. The three niches also entail varying levels of exposure to the outside, and they allow different levels of co-existence with other people.

There is still much to say about the composition and correlation of the different kinds of niches during the intermission. An extended investigation of the foyer should consider how the different niches are contingent, interspersed and overlapped and how this interrelationship helps staging the intermission. It is also possible to think of the three kinds of waiting niches as relevant when considering other types of buildings and programmes. Are they culturally induced niches, possible to recognise from other buildings? Looking at these niches in other types of buildings can provide an understanding of how different forms of waiting are both constructed and invented. It can also provide information about which kind of waiting spaces that are more likely to produce encounters between the users of the building and the surrounding environment. The lounge niche is easy to spot in hotels, malls, airports, conference buildings, and various public and private institutions where there is a need for a settled or pre-settled waiting space. The micro niche can probably be found in any building with a need for one or a couple of people to temporarily withdraw from the main circulation path. The micro niche can be a single chair or a bench placed outside of a room, a corner for a brief conversation away from the crowd, or a space in front of a window where people stand while waiting for the elevator or talking on the phone.

Threshold niches appear close to the entrance. They are elements for circulation with a visual connection to the city, and they afford additional activities, such a for example standing, sitting, hanging, drinking, eating, smoking or climbing. In the case of Casa da Música, the threshold niche of the staircase is a temporary throne for the people who wait for the second act, but also a throne for the evening flâneurs who rest their legs on the steps to the building, or for the night-time workers who happen to pass by between two working shifts. The threshold happens through the appropriation of one architectural element into a use for which it was not primarily intended. We could think of the threshold niche appearing in situations where an entrance has visual connection to the surrounding city, allowing for users of the building to see the outside, and at the same time to be seen. The power of the threshold niche is that it exists between the programmes of the interior and the city. It bridges interior and exterior in and around the foyer and opens up for encounters and interactions.

In the threshold niche, the staging of the intermission becomes a framing of the outside city. As the audience steps out on the staircase, what was an urban background in the interior parts of the foyer is now a tangible and audible foreground. The physical properties of this stair can all be seen as important for turning it into a link between the internal programme of the playhouse and the external rhythms of the city: the extruded width of the main entrance staircase, the built-in-lights in the steps, the glass railing mirroring these lights, the space under the stairs turned into a stage, and the visual connection to the surrounding.

On an instrumental level the threshold niche also presents a challenge for architectural practices to be more perceptive to the rhythms of the city when
designing environments with potential waiting niches. An architecture relating its spatial layout and programs to the both existing and potential future rhythms of the surrounding urban environment (for example the hours of different shifts in a nearby factory, the intervals of the subway train, or the lecture schedules for an adjacent high school) could emphasise the juxtaposition between different rhythms, insert critical confrontations and disruptions between these rhythms, and create a greater exposure between worlds usually separated within the city. In doing so architecture could also provide the ground for future encounters to come, introducing other voices and rhythms not present in the current time-space of the intermission.

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References