

To cite text:

Jankov, Sonja. 2026. "The Use of Arts and the Performativity of Architecture within the Culture of Resistance – The Case of Central Station in Novi Sad." *Philosophy and Society* 37 (1): 9–30.

Sonja Jankov

THE USE OF ARTS AND THE PERFORMATIVITY OF ARCHITECTURE WITHIN THE CULTURE OF RESISTANCE – THE CASE OF CENTRAL STATION IN NOVI SAD

ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on the interconnection between the artistic means used within protests and the architectural performativity of the central station in Novi Sad, following the collapse of its canopy on November 1, 2024, which killed 16 people. It first presents theoretical approaches to the concept of performativity in relation to the commemorative function of architecture, pointing out the limitations of previous research on the topic. It is further argued that the Novi Sad central station expanded these concepts by demonstrating that a single architectural object can be performative beyond its spatial boundaries, in multiple locations simultaneously. For this purpose, the paper analyzes the artistic means used within the massive protests that enabled this – signs, a scale model, large marionettes, and an appropriated *Monopoly* game in which the Novi Sad central station appears as a property. The paper concludes that during the 2024–2025 protests in Serbia and abroad, which had a strong commemorative dimension, the Novi Sad central station became performative in the sense that it acted as a catalyst for social transformation and public engagement. It mobilized the wider public to empathize with the victims, preserve the memory of them, and demand transparency and accountability in political discourse. As such, it became an actant that transformed people, changed their behaviors, and co-created collective identity, knowledge, and meaning, in relation to other non-human and human entities.

KEYWORDS

performativity,
performative
architecture, protests,
art, participation, Novi
Sad

Introduction

Continuous mass citizens' protests have taken place in transitioning Serbia on several occasions since the 1990s. The latest have been ongoing for over a year since November 1, 2024, when part of the newly reconstructed central station in Novi Sad collapsed and killed 16 people. As these protests did not take place only in Novi Sad, but also in many other cities in Serbia and abroad where the



Serbian diaspora lives, several motifs connected participants and communicated their message. One of them is the motif of the station itself, that is, various visual representations of it.

In this paper, the site of the station after the tragedy and its representations at the protests are approached from the theoretical perspective of architectural performativity. Previous research on the performativity of architectural objects has shown that architecture is an active subject in the creation of knowledge, meaning, behaviors, and identities, all of which are also created or communicated within mass protests. Therefore, the main goal of this research is to map the performative aspects of the Novi Sad central station and present their role within the protests. The key thesis of the paper is that the performativity of the Novi Sad central station reached people in other cities and countries, encouraging them to join a united collective with a common cause, while artistic means facilitated this process. For this reason, the paper closely analyzes artistic methods that visually referenced the station, through which protest participants communicated their message, while both architecture and artistic means are recognized as non-human actants that operate together with humans.

The research was conducted using desk and empirical methods, combining systematic material observation, case study analysis, discursive analysis, and comparative analysis. The results are presented in this paper in three segments, followed by a conclusion. After a brief review of the station's history and its alternative uses for cultural events, the paper focuses on theoretical accounts of the terms *performative* and *performativity*, particularly on studies that recognize performativity as an event occurring between an object and a subject. Furthermore, it briefly presents existing research on performative commemorative architecture, arguing that architectural performativity has mostly been approached as something preconceived by the architect. The largest segment is a close analysis of objects and interventions that visually and semantically reference the Novi Sad central station, through which its performativity extended to other places and cities. In particular: 1) large signs referencing the station's zigzag roofline, 2) a scale model used within a public performance in Niš, 3) large marionettes used within protests in Belgrade, 4) an appropriated *Monopoly* game staged at a crossroads in Belgrade that presented the station within a broader context. These chosen examples are approached here in a rather descriptive way because they are not publicly visible and their documentation is difficult to access, leaving their content unknown to people who have not seen them at the protests or encountered images or videos documenting them.

Historical Context of the Studied Case

The central station in Novi Sad was completed in 1964 in the northern part of the city, along with a new modern boulevard and a new bridge over the Danube. The head of the project team was Imre Farkaš; Tomislav Jakšić was in charge of Wing A, Petar Keravica of Wing B, and Julka Majtan of Wing C. Draško Berisavljević was responsible for the structural design, and he constructed the

characteristic zigzag-shaped roof by which the station became recognizable and memorable. It spans the 22 × 55 m central hall, which contains no supporting columns, making the station a unique and extraordinary piece of architecture (Konstantinović, Jović, Bede, Momirov 2017). The building is seen daily by many people, as intercity and international bus stations are located next to it, and numerous city buses pass by.

Over the years, several citizens' associations have initiated cultural events within the station to draw public and institutional attention to its historical and architectural value. In 2014, on the station's 50th anniversary, the Vojvodina Railway Society and the Traveling Haiku Society organized an open poetry and art competition, using one of the waiting rooms as a gallery, while citizens organized a fundraising campaign to restore the station's unique clock, which had been defunct for a decade. In 2016, the station was the main venue for the 20th Salon of Architecture organized by the Association of Architects of Novi Sad. In 2018, architecture students organized the promotion of the international student-led journal *Tristotrojka*, followed by the guided tour *ArchiTour* and the roundtable discussion *ArchiLecture*. In 2019, a unique temporary Design Pavilion was installed in the station's central hall to host the *Swiss Style Now* exhibition and the presentation of Filip Jovanovski's performance *This Building Tells the Truth*, the winner of the 14th Prague Quadrennial of Performance, Design, and Space.

When Novi Sad was awarded the title of European Capital of Culture in 2022, the central station was emphasized as a landmark and entry point to the city. Its front glass façade was covered with the message: "Welcome to Novi Sad, European Capital of Culture." Around the same time, reconstruction work began, based on the project approved in October 2021. The final phase of reconstruction was completed on July 5, 2024. However, four months later, on November 1 at 11:52 CET, the suspended concrete canopy, along with the steel tension elements that anchored the roof to the canopy, collapsed onto the pavement in front of the main entrance. It killed 14 people on the spot and injured many more, two of whom later died from their injuries.

The event sparked continuous peaceful mass gatherings and protests across the country, demanding open access to documents about the reconstruction, investigations into corruption, and the prosecution of those accountable. The most popular form was *Zastani, Srbijo* (Stop, Serbia), during which citizens blocked intersections at 11:52 CET for 16 minutes of silence to commemorate the victims.¹ Such gatherings have taken place in over 500 cities, towns, and villages in Serbia (AJS 2025), as well as abroad, where diasporas and/or citizens

1 Initially 15 minutes for 15 victims: Sara Firić (b. 2018), Valentina Firić (b. 2014), Đorđe Firić (b. 1971), Milica Adamović (b. 2008), Nemanja Komar (b. 2007), Andela Ruman (b. 2004), Miloš Milosavljević (b. 2003), Stefan Hrka (b. 1997), Sanja Ćirić Arbutina (b. 1989), Goranka Raca (b. 1966), Vukašin Raković (b. 1955), Mileva Karanović (b. 1948), Đuro Švonja (b. 1947), Vasko Sazdovski (b. 1979), Anja Radonjić (b. 2000). On March 21, 2025, Vukašin Crnčević passed away from injuries as the 16th victim.

of other countries joined the action. The *Zastani, Srbijo* gatherings occurred almost daily at certain intersections (e.g., in the center of Pančevo, or near IT companies and the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade), while others took place less frequently. There are recorded cases in which no pedestrians were present to block an intersection, yet drivers spontaneously stopped for 16 minutes.

Additionally, larger protests and marches took place in many cities, as investigations had not begun, authorities ignored brutality against peaceful protesters, and public media services failed to report objectively. These events all included commemorative minutes of silence for the victims.² The protests focused not only on the canopy collapse but also on the broader systemic failures of state institutions and corruption, which citizens recognized as issues that must be confronted collectively and in solidarity. The protests therefore addressed not only government representatives but also aimed at mobilizing people who were either unaware of these problems or choosing to ignore them. It is estimated that there have been over 21,600 anti-corruption citizens' gatherings in Serbia since the day of the tragedy.

The protests were connected not only to the causes and aftermath of the collapsed canopy but also to the station itself, which served as a starting or ending point for many of them. Moreover, images of the station or its characteristic zigzag roof appeared at numerous protests both in Novi Sad and elsewhere, serving as a mode of commemoration, support, connection, and the formation of a unified collective identity, as well as a demand for accountability and an end to corruption in the country. For this reason, this paper argues that through the 2024–2025 protests, the central station in Novi Sad became an architectural object that shifted the theoretical boundaries of *performative architecture*.

Theoretical Framework – Performativity of Architecture

When we speak about the term *performative*, it can be understood as an adjective that describes something transformative because it has performance-like characteristics, such as adaptive architecture. However, it can also refer to a word, a sentence, a sign, an artwork, an architectural object, or any other object that *does something*. John L. Austin introduced a new type of statement into the philosophy of language, which he called *performative utterances*, or *performatives* (Austin 1962: 5). They differ from *statements* and *constatives* that merely describe something because their utterance implies the execution of a certain action, that is, an act. Thus, when spoken by an accredited person in

² Some of them are: *Korupcija ubija* (*Corruption Kills*), *Ćutanja je dosta, 1. 2. na 3 mosta* (Enough of silence, on February 2, on three bridges), *Krvave su im ruke* (Their hands are covered in blood), *Pišaljka je glasnija od TV prenosa* (The whistle is louder than the TV broadcast), *Nema Nove, za staru ste nam još dužni* (There is no New Year, you still owe us for the old one), *Sve mora stati* (Everything must stop), *Probudi se, Srbijo* (Wake up, Serbia), *9 meseci – 0 odgovornih* (9 months – 0 responsible), *Naše pravo da znamo sve* (Our right to know everything).

a specific discourse, the sentence “I pronounce you husband and wife” *does something* – it transforms the status of a couple.

Similarly, objects have a performative aspect because they transform people. Studies of product packaging and marketing have shown that design is actively involved in the production of contents and consumption and, consequently, in the creation of consumers. Packages “can be understood as *actants*, entities that modify the behavior of other entities, therefore making things happen”; they “have the capacity to make others act and contribute to shaping consumer practices, identities, roles, abilities, and dispositions” (Pettersson McIntyre 2018: 339-340). Cigarettes, for example – their brand design and marketing – encourage us to smoke and turn us into smokers. Skis turn us into skiers, musical instruments into musicians, and other objects transform us through their instrumentality. Whether as *performative utterances* or as objects, performatives are involved in the transformation of subjects; that is, they are bound to the identities and behaviors of individuals and groups.

Following this, would it be possible to say that architecture also has the capacity to *make us do* certain things and transform us in some ways? Can we speak of architecture as something that *does* things, initiates actions, or changes or unites identities? How does architecture produce users? What modes of activity, behavior, and practice does it enact? In short, how is it *performative*?

According to Laura Weigert, the term *performativity* “refers to a process of interpretation or meaning making that takes place at each exchange between an audience and an event, object, or activity” (Weigert 2012: 63). As such the object may be an artwork, Darshana Jayemanne points out that, since antiquity, there have been “works which seek to incorporate the viewer and guide their gaze through conspicuous techniques of framing – that is, navigable and performative texts” (Jayemanne 2017: 9). For Tawny Andersen, “performativity resides somewhere in the tensions among language, embodiment and action”; it “connotes *relationality*,” is processual, and is “implicated in processes of *transposition*, *transgression* and *transformation*” (Andersen 2016: 12). All of these authors indicate that *performativity* is a form of activity that takes place when a person experiences objects or environments. In that process, both objects and subjects become transformed in comparison to what they were before the encounter, since performativity is “about the constitution of subjects” (Cabantous et al 2016: 209).

Performativity, therefore, can occur in encounters between visitors and architectural objects. Architecture is performative because it is “open and mobile, co-produced by the gaze of the observer” (Pavis 2016: 236). It is not a fixed object or merely a container of functions and meanings but is co-created by architects and users – “performative architecture focuses on use rather than form, on dwellers *taken as* participants in space” (Widrich 2016: 268). As a site or location, architecture “is always *being produced*, and so is subject to instability, ephemerality, and temporality” (Kaye 2000: 51). According to David Leatherbarrow, performative architecture is not simply an outcome of technology, because technology only enhances functionality. Instead, “[t]he

significance that buildings possess is granted to them by you and me” (Leatherbarrow 2005: 8), and what a building *is* is defined by what it *does* (Leatherbarrow 2005: 7). Marinus de Ruiter points out how new social media produce the effect of “instagrammification” on murals on buildings: “all visitors seem to want to grab a piece of the art by taking a picture” (de Ruiter 2015: 46), which demonstrates how new media respond to the performativity of architecture.

Apart from this, what makes architecture performative is that it can “take the role of an active, effective, and efficient subject in the processes of the production and creation of knowledge” (Žugić 2017: 9). Any architectural space can become a subject that co-creates new meanings rather than merely presenting them. Due to its performative features, architecture can also co-initiate activities, becoming an *actant* in relation to other entities that act. As a non-human entity, it can become part of a network of humans and non-humans studied by Bruno Latour within the “sociology of associations,” or simply “associology,” as he called it (Latour 2005: 9), along with other non-human entities such as animals, natural phenomena, tools and technical artifacts, material structures, transportation devices, texts, and economic goods (Sayes 2014: 136).

As most theoretical accounts focus on the performativity of architecture as an activity that takes place between architects and users, it has largely been researched through cases in which performativity was anticipated by architects. Although it is an ancient method found in temples such as the Parthenon (447–432 BC), architects of twenty-first-century memorial museums also use it to make visitors move through buildings and sites in certain ways, perceive the information displayed within or by them, and become transformed in the process.

In the new wing of the Jewish Museum in Berlin (2001), architect Daniel Libeskind used a 150 m long void as an “embodiment of absence” (Libeskind 2001: 28) that “houses” the memory of people who are no longer “at home.” The void embodies the “sense of *unheimlichkeit*, or uncanniness, in a medium like architecture” (Young 2001: 179). Symbolizing the negative space created by the Holocaust, the void as an architectural element turns visitors into active witnesses, as it

requires the user to participate, transforming a passive observer into an “active witness” of the narrative. Through the realization of the negation of explicit meaning, the architectural text functions as a performative – something that “does something” and cannot be “read” passively. Architecture thus evokes an absent presence, confronts “unrepresentable” history, and questions previously adopted expectations of museum space (Žugić 2017: 96).

By confronting visitors with a traumatic past and turning them into “active witnesses,” the museum inevitably changes them because “the duty of the museum [is] to be not only a place of memory and history but also empathy that will lead to moral transformation” (Sorado 2018: 172). This is achieved precisely through architecture’s performative aspect, activated by the presence and participation of visitors. Another example of performative commemorative

architecture is the National September 11 Memorial Museum (2014), built around the archaeological excavation of the remains after the event. It is “a performative space, in which exhibits are not only meant to tell the story of 9/11 but to spur action and transformation in visitors” (Sorado 2018: 171). The remains of the destroyed buildings and memorials to the victims serve as testimonies that turn memorial museums into *performative museums* (Williams 2007: 97).

In both cases, visitors learn about the victims, and empathy changes them before they leave the museums and continue with their lives. For that reason, both the Jewish Museum and the National September 11 Memorial Museum are examples of architecture whose performativity is directly related to memory and collective identity. Neil Leach even argues that the destruction of the World Trade Center in New York “has had a radical impact on the American psyche, and that it is against the backdrop of the now absent twin towers that a new sense of American national identity seems to have been forged” (Leach 2005: 171). Such events shape the collective gaze, much as “color” frames one’s view of the world. To be “black’ is to view the world with a ‘black’ gaze” (ibid.: 188), while to be American after 9/11 is to see the world from the perspective of a nation whose way of life is under attack.

Performativity of architecture, however, may also contribute to commemoration and collective identity in less formal ways. It is not necessarily bound to visiting a specific commemorative institution, nor does it characterize only those buildings whose architects intentionally designed them with performative effects in mind. Performativity is a latent or explicit feature of architecture. An object may not have a performative effect for decades but may, due to various circumstances, later become anchored in collective identity. This occurs because performativity “is defined in relation to its liminality, i.e., [its] ability to produce activities whose spatial, temporal, and symbolic *liminality* questions and provokes existing social norms” and “opens the possibility of taking emancipatory action” (Stojnić 2015: 104). This is precisely what happened with the central station in Novi Sad on November 1, 2024, after which, for many people, to live in Serbia is to live without knowing when another tragedy caused by corruption will occur. The station itself became a site of memory, mourning, and connection, uniting people to a collective identity. It also became performative beyond its physical location through the use of artistic means at mass commemorative and protest gatherings.

Images of the Novi Sad Central Station within the 2024–2025 Protests in Serbia

The central station in Novi Sad has been closed since the event on November 1, 2024. The collapsed concrete has been cleared, but no other interventions have been made, so the damage remains open and visible to anyone who passes by. Barriers prevent entry, but many people have left flowers, candles, teddy bears, and other signs of compassion for the victims beside them. On many occasions, citizens gathered in front of the station in the hundreds of thousands,

while students from Belgrade, Jagodina, Subotica, and Novi Pazar walked for several days to reach it and place flowers for the victims.

Since the event concerned not only the citizens of Novi Sad or users of railway services, the collapse of the reconstructed station's canopy was immediately recognized as a common concern and a result of broader state politics. The first artistic response was Boris Staiewsky's drawing, which went viral on social media just one day after the tragedy. It depicts the front of the station, but the collapsed concrete canopy is shaped like the country, with the inscription *Serbia* over it. The message was clear and has been repeated many times since: what collapsed on November 1 was not only the canopy but the entire state. The image of the collapsed station thus became an image of the opaque reconstruction process that killed 16 people, and it quickly became a metaphor for the citizens' protests.

In addition to becoming part of artistic interventions in the public space of social networks, the central station also became part of interventions in the urban public space. On November 24, artist Andrej Josifovski Pijanista painted a 48 × 4.8 m black rectangle on Republic Square, the main city square in Belgrade. The dimensions matched those of the collapsed canopy, and the intervention was titled *The Republic's Black Mourning Ribbon*. Referring to the black mourning ribbon, which is usually bent to visually represent a garment torn in sorrow, the straight black rectangle represented not only the collapsed canopy but also the lack of genuine remorse among those most accountable. The work was washed off the same day by municipal services (Zrnić 2024).

The performative aspect of the station was most strongly activated through objects that represented it at mass public protests. On December 12, 2024, students of the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad performed a number of artistic actions during a commemorative walk through the city center. One action involved 16 students, each holding a large red rectangle at a specific angle, so that, standing side-by-side, their installation formed a zigzag shape reminiscent of the railway station's roofline. At the time, students had already begun sit-ins and blockades, and more than 60 faculties across Serbia had suspended classes and exams due to the students' decision that their education was less important than the lives of the victims and their own safety, which they saw as endangered by a corrupt state and dysfunctional institutions.

In relation to the student sit-ins, as well as the continued expression of commemoration, many mass protest marches and gatherings took place, and a large number of citizens joined them. Within these events, the Novi Sad central station was represented on many large signs carried by participants. One of them was a 1.5 × 7 m sign reading *Svi smo ispod nadstrešnice* (We are all under the canopy). Above the inscription, the sign featured the characteristic zigzag line of the station's roof so that the inscription appeared in place of the collapsed canopy. As the material was tarpaulin, the sign could not stand on its own, making the presence of the people carrying it an integral part of the work, as they were literally standing under the canopy – that is, under its artistic representation. The sign appeared at the front of several protests, while

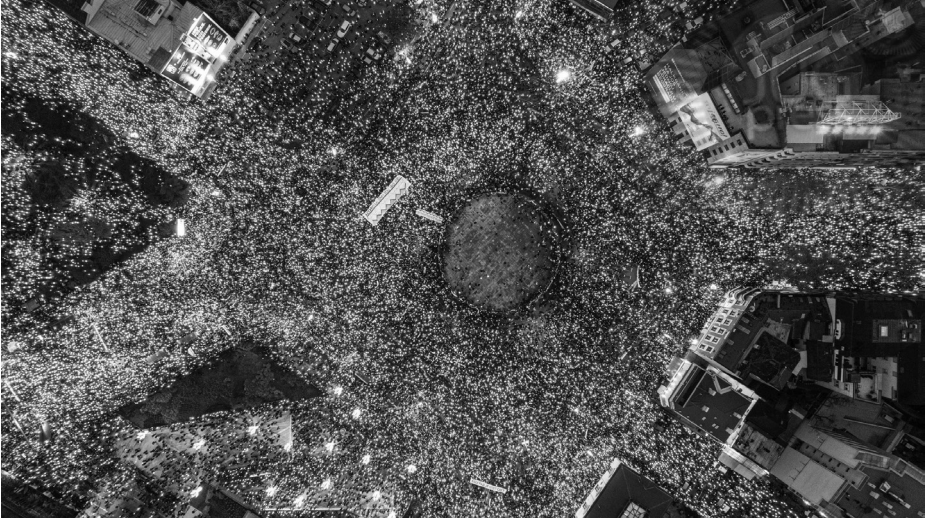


Figure 1: Two large signs *Svi smo ispod nadstrešnice* (We are all under the canopy) during the gathering on December 22, 2024 at Slavija in Belgrade. Courtesy of Jugopress.

at the student protest in Belgrade on December 22, 2024, it was held above the participants' heads like the canopy itself. Drone images also show another, even larger sign with the zigzag roofline, accompanied by beams of light directed toward the sky during the commemorative minutes of silence for the victims (Figure 1).

A day before the large protest on Vidovdan (June 28), a holiday strongly intertwined with Serbian national identity, the sign was held by students on top of a building with a large billboard located at the highly visible intersection of two major boulevards near several large faculties. The sign was visible to anyone passing through the intersection, while photographs of it circulated on social networks to encourage people to join the protest. It was carried again during the protest on August 1, 2025, which emphasized that nine months had passed since the event and that no one had taken responsibility. The protest took place in front of the new central station in Belgrade, which had been found to have structural irregularities and posed potential safety risks that could result in an even greater tragedy than the one in Novi Sad. The protest began with 16 minutes of silence, during which participants held black banners to commemorate the victims in Novi Sad, along with the large sign featuring the zigzag roofline (Figure 2). Citizens could also contribute by leaving a torn piece of black cloth as a symbol of grief and mourning.

The zigzag line of the station's rooftop was included on several other occasions. As part of the support for educational workers on February 5, 2025, in front of the Ministry of Education in Belgrade, pupils of the 10th Belgrade Gymnasium carried a large sign reading *Pozivamo na hrabrost* (We call for courage), in which the rooftop line was intertwined with the name of their school. They also carried the sign during walks in support of Dijana Hrka, the mother



Figure 2: Gathering in front of the Central Station in Belgrade on August 1, 2025. Courtesy of photographer Gavriilo Andrić. Source: <https://protesti.pics/devet-meseci>

of the victim Stefan Hrka, while she was on a hunger strike demanding justice during the first half of November 2025. The sign *Svi smo ispod nadstrešnice* (We are all under the canopy) was also carried during protests in Novi Sad, most notably by secondary school pupils during their protest walk on September 1, 2025. Their route started at the central station and continued toward the campus. Pupils also carried a large sign reading *Srednjoškolci pamte* (Secondary school pupils remember) which, like the students' sign, featured the zigzag roofline above the inscription.

The zigzag roofline or the image of the station's front also appeared in several calls for the one-year commemorative gathering in Novi Sad, on November 1, 2025. A sign reading *Svi u Novi Sad 1. 11* (Everyone to Novi Sad 1. 11), above which a zigzag line transformed into a heartbeat line, was hung on the pedestrian overpass along the exit route to Novi Sad, but it was taken down by municipal services the following day. Students who walked to Novi Sad from several cities in Serbia for the commemorative gathering carried a sign reading *Koracima sećanja "Da se ne zaboravi – zato idemo"* (Steps of memory "We go so that no one forgets"), which included an image of the station's front. On that day, members of the Serbian diaspora gathered for commemoration in over 60 cities in the USA, Canada, Australia, the UK, Germany, Italy, Spain, France, Greece, Portugal, Belgium, the Netherlands, Ireland, Austria, the Czech Republic, Finland, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Switzerland, New Zealand, and Qatar (UM 2025).

Following the commemorative gathering on the anniversary of the tragedy, Dijana Hrka began her hunger strike, during which the zigzag roofline was transformed on signs into the word MAMA (without horizontal lines), meaning "mom." Signs like these are particularly effective because they communicate that

anyone could have been under the canopy at 11:52 CET, on November 1, that any mother could have lost her child as Dijana Hrka did, and that the collapse is not the only possible dangerous scenario that may result from non-transparent public works carried out with questionable expertise. These signs attracted many citizens to join the public walks and stand behind the unified identity that formed around a critical approach to the causes that led to the tragedy in Novi Sad.

The signs would likely have been effective even without the visual references to the central station, but the image made them more relatable, especially when carried collectively by other people. It also made the station visible in different parts of Novi Sad, as well as in other cities. Among the many other signs carried by participants, those that included the zigzag roofline of the station were particularly relational and immediately evoked empathy for the victims. The act of carrying such a sign also emphasized that anyone could have been under that canopy at the time. Additionally, as the broken zigzag roofline appeared in many online announcements of gatherings in other cities in Serbia and abroad throughout the year, the collapsed station canopy mobilized people nationwide to gather into a unified collective identity. On March 15, 2025, citizens of Chicago, in support of Serbian students, held white V-shaped signs that together formed the zigzag roofline (PSČ 2025), which further demonstrates how the performativity of architecture mobilized people who are far away from the actual architectural object.

Apart from being reproduced in two-dimensional signs, the station was also referenced through a scale model and marionettes, both of which were part of public protests. On January 31, 2025, students of the University of Niš (a city in southern Serbia) performed an action titled *Uzrok zašto je nadstrešnica pala* (The Reason Why the Canopy Fell) using a scale model of the station's façade that they created for the occasion (JuGmedia 2025).³ The action lasted only a few minutes. Several students held the model, and at a certain moment the canopy fell, releasing banknotes of 50, 100, and 500 euros. The presence of euros, which are not Serbia's national currency, directly referred to the questionable use of EU funds during the reconstruction. The action not only connected corruption to the tragedy but also made visible the implication of human agency in the process that led to it. By manually manipulating the model's elements, the students highlighted the fact that the reconstruction did not happen by itself and that someone must be held accountable for the tragedy that followed.

The zigzag roofline of the Novi Sad central station was also replicated in one of the large marionettes created by students of the Faculty of Applied Arts in Belgrade and first animated at the largest protest in the region's recent history, which took place on March 15, 2025, in Belgrade (Figure 3). Students made four marionettes, approximately four meters high, each representing one of the four demands for which students from more than 60 faculties across Serbia

3 The model used in the performance was later included in the exhibition *100 dana – prava strana* (100 Days – The Right Side) at the University of Niš, on April 4, 2025.

stopped attending classes and taking exams. The first marionette, connected to the first demand to publish the complete reconstruction documentation of the Novi Sad central station, depicted a man in a suit holding the zigzag roof of the station in both outstretched hands, with money in his mouth. A marionette of three figures wearing black hoods represented the second demand to arrest all those responsible for attacks on students. The third, referring to the demand for the release of detained activists, took the form of a student protest guard wearing a vest and holding a large whistle in his mouth. The fourth marionette had a head shaped like a house and the face of an elderly professor; its clothes were covered in photographs of previous protests in front of faculties, referring to the fourth demand for an increased education budget.



Figure 3: One of four marionettes made by students to represent their demands during the gathering on March 15, 2025, in Belgrade. Photo by BETA/Uroš Matović. Courtesy of BETA.

Additionally, students of the Faculty of Fine Arts and the Faculty of Political Sciences made a replica of the Trojan horse and brought it in front of the Constitutional Court. It bore two inscriptions on its sides: a quote from the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia – “Paragraph 2. No state body, political organization, group, or individual can usurp sovereignty from citizens, nor establish power beyond the freely expressed will of citizens”⁴ – and the statement “Citizens are the bearers of sovereignty.”⁵ By bringing large marionettes

4 In original: Ustav Republike Srbije, Stav 2. Nijedan državni organ, politička organizacija, grupa ili pojedinac ne može prisvojiti suverenost od građana, niti uspostaviti vlast mimo slobodno izražene volje građana.

5 The replicas of the Trojan horse and marionettes were later exhibited at *Medupros-tor – blokadna izložba svih umetničkih fakulteta u Srbiji* (Interspace – blockade exhibition of all art faculties in Serbia), Cvijeta Zuzorić Art Pavilion, Belgrade, April 15-May 15, 2025.

among the people during protests, the students personified demands that were relevant to the entire population. In this context, the zigzag roofline of the station metaphorically suggests that the reconstruction process was operated like a marionette by the same actors who control public funds. Dividing the roof between both hands of the marionette suggests that it was broken by the pursuit of money positioned between the two parts and symbolically consumed by the figure.

In all four cases – the signs, the performative commemorative action, the model, and the marionettes – the presence of human bodies carrying the objects that depict the station, or physically forming the shape of its roofline, emphasizes the performative aspect of the architectural object that transformed people after its collapse. When seeing someone carry these objects, others can identify with them and begin to see the world through the same lens. By joining the protest walks, participants symbolically carry the sign that states that “we are all under the canopy,” meaning that everyone is united within a shared collective identity.

The fourth way in which the Novi Sad central station became performative beyond its physical boundaries was through a large-scale appropriated *Monopoly* board painted during the protest *Predi na našu stranu* (Come to our side) on July 31, 2025, on Zoran Đinđić Boulevard ⁶ (Figure 4), and at the intersection near the Government of the Republic of Serbia, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the General Staff building.⁷ The board was large enough for people to walk across; it was relational and enabled passersby to understand its meaning through observation or participation. It included all the elements of the original game, including the original color groups: brown (for the least expensive properties), followed by light blue, pink, orange, red, yellow, green, and dark blue (for the most expensive properties). In the original game, these spaces represent avenues on which a player can build houses, upgrade them to hotels, and increase rent at the expense of other players, who may eventually go bankrupt.

The game is based on the progression of property ownership, property trading, the expansion of private property, and, consequently, the accumulation of private income. The students used it to present the state’s relationship to publicly owned properties and services.⁸ For this purpose, they replaced the

⁶ Besides the fact that this is one of the largest boulevards, it is also named after the former prime minister of Serbia who was assassinated in 2003, after only two years at this position. Đinđić was known for progressive, pro-democratic and EU-oriented ideas, and for advocating cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY).

⁷ This was one of many protests against the Serbian Government’s decision on December 2, 2024, to revoke the status of the cultural monument to the General Staff building, so that a luxury hotel and residential complex can be built in its place.

⁸ A similar appropriation of the *Monopoly* game was carried as a sign by a participant in the protest on February 18, 2025, in front of the Ministry of Culture. The sign also featured the Novi Sad central station, but the other properties were more closely



Figure 4: Appropriated *Monopoly* game painted on Zoran Đinđić Boulevard in Belgrade during the protest *Predi na našu stranu* (Come to our side) on July 31, 2025. Courtesy of photographer Filip Krainčanić.

original properties in the game with public institutions and assets in Serbia, following the same color scheme and spatial distribution on the board (Figure 5). The lowest-valued properties on their board were municipally funded pharmacies, whose employees had not received their last five salaries, and the university, where teaching staff had been receiving only 13% of their salaries for months due to a government decree issued during the blockades. The decree reduced the number of hours allocated to scientific research from 20 to 5, effectively requiring professors to teach 35 hours per week – an impossible workload while faculties remained under blockade.

Slightly more expensive are the urban public areas Pioneer Park, the Ušće district, and Fruška gora National Park, whose spatial plan has been changed to enable a private investor to build new profitable developments. These properties are followed by public telecommunications and media enterprises, as well as the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media (REM), which is responsible for monitoring whether electronic media report truthfully, completely, and in the public interest, as well as for ensuring equal representation of political actors during election campaigns. REM appoints the management board of public media services, thus directly affecting editorial policy. Students invested significant effort in electing members of REM, since this was required by law and was overdue.

related to culture. They included starlets, the extremely high cost for the new logo for the national post office, and the extremely high cost of urban New Year's Eve decorations, while the most expensive places represented fake diplomas. The board had four jails, while the Community Chests spaces depicted the canopy of the Novi Sad central station, reduced pensions, and stolen elections.

Figure 5: Properties in the standard Monopoly game vs. in the Serbian students' installation

In the standard Monopoly game	In the Serbian students' installation	Color code	Value in Monopoly currency
Mediterranean Avenue	Belgrade Pharmacy chain	brown	60
Baltic Avenue	University	brown	60
Oriental Avenue	Pioneer Park (Belgrade)	light blue	100
Vermont Avenue	Ušće district (Belgrade)	light blue	100
Connecticut Avenue	Fruška gora National Park	light blue	100
St. Charles Place	Telekom	pink	140
States Avenue	The media	pink	150
Virginia Avenue	Regulatory Body for Electronic Media	pink	150
St. James Place	Linglong	orange	180
Tennessee Avenue	Ironworks	orange	180
New York Avenue	PKB (Agro-Industrial Corporation Belgrade)	orange	200
Kentucky Avenue	River Jadar	red	220
Indiana Avenue	Bor Majdanpek (mines)	red	220
Illinois Avenue	Zaječar	red	240
Atlantic Avenue	Belgrade Waterfront	yellow	260
Ventnor Avenue	Hotel Yugoslavia	yellow	260
Marvin Gardens	General Staff building	yellow	280
Pacific Avenue	Kablar viewpoint	green	300
North Carolina Avenue	Pančičev vrh	green	300
Pennsylvania Avenue	Zlatibor	green	320
Park Place	Sava embankment	dark blue	350
Boardwalk	Makiš water source	dark blue	400

More valuable properties include the ironworks in Smederevo and the Agro-Industrial Corporation Belgrade, both sold after bankruptcy to international companies for minimal sums, as well as Linglong in Zrenjanin, the first European factory of the Chinese tire industry. These are followed by the River Jadar, which has become the focus of numerous initiatives to protect it from pollution that would result from the Rio Tinto project, and the mines in Bor and Majdanpek, which went bankrupt and were subsequently sold. Zaječar is included as the city where local elections took place on June 8, 2025, and students invested considerable effort through public events and gatherings to mobilize passive voters to exercise their right to vote in order to change the political climate. The board also includes three real estate investments in Belgrade – the Belgrade Waterfront project, Hotel Yugoslavia, which

was demolished in January 2025, and the General Staff building, which may be demolished in the near future since its status as a cultural monument was revoked in December 2024. Between these two spaces is an image of the Sava Bridge, a Belgrade landmark whose demolition was completed the day before the protest took place.

The most valuable properties are public goods that have already been threatened by excessive and inappropriate development: Mount Kablar; the Serbian section of the Balkan Mountains, defended by local residents against the construction of small hydropower plants; Zlatibor Mountain, endangered by real estate overdevelopment; and the Sava embankment, which has been defended by local citizens against excessive and semi-legal privatization. The most valuable of all is the water source that supplies the entire city of Belgrade whose sanitary protection zone has been narrowed. This zone implies a ban on construction and activities that could threaten the water source, while its reduction resulted from a series of decisions “characterized by non-transparency, contradictions, and public distrust in the work of institutions” (Popović 2023). As a result, the “privatization of sources, seizure of water source zones, rivers, embankments, streams and other water assets has been a trend for several decades, but also something against which many individuals and environmental initiatives and organizations are raising their voices” (Popović 2023).

The Novi Sad central station appears among the railroad and utility properties (Figure 6), which in the original game represent industries exploited to generate money before investing in real estate. Other such properties include the new central station in Belgrade, built since 1977, whose most recent development required structural repairs, raising questions about the safety and sustainability of the entire complex. They also include the Public Enterprise Electric Power Industry of Serbia, which has struggled for years and recently eliminated the option of direct bill payment without a bank commission; the Belgrade metro project, which requires readjustment in order not to endanger the city’s water source; the water supply in Zrenjanin, where tap water has been unsafe for drinking for over 20 years, due to very high arsenic levels; as well as heavily indebted municipal public transportation companies.

The action, tax, and corner spaces are least altered. The spaces *Chance*, *Jail/Just Visiting* and *Jail* remain unchanged to emphasize that anyone involved in the non-transparent misuse of public funds, public ownership, or public goods should be prosecuted. Some spaces, however, have been appropriated: one *Community Chest* space is changed to *RTS* (Radio Television Serbia) – the public informative media that citizens are obliged to fund through mandatory monthly payments, yet which fails to report objectively; *Income Tax* is changed to *Racketeering*; *Luxury Tax* is changed to *Money Laundering*, while *Free Parking* is changed to the so-called *Ćacilend* – the satirical term used for camps of organized supporters of the current political structures.

The installation of the appropriated *Monopoly* game provided the most comprehensive visual presentation of the broader problematic context in which the canopy collapse occurred. It referenced the bankruptcy and/or privatization

Figure 6: Railroad and utility properties in the standard Monopoly game vs. in the Serbian students' installation

In the standard Monopoly game	In the Serbian students' installation	Value in Monopoly currency
Reading railroad	Prokop (new Belgrade Central Station)	200
Electric company	Public Enterprise Electric Power Industry of Serbia	200
Pennsylvanian railroad	Waiting for the metro	200
B. & O. Railroad	Novi Sad Central Station	200
Water works	Water supply in Zrenjanin	150
Short line	City public transportation	200

of many publicly owned enterprises and services; their sale to international owners who provide little benefit to Serbia; the usurpation of national parks and common goods that directly endanger public health; selective and manipulated media coverage; the non-transparent distribution of public funds; the long-term appropriation of public urban spaces for political campaigns; the approval of industrial production not permitted in the EU; and the devaluation of labor and professional expertise. At once ironic and humorous, the installation was, in fact, deeply critical and made visible the privatization and degradation of publicly owned property and public services. In this sense, it resembled *The Landlord's Game*, the precursor to *Monopoly*, invented in 1904 by Elizabeth Magie to educate players about the negative consequences of land privatization. Unlike *Monopoly*, *The Landlord's Game* proposed that rent derived from commons, natural resources, and urban locations should belong to all members of society, while private profit should originate only from one's own production.

Within the game, the performativity of the central station, mediated through its image, perhaps resonated most strongly. It encouraged participants to recognize that the canopy collapse was not an isolated consequence of corrupt state services, but one of many examples of systemic corruption that could produce further victims. Up to that point, the protests had addressed corruption in a more abstract and general way, whereas the game communicated concrete, multiple examples of corruption and the interests that drive it. Through the game, the performativity of the station activated the performativity of other objects represented on the site, co-created knowledge and meaning, and strengthened people's determination to resist corruption.

Conclusion

Since November 1, the central station in Novi Sad has functioned as a *performative* in two ways: (1) as a site and (2) through various artistic means that reproduce its visual elements at citizens' mass gatherings and in online announcements

of those gatherings. As a site whose function has been commemorative since November 1, it has been standing as a space of empathy that, together with victims' memorabilia and the visible aftermath of the collapse, has prompted emotional transformation. It also stands as testimony to the tragedy, demanding accountability and transparency regarding the processes that led to it and shaping a particular gaze through which individuals and collectives perceive the society in which they live.

Since the canopy collapse, the central station has been actively *doing* something – it has evoked empathy in the wider public, turned the population into active witnesses, united them into a common identity, shaped people's ability to publicly express their feelings and views, and co-initiated events that may lead to social transformation. This was possible due to its performativity, which was embraced within mass gatherings that included numerous artistic representations of the station, such as large carried signs featuring the roofline, performances evoking the collapse, marionettes visualizing students' demands, and the appropriated *Monopoly* game that critically presented the broader context of the event. The central station in Novi Sad is therefore not defined solely by its original function, but by what it does – taking an active role in anti-corruption resistance as an actant operating in relation to both human and non-human entities, either as a site or through its representations.

The results of this research are significant for theories of performativity, architecture, and the use of artistic means in citizens' protests. The study shows that the performativity of a single architectural object can be experienced in multiple locations rather than being confined to one place. It also demonstrates that performativity can serve commemoration within bottom-up initiatives, not only within the top-down institutionalization of cultural memory, as in commemorative museums. The case of the Novi Sad central station and the mass protests that followed the tragedy illustrates how human and non-human actants can work together within a culture of resistance and how the performativity of architecture relates to the activities of all involved actors. Moreover, performativity appears to be a prerequisite for architecture to become part of actor-network relations. The topic leaves room for further research, particularly regarding whether commemoration is the key factor that connects the performativity of architecture and citizens' protests.

References

- AJS: Arhiv javnih skupova. 2025. „Mesta u kojima su održane akcije posle rušenja nadstrešnice“ (Places where actions were held after the canopy collapsed). February 2. URL: <https://javniskupovi.org/index.php/2025/02/01/gradovi-u-kojima-je-odrzana-akcija-zastani-srbijo/> (last accessed September 12, 2025).
- Andersen, Tawny. 2016. “An Object that Belongs to No One: Theorizing performativity in relation to trans-.” *Performance Research* 21 (5): 12–16. DOI: 10.1080/13528165.2016.1223435
- Austin, John L. 1962. *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Cabantous, Laure; Gond, Jean-Pascal; Harding, Nancy and Learmonth, Mark. 2016. "Critical essay: Reconsidering Critical Performativity." *Human relations*, 69 (2): 197–213. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0018726715584690>
- de Ruiter, Marinus. 2015. "Your own personal Horn of Plenty." In: Bogdanović, Ružica, ed. *On Architecture – Reworking the City through New Architecture. International Conference and Exhibition. Book of Abstracts and Exhibition Book*. Belgrade: STRAND – Sustainable Urban Society Association: pp.: 46.
- Jayemanne, Darshana. 2017. *Performativity in Art, Literature, and Videogames*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- JuGmedia. 2025. „Studenti u Nišu izveli performans sa maketom Železničke stanice“ (Students in Niš performed a performance with a model of the Railway Station). (January 31. URL: <https://jugmedia.rs/studenti-u-nisu-izveli-performans-sa-maketom-zeleznicke-stanice-video/> (last accessed January 26, 2026).
- Kaye, Nick. 2000. *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Konstantinović, Dragana et al. 2017. Dokumentacioni dosije za Železničku stanicu u Novom Sadu (TRC-RS-021-b-0002) (Documentation file for the Railway Station in Novi Sad). DoCo MoMo Serbia – International working group for documentation and conservation of buildings, sites and neighborhoods of the modern movement. URL: <https://www.docomomo-serbia.org/code/uploads/2018/03/26-TRC-RS-021-b-0002-Zeleznicka-stanica-Nov-Sad-SR.pdf> (last accessed January 22, 2026).
- Latour, Bruno. 2005. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Leatherbarrow, David. 2005. "Architecture's unscripted performance." In: Kolarevic, Branko, and Avi Malkawi, eds. *Performative Architecture: Beyond Instrumentality*. New York and London: Spon Press: pp.: 6–9.
- Leach, Neil. 2005. "9/11." In: Crinson, Mark, ed. *Urban Memory. History and amnesia in the modern city*. London and New York: Routledge: pp.: 169–191.
- Libeskind, Daniel. 2001. *Daniel Libeskind: The Space of Encounter*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Pavis, Patrice. 2016. *The Routledge Dictionary of Performance and Contemporary Theatre*, translated by Andrew Brown. London and New York: Routledge.
- Petersson McIntyre, Magdalena. 2018. "Gender by Design: Performativity and Consumer Packaging." *Design and Culture* 10(3): 337–358, DOI: 10.1080/17547075.2018.1516437
- Popović, Aleksandra. 2023. „Sistematsko uništavanje beogradskog izvorišta“ (Systematic destruction of the Belgrade water source). *Nedeljne informativne novine – NIN*, September 20. URL: <https://www.nin.rs/arhiva/vesti/38297/sistematsko-unistavanje-beogradskog-izvorista> (last accessed September 18, 2025)
- PSČ: Instagram profile *Podrška studentima* Čikago. 2025. URL: <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DHPRh5WsPBu/?igsh=YTI5M3d0bDltNzhm> (last accessed January 17, 2026).
- Sayes, Edwin. 2014. "Actor–Network Theory and methodology: Just what does it mean to say that nonhumans have agency?" *Social Studies of Science* 44(1): 134–149. DOI: 10.1177/0306312713511867
- Sodaro, Amy. 2018. "Affect, Performativity and Politics in the 9/11 Museum." *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* 14 (3): 171–192.
- Stojnić, Aneta. 2015. "The Problem of the Political in Cyberspace." *Art + Media: Journal of Art and Media Studies* 7: 103–109.

- UM: Instagram profile *Usrana motka*. 2025. „Studentima i građanima u obeležavaju komemoracije 1. 11. 2025. za 16 žrtava režimske korupcije pridružila se i naša dijaspora širom sveta“ (Our diaspora around the world joined on November 1st students and citizens in commemorating 16 victims of regime corruption). November 2. URL: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DQjRQ3zDKuu/?igsh=cTVxZWUwaG5kd2Ju> (last accessed January 26, 2026).
- Weigert, Laura. 2012. “Performance.” *Studies in Iconography* 33 (Special Issue: Medieval Art History Today – Critical Terms): 61–72.
- Widrich, Mechtild. 2016. “‘The Ultimate Erotic Act’: On the Performative in Architecture.” In: Stierli, Martino, and Mechtild Widrich, eds. *Participation in Art and Architecture: Spaces of Interaction and Occupation*. London: I.B. Tauris: pp.: 260–280.
- Williams, Paul. 2007. *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities*. Oxford and New York: Berg.
- Young, James E. 2001. “Daniel Libeskind’s Jewish Museum in Berlin: The Uncanny Arts of Memorial Architecture.” In: Zelizer, Barbie, ed. *Visual Culture and the Holocaust*. The Athlone Press: pp.: 179–197.
- Zrnić, Sanja. 2024. „Trg Republike: Gradska čistoća uklonila Crni flor Pijaniste“ (The Republic Square: City cleaning services removed the Pianist’s Black flor). November 24. URL: <https://vreme.com/vesti/trg-republike-pijanista-oslikao-crni-flor-u-dimenzijama-pale-novosadske-nadstresnice/> (last accessed January 26, 2025).
- Žugić, Višnja. 2017. „Performativnost arhitektonskog prostora: arhitektonski subjekat u funkciji proizvodnje značenja“ (Performativity of Architectural Space: Production of Meanings as a Function of Architecture) – PhD dissertation. Novi Sad: Faculty of Technical Sciences.

Sonja Jankov

Upotreba umetnosti i performativnosti arhitekture u okviru kulture otpora – slučaj železničke stanice u Novom Sadu

Apstrakt:

U radu se fokusira na performativnost arhitekture kroz studiju slučaja urušavanja nadstrešnice renovirane železničke stanice u Novom Sadu 1. 11. 2024, usled čega je poginulo 16 ljudi. Ukazuje se da je arhitektura performativna, u smislu da inicira akcije, podstiče sećanja, izaziva osećanja i transformiše nas u tom procesu. Može delovati kao katalizator društvene transformacije, a njena značenja koprodukuju korisnici i posmatrači, te arhitektura preuzima aktivnu ulogu u proizvodnji značenja i znanja. U radu se daje kraća analiza dosadašnjih istraživanja performativnosti arhitekture, te ukazuje kako su memorijalni muzeji poput Nacionalnog memorijalnog muzeja 11. septembra u Njujorku i Jevrejskog muzeja u Berlinu prepoznati ne samo kao mesta sećanja i istorije, već i kao prostori empatije koji mogu dovesti do moralne transformacije, zbog čega su oni performativni. Koristeći teorijska objašnjenja termina performativnosti u kombinaciji sa empirijskim istraživanjem, analiziraju se načini na koje je urušena železnička stanica u Novom Sadu postala performativna kroz brojne masovne proteste koji zahtevaju odgovornost i transparentnost u vezi sa koruptivnim procesima koji su doveli do nesreće. Tvrdi se da je železnička stanica performativna kroz (umetničke) akcije u kojima se ona pojavljuje kroz formu vizuelnih znakova, maketa, marioneta ili adaptirane igre *Monopol*, te se bliže analiziraju ovi postupci. U radu se zaključuje da je železnička stanica u Novom Sadu uvela novi oblik arhitektonske performativnosti koji se razlikuje od ranijih definicija, pokazujući da jedan arhitektonski objekat može biti performativan izvan svojih prostornih granica, na više lokacija istovremeno. Tokom protesta 2024–25. u Srbiji i

inostranstvu, železnička stanica u Novom Sadu postala je performativna u smislu da je mobilisala širu javnost u saosećanju sa žrtvama, očuvanju sećanja na njih i zahtevanju transparentnosti i odgovornosti u političkom diskursu. U tom smislu, ona je ujedinila širu javnost u jedan identitet.

Ključne reči: performativnost, performativna arhitektura, protesti, umetnost, participativnost, Novi Sad

