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**Scenography: a motley stream of colours, forms, and layers : editorial**

*Theatralia*. 2024, vol. 27, iss. 1, pp. 7-11

ISSN 1803-845X (print); ISSN 2336-4548 (online)

Stable URL (DOI): <https://doi.org/10.5817/TY2024-1-1>

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/digilib.80023>

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Access Date: 03. 07. 2024

Version: 20240626

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## Editorial

# Scenography: A Motley Stream of Colours, Forms, and Layers

The issue of *Theatralia* 1/2024 was composed in connection with the most recent Prague Quadrennial 2023 (PQ). The issue represents the most extensive output from our years-long collaboration with PQ, which has become more than just an exhibition of scenography. Working meetings and conferences of theatre studies scholars, scientists from related fields, and practitioners have enriched and extended the agenda of PQ beyond its original scope.

Two of such recently added multi-day events are PQ Talks, which in the short time of its existence has gained popularity and prestige as the top event of its kind, along with a smaller, two-day internal conference of the members of the Scenography Working Group of the International Federation for Theatre Research (IFTR/FIRT). The contributions from these two events have become the basis for the texts in the current issue of *Theatralia* in the Yorick, Guest, Events, and Archive sections.

The texts you will find in this issue are united by common phenomena – current and historical trends in scenography and PQ, – and they also mirror the diverse range of issues that can arise from scenography as a central theme. This diversity is due to both the different localities from which the authors come, and the increasingly broad field of exploration and research that is scenography.

Yorick section boasts of five studies by seven authors from different parts of the world. Their contributions reflect a practice typical for most foreign authors, namely that they work as practical scenographers and, at the same time, develop scientific and pedagogical activities in the field.

**Nikolas Kanavaris** is a Greek architect, scenographer, costume designer, educator, and author of scholarly articles and publications dealing with scenography in terms of the architectural treatment of stage space, the theatrical character of some off-stage

objects and concepts that have appeared or are emerging in the history of scenography. His article titled ‘Scenography as a Living Transformator of the Theatrical Space: The “On Stage” Spatialities of Giorgos Patsas and Dionisis Fotopoulos’ focuses on the work of these two famous Greek scenographers. Kanavaris analyses their scenography with regard to its relationship to the text and the actor’s body and movement.

This issue also includes articles by artists and theoreticians coming from the birthplace of the Biennale. **Renato Bolelli Rebouças** is from São Paulo, the city where ‘it all began’. As a scenographer, educator, and researcher, he has long been concerned with the socio-cultural aspects of scenography, its aesthetic, linguistic, and spatial principles established by the ‘global South’, that is, the countries of Latin America, Africa, and Asia, where scenography is closely linked to such factors as climate, environment, ritual, and unconventional, non-theatrical spaces. This is also the subject of his study ‘Expanded Scenography from the Global South’, for which the author drew inspiration from the concepts of sociologist Boaventura de Souza Santos.

In their study ‘Architecture, Performance, and Scenography: Exploring the Body Experience in the House – Insights from *Ensaio do corpo*’, the scenographer, architect, and urban planner **Natália Dário Mendes Barros** and the architect and scenographer **Cristiano Cezarino Rodrigues** from Belo Horizonte, Brazil, presented Natália Barros’s book *Ensaio do corpo no lugar de morar* from 2021. The author shows how, in the pandemic era, digital technologies can/could be used to gather a significant number of artists from all over the world and explore together, through performative experimentation, the possibilities of an expanded conception of scenography in a non-theatrical environment, in a familiar, domestic setting, using simple tools and expressive means of visual and performing arts. The authors’ aim was to stimulate reflection on the bodily experience of even such – pandemic-forced – activities, which, in essence, push the boundaries of scenography and give it further meaning and significance.

**Kristina Penna**, a scenographer, educator, and theorist from the University of Derby, UK, contributed to the issue with the article ‘Scenographic Contraptions: Designing Uncertainty and Orchestrating Error for the Generation of Participatory Scenography’, which explores the method of ‘scenographic error’, i.e., the moments when the scenographer attempts to invite the audience to participate and an interaction between the audience and the scenographic work occurs. The study is based on research on the human brain in relation to these situations.

In their study ‘Experiencing the Infra-Ordinary: The Power of Imaginative Spaces’, visual artist and educator **Tereza Stehlíková** and choreographer and dancer **Katja Vaghi** examine the site-specific performance, which took place at the PQ venue, the Holešovice Market Hall, from the perspective of multisensory perception and the importance of experience in theatre art. They focus on the protection and care that should be given to the imagination and the freedom of our perception.

The Spectrum section opens with **Zsolt Almási**’s contribution titled ‘The Theatrical Fate of Shakespeare’s Great Tragedies in Hungary: Metadata and Their Value’. The author zeroes in on staging the history of Shakespeare’s Great Tragedies in Hungary in the 32 years of the socialist regime (1958–1989) and the years that followed (till

2021). The focus of the article is the analysis of the metadata available for these productions and the demonstration of its use in further research. The study provides a critical reflection on the research methodology of production metadata and also offers their interpretation in a specific cultural-historical context.

**Tomáš Bojda** examines the practices of actor-interpretation within radio and audiobook production. His article ‘Radio and Audiobook Acting: Comparative Analysis of Two Audio Productions of *The Master and Margarita*’ deals mainly with the ways of acting and draws on their differences and commonalities. The author analyses the examples of two Czech adaptations of Mikhail Bulgakov’s novel *The Master and Margarita*, giving special attention to a creative path of motives, ideas, and concepts through audio medium, e.g., the creative concretisation of the literary subject and the relationship between the literary text and its vocal interpretation.

The last article in the section is in Czech: ‘Ohýbání času: Dramaturgické principy v projektovém způsobu práce Elišky Brtnické a kolektivu [Bending Time: Dramaturgical Principles in the Project Work of Eliška Brtnická and Collective]’. The authors, **Kateřina Korychová** and **Martin Bernátek** focus on the contemporary circus (*nouveau cirque*) performance *Thin Skin* (2022) by Czech acrobat Eliška Brtnická and her collective. The case study deals with dramaturgy, understood by the authors as ‘a practice that encompasses multiple functions and forms’ in specific conditions of the new circus. This case study explores the ‘dramaturgical decisions’ influenced by the working conditions of contemporary art in the Czech Republic, especially the residency system and the project-based working, and their influence on the rehearsal process and shaping the performance. The analysis also draws on Bojana Kunst’s insightful concept of ‘projective temporality’.

The Guest section brings two remarkable contributions from completely different localities, addressing different socio-political issues.

**Ian Garrett**, a Canadian designer, producer, educator, researcher, and associate professor of ecological design at the University of Toronto, traces sustainability in art and culture. He leads design work that focuses on the integration of ecology, technology, and scenography. He reflects this agenda in his text ‘Ethical Scenography in the North American Cluster Programme at the Prague Quadrennial’.

**Hadi Damien**, curator of Lebanon sections at PQ in 2015, 2019, and 2023, is a scenographer and educator at St. Joseph’s University of Beirut and the American University there. He also teaches, for example, at the Free University of Berlin. His article ‘Curating amidst Compounding Crises: The Lebanese Contribution to the 2023 Prague Quadrennial of Performance and Design and Space’ comments on the struggles of his country, which is going through deep crises, and how they are reflected in PQ 2023.

The Reviews section brings one PQ-nominated book to attention. **Eliška Raiterová** reviews Ross Brown’s *Sound Effect: The Theatre We Hear*. The book presents, as Raiterová sums up, ‘the understanding of sound as a dynamic and culturally embedded phenomenon’, and it is worth reading for those who are interested in history and exploring sound and hearing.

Four articles by the authors from different parts of the world are published in the Events section, ensuring this section's desired multifaceted nature. **Andrew Filmer**, a lecturer in the Department of Film and Television Studies at the University of Aberystwyth in the UK, explores 'Acts of Assembly: The Performance Space Exhibition at PQ 2023'. It zooms in on the meeting points of performance. The author also focuses on non-theatrical activities and architectures, on the communication of these dynamic, moving phenomena with static phenomena, which can change their status due to human action and subsequently become a dynamic, moving element. **Klára Zieglerová** has shared her thoughts on the *Fragments* Exhibition at PQ 2023, which showcased a range of tangible objects. These objects encourage visitor interaction, which the author believes is a valuable advantage in today's world of digital media and virtual digital models. Zieglerová places particular emphasis on the concept of scale and how it can impact the audience's emotional response to the exhibited objects.

**Albena Tagareva**, a lecturer at the Sofia Institute of Art Studies, in her article '*The Late Anthroposcene Findings: Rethinking/Recycling the Theatre Props. Bulgarian Participation in PQ 2023*' focuses on Bulgarian participation in PQ, which has a long history dating back to the year of PQ's inception in 1967. It examines the last PQ from the point of view of the Bulgarian exposition, which attempted to mirror the current issues addressed by (not only) Bulgarian society.

**Athena Stourna**, a Greek scenographer, researcher, and teacher based at the University of Peloponnese, presented at the Scenography Working Group symposium two projects dealing with the possibilities of incorporating through scenography and visual arts two groups of socially excluded individuals – the children of migrants and prisoners – in workshops and performances. In her article 'Transformation, Repair, and Change! Scenographic Strategies in Teaching Socially-Engaged Performance', she showed how effective and mutually beneficial communication through scenography and visual arts can take on additional meanings that intervene positively in the social and political spheres by breaking down barriers and helping to alleviate the trauma associated with inhumanity and exclusion.

In the Archive section, we present an essay by Chilean scenographer and teacher **Jhonn Álvarez**, 'Costume Design for Public Space: A View from Complejo Conejo, Chilean Performance Collective', which describes the methodology of the Chilean performance collective Complejo Conejo in designing costumes for their performances in public spaces. Two performances *Walking Fish!* and *What Do Astronauts Do?* were on view at PQ 2019 and 2023.

Hopefully, the diversity we have tried to capture reflects contemporary trends in scenography in particular: its obvious and increasingly marked convergence with what is happening in the visual arts, for example, and especially with what is moving human society more generally – see the tragic environmental degradation, the escalating conflicts in the world, migration, issues of human identity, and so forth.

We thank the editor Svitlana Shurma for her dedicated cooperation, care, and commitment, Aziza Kadyri for her help with the concept of this issue and first steps to make it true, and the reviewers of the studies of this issue. We would also like to thank

Adam Dudek, Pavel Drábek, and Markéta Fantová, colleagues from PQ, for their valuable advice and help with our work on this issue of *Theatralia*.

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