

Barros, Natália Dário Mendes ; Rodrigues, Cristiano Cezarino

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Architecture, Performance, and Scenography: Exploring the Body Experience in the House – Insights from *Ensaaios do corpo*

Natália Dário Mendes Barros / Cristiano Cezarino Rodrigues

Abstract

This article presents an analysis of Natália Barros' book, titled *Ensaaios do corpo no lugar de morar* (2021). The book deals with a theoretical, practical, and collaborative research within the realms of architecture, dance, scenography, performance design, and digital tools. Numerous artists from across the globe have come together, catalysing performative experiments that challenge conventional notions of dwelling. The aim of this article is to provoke reflections on the bodily experience within the home amid the global backdrop of the pandemic, based on a digital performative experiment that appears to blend an expanded conception of scenography with certain elements of domestic life.

Key words

architecture, book, digital performance, domesticity, scenography

The title could be loosely translated as *Essays on the Body in the Dwelling Place*. However, this translation does not fully capture the significance of 'home' as a place that encompasses memories, history, and identity. The origins of the book trace back to Natália Barros' final graduation project under the supervision of Cristiano Cezarino at UFMG's architecture faculty. The project received awards, leading to the publication of this book.

Ensaio do corpo no lugar de morar [Essays on the Body in the Dwelling Place] (2021) was an artistic project that investigated the experience of dwelling during confinement and the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the relationship between the body and spatiality. The pandemic had a worldwide impact on ways of living and dwelling, with Brazil experiencing particularly severe consequences.¹ The global response to the new coronavirus involved confinement, physically restricting individuals to their homes, leading to fundamental shifts in lifestyles and dwelling habits. The interplay between the human body and physical space underwent significant changes, both in urban environments and domestic settings.

Faced with the impossibility of experiencing the city as usual – moving through blocks of buildings, enjoying public spaces, and gathering on the streets – individuals found themselves retreating into their homes, where the fundamental point of architecture resides: dwelling (*sensu* PALLASMAA 2017). As we adapted to this new reality, we were also rethinking and reshaping our relationship with our homes and the spaces we inhabit. In light of the need to reinvent social interactions and adapt built environments to pandemic-induced changes, we propose some questions based on the book *Ensaio do corpo no lugar de morar*: what does it mean to live in confinement? How does the human body adjust, limit, or redefine its relationship with space? How does space trigger emotional responses and reshape spatial perception? How has the practice of scenography adapted to this new scenario? How can we reassess spatial dynamics in a post-pandemic future? How does art alter our perception of space? What motivates artists to persist and resist? How can art evoke emotions beyond the confines of a screen?

In the face of the pandemic's challenging scenario, which imposed limits and interruptions on artistic and cultural endeavours, numerous artists worldwide embraced this research and artistic experimentation project that originated from the Instagram page @entreparedesejanelas and culminated in this published book. Through the convergence of the human body with its surroundings (or more precisely, the interaction of diverse bodies with their places of living), art, artists, and their homes underwent a process of reinvention during the pandemic. An open invitation was extended to people around the world. The intention was to promote an artistic-cultural exchange and reflection on the creative power of art in the face of the consequences of the pandemic caused by the coronavirus, which prompted a reconsideration of spaces and ways of living. The research reached a considerable artistic, cultural, and ethnic-racial diversity. Over 100 artists participated in the project on Instagram, from various cities, countries, and continents: Brazil, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Germany, Canada, Hungary, and Portugal.

From all over the world, they melded or clashed their bodies against their homes, seeking to embody and challenge the essence of the sense of dwelling. To encourage playful uses and mindful explorations of their homes, we proposed to project partici-

1 In Brazil, the government's efforts under Jair Bolsonaro to contain the virus were either inadequate or contradictory to effective measures and immunisation. The World Health Organization (WHO) deemed the pandemic situation in Brazil alarming.



Fig. 1: The artist Natália Sá does not see the architectural structures of her home as barriers but as spaces for appropriation by her performative body. Personal archive of the author (Natália Barros).

pants that they seek to respond to some provocations. They were: Have the ways of dwelling changed with the pandemic? What are the conflicts between your body and the space? How to resignify the spaces? How to evoke the synesthesia of space? How to be attentive to perceive and interpret the house through the five senses? Therefore, individuals were encouraged to perceive their residences through textures, shadows, reflections, scents, levels, paths, routes, obstacles, and sounds. Bodies were prompted to engage with the space through one or more of the five senses: touch, smell, hearing, sight, and taste. Additionally, they were urged to challenge the conventional use of their homes by utilising spaces, furniture, and structures in unconventional ways (e.g., Fig. 1).

The familiar haven, where each individual's intimacy resides, was illuminated by an unfamiliar and curious perspective that left an impact on every individual, leading to the discovery of the potential of their homes as spaces for artistic practices aiming to construct alternative worldviews. This collaborative research initiative brought together artists from around the world, catalysing innovative experiments that pushed the boundaries of traditional concepts of living and encouraged fresh viewpoints on our

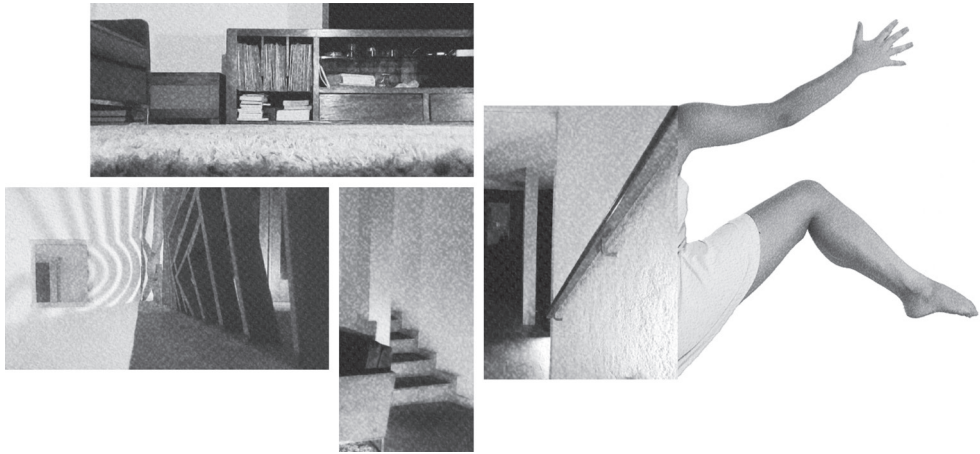


Fig. 2: Performance *Além da tela*, 2020. Photo: Natália Barros.

interaction with our homes against the backdrop of a global pandemic. Presented with these experimental artistic endeavours, we were all invited to reflect upon the essence of dwelling, the significance of the architectures we are crafting, and the intricate connection between our bodies and the spaces that provide us shelter.

In this article, we will delve into reimagined concepts of architecture, performance, and scenography in response to the global pandemic's influence on spatial dynamics, while also exploring how art serves as an inventive and alternative reaction. Our objective is to pose inquiries about the embodied encounter (of a confined body within our homes during the pandemic) through the analysis of a digital performance developed within the context of the book's project. This performance appeared to merge an expansive understanding of scenography with specific elements of architecture or domestic life (Fig. 2). We have structured our discourse into three segments: initially, we explore an architecture concept that prioritises action and consequently, the kinetic body. Subsequently, we introduce an extended concept of scenography whose confines intertwine with performance. Lastly, in the third segment, we interlink these notions with one of the performances documented in the book, named *Além da tela* (2020) (which could be loosely translated as 'Beyond the Screen').

Architecture as a verb²

We assume that in order to reinvent spatial relationships, an updated perspective on the concept of home is necessary. Through the perspective proposed in the book, a home is not merely a dividing membrane between the individual and the external environment, establishing distinctions between inner and outer environments. More than a physical structure, the home represents – or should represent – the place of living: a space that harbours fears, fantasies, desires, and memories. The dwelling becomes an omega point, a vantage from which we perceive the totality of the world and establish a more genuine, rooted connection.

However, this perspective is not innovative. Philosopher Gaston Bachelard, in *The Poetics of Space* (1957), already recognised that a genuinely inhabited space carries with it the essence of a home. Furthermore, Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa is a significant figure in this discourse, adeptly exploring the correlation between space and the subjective experience of inhabitants across various layers of phenomenology. As Pallasmaa (2017) suggests, inhabiting constitutes a fundamental ontological encounter with spaces, shedding light on the embryonic phases of the relationship between being and the world, or *Welt-innenraum*. Consequently, the essential nature of space aligns more with the subjective, affective, psychic, and emotional dimensions of being rather than the purely physical attributes of constructed structures (see PALLASMAA 2017).

In this context, the act of dwelling encompasses a multitude of facets that extend beyond the mere physical structure of a house. Dwelling entails technical, functional, material, mental, experiential, and subjective dimensions. Within the framework of this book, the deliberate use of the term ‘place of living’ or ‘place of dwelling’ instead of ‘house’ was a thoughtful choice aimed at illuminating the disparity between the terms. Because of the translation, it is important to point out that we prefer to present these two similar expressions rather than choose just one of them. Both ‘place of dwelling’ and ‘place of living’ refer to where a person resides but emphasise a broader sense of home, including day-to-day experiences, rather than just the physical space itself. Both terms can carry emotional and personal connotations, often associated with a sense of belonging, memories, and personal history. They focus on the active aspect of living, the emotions associated with having a home to live in, highlighting the actions, experiences, and interactions that take place within that environment (see Fig. 3).

Therefore, while ‘place of living’ or ‘place of dwelling’ carry connotations of home, lived experiences, and memories, the term ‘house’ evokes mere notions of structure, shelter, and construction. Consequently, the term ‘house’ might fall short in capturing a more profound symbolic essence. Conversely, the expressions ‘place of living’ or ‘place of dwelling’ encapsulate and intertwine, at their core, the construction of

2 This title refers to a section in Pallasmaa’s book *Habitar* (2017). Furthermore, there is another experimental performance included in the book (which precedes the *Além da tela* performance as part of a warm-up) that embodies the concept of ‘architecture as a verb’. This performance can be accessed at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G00WRGSIBO0>.

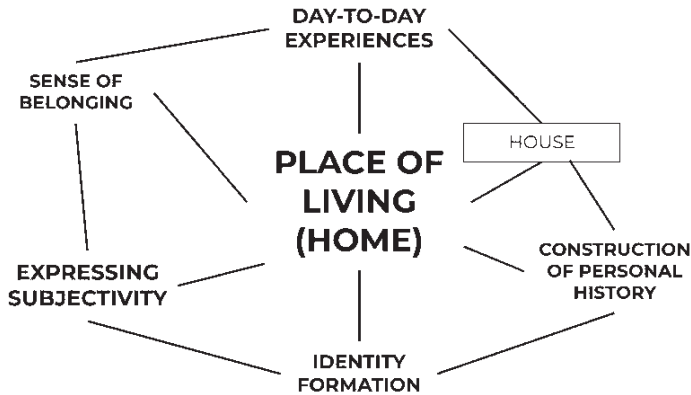


Fig. 3: The difference between place of living or place of dwelling and house.
Concept: Natália Barros.

personal history, individual transformation, the potential for expressing subjectivity, identity formation, a sense of belonging, and the entitlement to urban spaces. As such, the act of dwelling assumes vital importance in shaping one's very essence.

Once we understand inhabiting as the foundation of the being-in-the-world relationship, dwelling is no longer solely defined by technical parameters; it encompasses sensory, mental, subconscious, and poetic dimensions. In the book *Habitar* (2017), a collection of five essays on the notion of dwelling by Juhani Pallasmaa, there is a section titled 'Architecture as a Verb'. In this segment, the Finnish architect contends that bodily responses are integral to the architectural experience and should take precedence over purely formalistic, aesthetic, and functional aspects. According to Pallasmaa, the event (experience) stands as the foundational core of lived spaces, surpassing the significance of the edifice (structure and materiality). Hence, the essence of architectural experience is communicated through verbal actions – implying encounters, interactions, perceptions, and the relationship between the body and space – rather than static nouns.

Consequently, spaces cannot be reduced to mere objects, as if they were mere conglomerates of bricks, walls, beams, or floors. In this context, it is the act of traversing a doorway (marking the transition between entering and exiting) that shapes the architectural experience more than the physical structure of the door itself, or the act of gazing out of a window, surpassing the visual design and composition of the window itself, or even the act of congregating around a dining table, exceeding the physical appearance of the table itself (PALLASMAA 2017: 96–97). Therefore, inhabiting presupposes less the physical confines of the built environment and more the usage and appropriation that transpire within it. Within this conceptual framework and against the global pandemic, the performance *Além da tela* proposes to occupy and subvert the space of the home through the occurrence of the body in movement.

Beyond objective, aesthetic, and programmatic variables, architecture is an experience that bears marks of time and history, habits and memories of its inhabitants. Architecture is not a noun. Architecture is a verb. Dwelling, cooking, sleeping, eating, socialising, reading, entering, exiting, fitting, creating, adapting, belonging, moving, decelerating, staying, experiencing, improvising, constraining, expanding, sensing, occupying, embodying, composing, imagining, perceiving, changing, discovering, expressing, performing, recognising, affecting, exploring, subverting, breathing. By humanising built blocks, architecture becomes a lived metaphor. (BARROS 2021: 39)³

Scenography as performance

As architecture is understood more through action than merely as a fixed object, the verb becomes the linguistic expression capable of conveying experience rather than the noun. It is not just about the door itself, but the act of passing through it, thus the body becomes centrally important. In this way, the home is more than just an architectural structure; it is a collection of affections, stories, and memories – the true essence of home. During the coronavirus pandemic, due to confinement, homes also became stages for experiences in the realms of theatre, scenography, and performance design. Therefore, we construct this topic of the article based on the hypothesis that architecture and scenography merge with the experience of the body, reinventing performative spatialities during the pandemic.

Similarly to the developed notion of ‘architecture as a verb’, in her work ‘Scenography or: Making Space’ (2012), Thea Brejzek presents a reflection on the concept of space, particularly on the act of crafting spaces in scenography, and the expansion of our understanding of spatial dimensions and practices. According to Brejzek, the traditional notion of space as a static physical construct with defined boundaries has evolved. Instead, she highlights a dynamic spatiality that unfolds over time, only truly experienced through action, and emerging as an ongoing process resulting from interactions among the environment, creators (whether scenographers or not), participants, and spectators. Each of these spatial agents becomes both co-authors and witnesses, influencing the interpretation of spatiality. As such, the focus shifts from a final output to a collaborative process of shaping spatial experiences, intrinsically reliant on the active presence of the human body. Consequently, the essence of creative significance lies not solely in the end result, but also in the process and the experiential dimension it encompasses.

I have called the acts and processes of the staging of space, the making of space, and of scenography the production of an expanded field of presence and it is within this expanded field that the construction of meanings takes place. In this presentness, the notion of expansion refers to a heightened experience of the here and now, and to a spatio-temporal and sensorial expansion in processes of action and reception, of participation and enactment. (BREJZEK 2012: 17)

3 Unless indicated otherwise, all translations are the authors’.

Directly related to this is a broader concept of scenography. The term scenography originates from the Greek word ‘σκηνογραφία’ (*skenographia*), where *skene* signifies the scene, theatrical ensemble, or stage, and *graphía* pertains to writing, drawing, or representation (HANN 2019). However, Pamela Howard’s inquiry, *What is Scenography?* (2009), is more challenging to address nowadays. While scenography was once understood as the design of the stage or a decorative art form applied to the backdrop, it now encompasses an expanded and hybrid scene that involves the realm of performance. It has evolved into a relational spatial practice that relies on the actions of actors and the reception of the audience to achieve completeness (RODRIGUES 2016: 100–101).

Referencing Frederick Kiesler’s manifesto *The Theatre is Dead* (1926), Rachel Hann highlighted in *Beyond Scenography* (2019), that scenography paradoxically both perished and endured, reemerging in a transgressive form that challenges established dogmas and ventures beyond conventional models of theatre history (HANN 2019: 1–2). Traditional theatrical practices, marked by text-centredness, illusionism, pictorialism, decor, and ornamentation (ROUBINE 1998), are now viewed through different lenses, and certain notions of space, as well as categories such as form, style, and representation, seem inadequate to describe the transformations in practice, visuality, and spatiality that scenography is undergoing. Scenography is now understood within alternative contexts, materialities, and the diverse interactions between the stage, actors, and audience (see REBOUÇAS 2022).

Nowadays there are various experiments beyond the confines of traditional theatre buildings, transcending the conventions within each specific category while opening scenography to a process of hybridisation and dissolution of artistic boundaries – for example, approaching performance (QUILICI 2014). The pursuit of new terminologies, such as expanded scenography or expanded scene, reflects an attempt to craft language capable of encapsulating or explaining this expanded and hybrid scene (FERNANDES 2018). The concept of ‘expanded scenography’ terminology draws inspiration from Rosalind Krauss’ influential essay *Sculpture in the Expanded Field* (1979), where she uses the term ‘expanded’ to signify shifts in the parameters of sculptural art that go beyond traditional boundaries and associations (MCKINNEY and PALMER 2017: xiv).

In her essay ‘A cenografia como performance: influências da Quadrienal de Praga’ [Scenography as Performance: Influences from the Prague Quadrennial], Aby Cohen explores the creative process and possibilities within scenography, considering the context that propels scenographers beyond the confines of the theatre and into the realm of performance design experiments. According to Aby Cohen (2018: 138), she pursues ‘different ways of telling stories, not only by designing spaces, but giving it a sense of living, creating a lively place, inhabited by the poetry created with scenic design elements’. Cohen explores the expansive potential of scenography, which embraces various artistic languages and performance design, as a catalyst for meaningful encounters – an ephemeral event-space⁴ that fosters dynamic interactions between actors and the audience.

4 Reference to the book *Event-Space: Theatre Architecture and the Historical Avant-Garde* (2019) by Dorita Hannah.

In this context, Aby Cohen underscores how the Prague Quadrennial functions as an experimental arena that highlights the shifting terminologies employed to describe scenography in the modern theatre landscape. The Prague Quadrennial – PQ is the largest worldwide exhibition occurring every four years in Prague, Czech Republic, where the latest works and investigations in the art of scenography are showcased, indicating changes and innovations in the field (see HOWARD 2015). During the 12th Prague Quadrennial – PQ 2011 the transformations that scenography was undergoing were exemplified by the very change in the event’s name, evolving from *Prague Quadrennial of Scenography and Theatre Architecture* to *Prague Quadrennial: Performance Space and Design* (COHEN 2018). This terminology continues to be adopted, as seen in the most recent edition of the event, held in June 2023.

At PQ 2023, we gain insight into Aby Cohen’s proposition of scenography as a performance, surpassing the traditional static roles of prop or decor, or the fixed stage where the audience passively observes. Scenography transforms into a dynamic entity, inviting active engagement from the audience and embodying life. Based on the theme RARE, PQ 2023 received submissions from around the world, this time particularly multidisciplinary, collective, and developed as multi-sensory experiences in scenography, theatrical architecture, and performance design. Two exhibitions from PQ 2023 particularly interest us: the United States’ installation *Our Home: Unheard Voices of Past and Present*, and the Brazilian exhibition *CROSSROADS: We Believe in Crossroads*. Although not strictly within the realm of performance design, these two works from PQ contribute to the dialogue in our article regarding the intersections between home and scenography, influenced by the experiences of the body and performance. While it would also be possible to delve into the Portuguese installation due to its relation to the intimacy of home (‘building a space is building ourselves’) or the proposal from Cyprus for evoking the weight of memories, which is closely related to the idea of home, we will focus solely on reflections from the American and Brazilian exhibitions.

The United States provided a unique environment with a structure resembling a house (Fig. 4), stimulating reflections and discussions on the country’s diverse multiplicity. According to the proposal, we understand ‘the home as a signifier of place, belonging, identity, language, and culture is an influential lens on design’ (PQ 2023b). In this sense, the projection of videos by different artists onto the home-like structure functions as a performance that permeates and influences the PQ scenography warehouse with the aesthetics of dwelling. Although structural, the installation extends beyond its physical materiality, traversing space-times with memories and meanings embedded in the home.

The Brazilian exhibition, on the other hand, also centred on cultural diversity as a concept (mainly valuing African and indigenous roots). Through an interactive and sensory experience (especially auditory), it opened up to visitors. Awarded with the Best Teamwork prize, the Brazilian installation invited listening with the purpose of echoing the polyphony of cultural themes, daily scenes, street corners, and experiences from the various ‘Brazils’ to the public. Sounds structured the scene itself and



Fig. 4: United States' exhibition. Collection of PQ 2023 (PQ 2023b).

connected Prague to various homes, experiences, and realities in Brazil. The exhibition turned into a cross-seas cartographic encounter between both lands. For example, the entire floor covered with dry yellowed hay (Fig. 5) transported the visitor to another space, one that ceased to be Prague because Brazilian essence occupied every corner; yet it was not strictly Brazil either, as rays of sunlight, conversations, and noises from the PQ universe entered through windows, doors, and the ceiling. Designed as an interactive immersion, the installation engaged the entire body of the audience: in walking through the mix of dry plants; in interacting with the sound objects, accents, traits, textures, people, and places along the way; and in inward contemplation facing the experience of listening and opening to other senses. More than the physicality of space and objects, the installation reverberated the performance of the moment, of the now, of the body in presence discovering the potentialities of that exhibition.

This blurred boundary between scenography and performance opens up new avenues for interaction, where space, time, movement, materials, sounds, and narratives converge seamlessly. This dynamic presence of scenography resonates with Juhani Pallasmaa's ideas in his book *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (2005), advocating for architecture to engage all senses beyond visual perception (incorporating touch, smell, and sound). That being said, it seems that in similar ways the concepts of architecture as a verb and scenography as performance merge due to their potential for bodily experience (Fig. 6). Thus, the performance serves as an innovative practice,



Fig. 5: Brazilian exhibition. Collection of PQ 2023 (PQ 2023a).

placing the body at the centre of a unique spatial relationship within the realms of scenography and architecture.

This concept of the body as the focal point of experience resonates powerfully within the realm of performance art, particularly when considering the context of the pandemic. The term ‘performance’ carries a nuanced and multifaceted meaning that goes beyond simply referring to physical activity. While physical activity involves bodily movements and actions, performance encompasses a broader range of concepts and implications that cannot be fully captured by the term physical activity, such as expressiveness, interpretation, spatial dynamics, narrative, and interaction. Performance is not merely spectacle, dance, or theatre, although it can be associated with all of these artistic domains. Performance incorporates expressive movements of the body as a means of articulating spatial concepts, emotions, and narratives. Through actions and gestures, performers communicate ideas, themes, and atmospheres, transcending mere physical activity to embody dynamic and expressive forms of art. As noted by Maria Beatriz de Medeiros, performance can be described as an ‘unfaithful cry expelled directly from the depths of the viscera into the hollow of space, capable of traversing time’ (DE MEDEIROS 2012: 81). The embodied experience within architecture and performance design involves the integration of the physical body, sensory perception, and spatial interaction to create immersive and engaging environments.

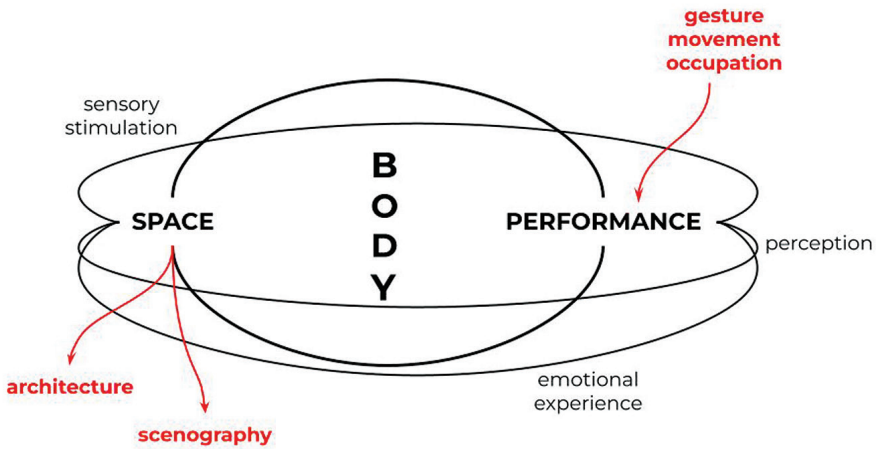


Fig. 6: The performance appears to function as an innovative practice that situates the body at the core of a distinct spatial relationship within the realms of scenography and architecture. Concept: Natália Barros.

During the pandemic, numerous artists have utilised their homes as scenographic settings. In their performances, the home transforms into a stage where the body interacts with architectural elements, giving rise to a creative amalgamation of spatial and sensory experiences (ANDRADE et al. 2021). According to Andrade et al. (2021), pandemic-driven performative experiences, such as the performance *Além da tela*, bring together the aesthetics of domesticity and scenography, mutually appropriating each other while being influenced by the language of the webcam.

[...] a practical experimentation of this pandemic scenography through the investigation of the performance of the home, the poetics of intimacy, the aesthetics of domesticity. The idea was to seek to find the dramaturgy of the home as the place of dwelling [...]. We inhabit our homes with our bodies, and within these habitual bodies, we create memories of this ‘dwelling’ and the familiarity of the place. It is precisely within these bodily memories, habits, and repeated and restored movements of daily life, that space enacts its performance upon us. This manifests as a sort of implicit dramaturgy within the surfaces, forms, and designs of the surroundings, furniture, and objects. (ANDRADE et al. 2021: 9)

Digital performance *Além da tela*: personal account of Natália Barros⁵

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Building on the points we have discussed thus far, our aim is to demonstrate how the performance *Além da tela* in the book *Ensaio do corpo no lugar de morar* intricately intertwines the concepts of architecture and scenography discussed in this article. Some of the reflections we intend to elucidate through this performative experiment include: What are the fundamental aspects of an embodied experience that can be underscored in the performance? How does the performance merge an expanded conception of scenography with elements of domestic life? In what ways does the interplay between architecture, scenography, and performance foster a refreshed understanding of the notion of dwelling? Since the performance was both developed and experienced by Natália, we will adopt a first-person singular perspective in this section of the article, embodying the voice of the author herself.

On 29 September 2020, in the city of Belo Horizonte, in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais, the performance *Além da tela* unfolded as a public virtual event, broadcasted live. Fundamentally, the performance constituted an experimental exercise delving into my television room with my body from a subversive angle. My choice of the TV environment for investigation was intentional, not arbitrary. Given the heightened activity and usage of this ‘favourite’ space within the household, it served as the focal point. Amidst the COVID-19 induced isolation, the TV room morphed into a multifunctional zone, doubling as a home office, dining area, gym, cinema, and recreation spot. This shift prompted spontaneous subversion of the space, transcending its conventional role solely for television consumption. Consequently, my aim with the performance was to push the boundaries of subversion, exploring alternative ways to utilise, occupy, and reclaim the space, thereby shaping novel scenic spatialities.

Prompted by the pandemic that confined us indoors, yet also propelled by my performer body, I decided that subverting space would be the guiding principle of my study through performance. At its core, the performance examined the theme of domesticity from two distinct angles: the domestic (the essence of life’s meaning within the home and subjectivity) and the act of domestication (the state of being subjected). Amplified by the constraints of confinement, my research focused on domestication, prompting one of my inquiries: to what extent does architecture – or more broadly, spatial constructions – impose a particular way of living, dictating daily uses, controlling how spaces are occupied, and shaping the appropriation of bodies? In light of this, I aimed for the performance to be an artistic manifestation allowing the transmutation of ordinary dwelling, imprinting a more imaginative and challenging way of appropriating my domestic space – without allowing it to dictate or domesticate my body’s desires and aspirations, as architectural designs sometimes tend to do.

5 The performance is available at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjqjZBYJtD0>.



Fig. 7: Performance *Além da tela*, 2020. Photo: Natália Barros.

The performance established a dialogue between my body and the television room, where both were affected, metaphorically shaping the solidity of the house while simultaneously challenging bodily actions. Experimenting with the house's forms, from the hardness of the rustic walls to the softness of the carpeted floor, my body crawled, fit, and unfit itself in every corner of the space. I tested unconventional ways to occupy a TV room, diverting, disturbing, and subverting the expectations and functional norms of this space (designed almost exclusively for passive TV consumption). In this sense, instead of simply sitting to watch television, I climbed, jumped, sank, and slid my body across the couch. Spread out on the floor, I crawled and felt the texture of the plush carpet in the room. If the TV stand is typically furniture designed to support the TV, in the performance, it had to accommodate the weight of my body moving over it in a balancing act from my feet along the narrow space – so narrow that as I walked, I knocked over the remote control. As if that was not enough, akin to a child's game, I leaned on the railing and walls, positioning my body to descend the stairs without touching my feet to the steps. The performance reinvented and merged the poetics of intimacy, the aesthetics of domesticity, and the theatrical spectacle.

Not only a myriad of visual elements, movements, and textures, but also a whirlwind of sounds from the domestic environment shaped the performative scene. To construct the experimental soundtrack, I recorded various sounds produced in my home throughout the pandemic for weeks. The singing of birds, the clatter of dirty dishes in the sink, my father's work meetings, conversations during card games, street noises... I incorporated the sounds of the house as a compositional element – alongside my identity, memories, and history. The house was not merely a backdrop but rather a dramaturgy of integration between the domestic and the theatrical-performative



Fig. 8: Performance *Além da tela*, 2020. Photo: Natália Barros.

spectacle. While the house preserved and recalled old habitual records of my body, it also embraced the exploration of a new corporeal investigation. Consequently, we witnessed the creation of new spatialities, the result of the reinterpretation of home by the scenic intention.

With the aim of disrupting the normative codes and signals that dictate daily habits and behaviours within the home, improvisation and chance were embraced by me in the performance. Thus, the scenic-performative experiment was open to spontaneity, engaging in a sincere dialogue between my body and my home. The performance was a dual process of creative action and resistance against predetermined practices of spatial engagement. The moving body acted as an agent in deviating from conventional spatial norms, disrupting the mundane and enabling a playful and subversive exploration of the domestic environment. Consequently, experiments emerged that involved both adaptation and misalignment of the body with the architectural features of the house, resulting in a blend of displacement, deviation, and discomfort.

Conceived within the context of social isolation, I designed the performance directly for the language of the internet camera, thus being in digital format, which determined some specific strategies. I opted against editing and manipulating the filmed material, preferring to use it raw, in live online transmission mode. In doing so, I valued unpredictability as a creative element. The artistic direction of the performative scene, in turn, was based on using the TV room as a set, fragmented into various fields of vision. Four cameras were strategically positioned in different corners of the space (on the stairs, under the carpet, facing the television, and at the opening of the wall), providing distinct viewpoints that complemented and intersected (Fig. 10). My moving body through the space was captured by each of the framed

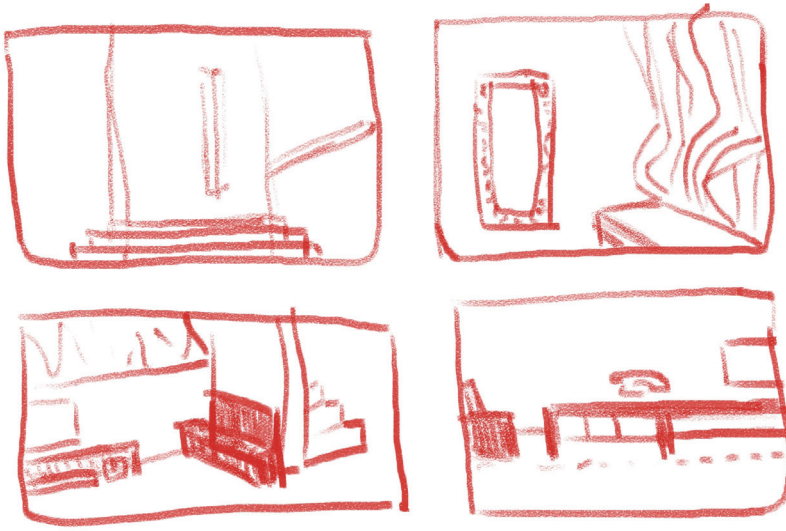


Fig. 9: Illustration of camera positions in the performance *Além da tela*. Concept: Natália Barros (2020).

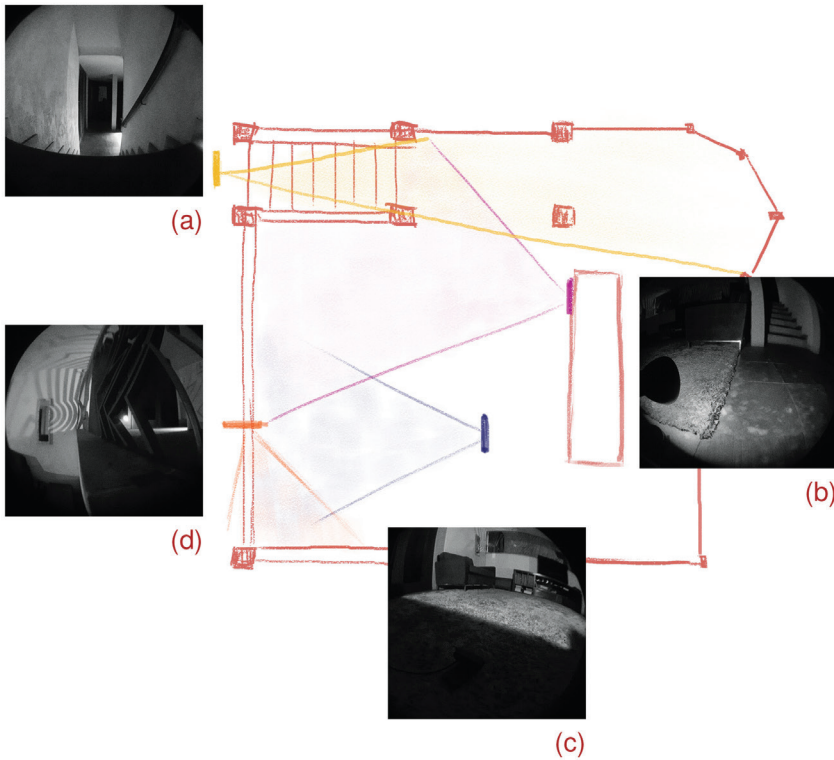


Fig. 10: Camera positions in the performance *Além da tela*. Concept: Natália Barros (2020).

perspectives of the room. The experience mediated by the four screens – beyond the other screens of the spectators and via streaming – transformed the house into a set of virtual stages for the scenic-performative action. The aesthetics of domesticity were blended with those of the performing arts. The intimacy of the house was opened to the viewing public.

The language of the camera and digital technologies was considered in terms of its challenges and potentials, serving as both a driving force and a tool for scenic construction. However, the use of technology assumes a contradictory role, diverging from its conventional practicality. Virtual transmission, initially seen as a consequence of the need for recording, evolves into a fundamental component of the performance, breaking away from mere technological functionality. In addition to the aesthetics of multiple screens, the four cameras used were not controlled by me, the performer. In fact, the dynamic of camera inputs and outputs was under the control of another person: another body in another space (specifically, another city). As a result, the level of control over the performance was intentionally reduced, as part of the ‘scenic writing’ was done through the cameras. Instead of configuring a single camera and subsequently presenting an edited video, the experience was mediated through a variety of screens, combined with the unpredictable nature of the moment. The dramaturgical and visual potency of each frame was also carefully considered as scenic resources in constructing the performance. Furthermore, despite the physical separation between the performer and the audience, a temporal synchrony seemed to bridge the gap between these two entities (that of the observer and that of the performative body). The intimacy of the domestic space itself built a new layer of meaning – autobiographical – enhancing the sophisticated interplay of perspectives, screens, materialities, and movement.

We witness a performance that reveals itself as a reinvention of both architecture and scenography, transcending the conventional notion of a fixed and built ‘place’. These dimensions merge within the spatiotemporal realm of the event, in the fleeting moment of the performance, constantly reshaped by the moving body. The domestic space is metamorphosed into a digital stage, navigated by the body, and mediated by screens, in an interaction between the poetics of intimate home life and the dramaturgy of habitation. In this context, the house becomes not merely a physical location but also a dynamic, real, and virtual environment, blending architectural and scenographic elements, where the interaction between body and space redefines the experience of living and performativity. This form of scenic architecture emerges as a dynamic interplay between the constructed environments and the bodily acts of dwelling and performing, melding body and space within the phenomenological domain of human experience.

Considering the scenic-performative language as the driving force of the creative process, we arrive at new strategies for thinking and creating spatialities. The subjective experience of bodily performance within the home opens pathways to explore perception, imagination, fiction, and reality, delving into technology as well, as the camera played a crucial role in constructing spatial experiences. In this context, the



Fig. 11: Performance *Além da tela*, 2020. Photo: Natália Barros.

camera becomes an essential tool in shaping spatial environments, while the scenic-performative language propels new creative strategies for envisioning and crafting these spaces. Scenography, architecture, performance, and technology transcend their individual boundaries, becoming mediating interfaces through which the body communicates, expresses, and metamorphoses. The house, a fundamental landmark of human-world interaction, transcends its conventional role as mere shelter. In this exploration, performance intertwines with it, generating a scenic architecture that extends as a manifestation of the moving body (Fig. 12). This architecture constructs spatial experiences, inviting diverse sensory encounters. The domestic space awakens, forging new spatial relationships guided by bodily presence. The tactile experience echoed by Walter Benjamin underpins this notion – space is experienced, created, and remodelled through the sensitive body. The performative experiment creates a sensory and spatial experience that involves both the performer and the audience in a new way of perceiving and interacting with the domestic environment.

Conclusion

Through this article, our intention was to establish a connection between the concepts of ‘architecture as a verb’ and ‘scenography as performance’ and the way the performance was both conceptualised and portrayed in the book. As explained earlier, the book serves as a documentation of this performance’s process, capturing its impact after its occurrence. This chronological relationship between the performance and the book allowed us to delve into the analyses presented here. In striving for a synthesis, it

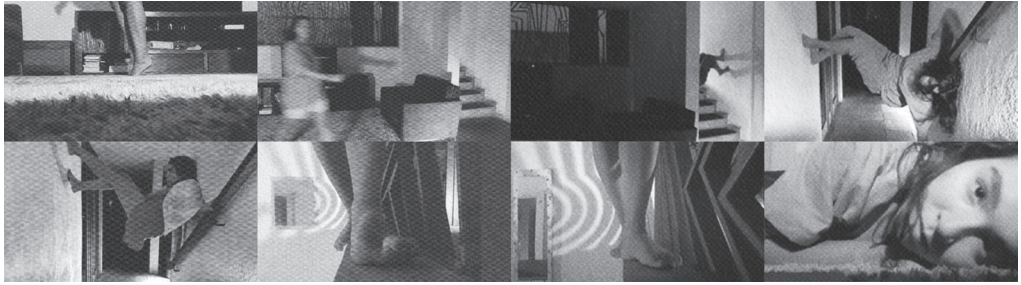


Fig. 12: Performance *Além da tela*, 2020. Photo: Natália Barros.

becomes evident that the interplay of time and the physical body within the unfolding of the performance is what bridges the gap between the concepts presented, highlighting an approach to architecture and scenography that centres on the embodied experience.

The concept of ‘architecture as a verb’ challenges the conventional notion of architecture as a static object, instead placing emphasis on the dynamic and performative aspects of space. This perspective is evident in the examined performance, where the architecture of the home transcends being a mere physical structure and transforms into a space that is not only inhabited but also experienced. The performance erases the boundaries between body and space, fashioning a dynamic and interactive milieu that beckons the audience to engage actively. Likewise, the concept of ‘expanded scenography’ disrupts the conventional confines of scenography and performance design. In this context, the performance rises beyond the confines of being a stationary prop, a decorative element, or a rigid stage. It evolves into a living entity that encapsulates vitality and entices the virtual audience to engage in the present moment of the event, even within the realm of online transmission.

Our argument centres on the notion that this approach to scenography and architecture opens new paths for interaction and reception of the performative event. Space, time, movement, materials, sounds, and narratives seamlessly converge, melding within the unfolding event. This performative reverberation extends beyond the pandemic’s confines, permeating today’s discussions on scenography and architecture, given that we continue to grapple with its aftermath. The book, akin to a window, provides an interface that opens to the participation of other artists exploring the concept of home. Even when this window is seemingly closed, as in individual performances, it allows rays of light to penetrate shared theoretical dialogues. Moreover, as a multiplatform endeavour – spanning from the pages of the book to the digital screens of the performance, encompassing architecture, scenography, design, video, and more – it offers a multidimensional vista of transdisciplinary and technological intersections.

Amidst the era of isolation, where digital realms became our refuge, artistic efforts like those elucidated in the book bridge the virtual with emotional and physical metamorphoses. The tangible and the virtual coalesce within the time-space of performance. As our relationship with time evolves, so does our interaction with space,

prompting the body to embrace new sensory and spatial perceptions. Everyday routines, modes of occupancy, and both objective and subjective meanings of dwelling undergo metamorphosis and exposure within the pages of this performance-turned-book. Overall, through this article, we sought to underscore the paramount significance of the embodied experience within architecture and performance design. We aimed to demonstrate how the concepts of ‘architecture as a verb’ and ‘expanded scenography’ can serve as tools for crafting dynamic and interactive environments. These environments challenge conventional boundaries, inviting the audience to participate actively in the performance. However, just like the book itself, our intent was not to conclude definitively, but rather to speculate – to pose questions and provoke reflections that beckon other discerning minds to join, contributing to and expanding upon this ongoing exploration.

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Natália Dário Mendes Barros, Master of Architecture

UFMG, Architecture School of the Federal University of Minas Gerais,
Theory and History of Architecture and Urbanism
Paraíba Street, 697, Funcionários, Belo Horizonte/MG, 30130-141 Brazil
nataliadmendesb@gmail.com
ORCID: 0009-0006-3664-1928

Natália Barros is a Brazilian architect, set designer, artist, and researcher. She took part in PQ 2023 and has also partnered with J. C. Serroni on several of his scenography projects. Her first book, *Ensaíos do corpo no lugar de morar* (2021), stems from an acclaimed transdisciplinary project.

Dr. Cristiano Cezarino Rodrigues

UFMG, Architecture School of the Federal University of Minas Gerais,
Projects Department
Paraíba Street, 697, Funcionários, Belo Horizonte/MG, 30130-141 Brazil
cristianoc@ufmg.br
ORCID: 0000-0001-6774-7246

Born in Brazil, **Cristiano Cezarino** is an architect, set designer and a transdisciplinary practitioner/scholar. He is an Associated Professor at Architecture School and in the Post-Graduation Programme at Fine Arts School (UFMG). He received an MA and a PhD in Architecture and Urbanism from UFMG, Brazil.



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