PARADIGMATIC SHIFT FROM STAGE DESIGN TO SCENOGRAPHY

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Prologue

The intellectual point of departure for this book lies in the need to understand stage space not merely as a decorative element, but as a philosophical problem in its own right. For a long time, space in the performing arts was treated primarily as the site in which action unfolds. Yet philosophical thought has long shown that space is far more than a neutral container of events. It is bound up with visibility, perception, power, and the conditions under which subjects and objects come to appear.

As Michel de Certeau suggests, there is a profound difference between viewing the world from above, through the detached and controlling eye of a disembodied observer, and moving through it on foot, establishing a partial yet active relation to places and things through bodily engagement. Traditional dramatic theatre largely offers the spectator the illusion of a totalizing, almost godlike gaze. Scenography, by contrast, unsettles that position. It displaces the spectator from the safety of distance and turns perception into an active process of orientation, interpretation, and synthesis.

It is precisely here that Jacques Rancière's notion of the emancipated spectator becomes crucial. Theatre is not a space in which the audience passively receives meaning in the dark; it is a political site of encounter in which spectators interpret, select, connect, and construct meaning for themselves. In this sense, the politics of visibility concerns not only what is shown, but also how the visible order is organized and disrupted and how those human and non-human agents that have been rendered invisible assert themselves and challenge the distribution of what is seeable, sayable, and thinkable.

As Peggy Phelan reminds us, the spectator's gaze is never innocent: in looking at the other, the subject also participates in the making of the self. Likewise, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of embodiment enables us to understand the stage

as a phenomenal space in which body and consciousness are inseparable. On stage, the actor's body does not simply represent a character; it makes presence tangible. In a similar way, objects that may appear passive, inert, or disposable in everyday life acquire vitality within scenographic space. Light, sound, material, and object cease to function as secondary supports and instead emerge as active participants in performance.

From this perspective, scenography reveals the unstable, transient, and vibrant potential of theatrical space. It invites us to move beyond the logic of mere representation and beyond the protocols of capitalist commodification toward a more ecological awareness, one in which human and non-human entities coexist in dynamic relation. This book explores that transformation. It traces how the stage shifts from being understood as a static set to becoming a philosophical laboratory and a political forum, an active and performative field in which perception, embodiment, and visibility are continuously reorganized.

To enter the landscape of the stage, then, is also to enter a space of disturbance and possibility. It is to ask how theatre shapes ways of seeing the world, and how those ways of seeing may in turn be challenged, reconfigured, and transformed.

This work, which examines the ontological and paradigmatic shifts in stage design, is the outcome of an intellectual journey that would not have been possible without the support of those around me. First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my doctoral advisor, Prof. Dr. Ayrin Ersöz. Her intellectual guidance, academic rigor, and unwavering encouragement have been fundamental to the development of this research. She has not only guided my academic work, but also encouraged me to think beyond the visible limits of the stage. I am equally grateful to Istanbul Yeni Yüzyıl University, my academic home, for its institutional support.

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1.Introduction

Today, when we go to the theatre, we usually expect more than just a visually appealing, beautiful stage set. We want to immerse ourselves in a world that surrounds us, a world that breathes, where we interact with the actors and the story. This process of shaping and creating this world of meaning is called scenography, but a long way has been taken to get there (Hann, 2018). This journey extends from the wooden hut called skene (σκήνη) in ancient Greek theatre (which evolved into scene in Western languages today), to the optical illusions of the Renaissance, and to the technologically mediated stages of today (Skene, n.d.). The story begins with the term skenographia (σκηνογραφίαν), a combination of the Greek words skene (hut/tent) and grapho (γρᾰ́φω), meaning to write/describe (Brockett & Hildy, 2007; Grapho, n.d.; Skene, n.d.). The term skenographia (σκηνογραφίαν) is mentioned for the first time in the Western canon by Aristotle, and only once, in his works Poetics, 1449a18 (Aristotle, ca. 335 B.C.E./1995, 1449a18). This situation shows that the term, from the moment it was born, represents both a historical break and is positioned as a technical sub-branch of visuality (opsis). Aristotle, in his work Poetics, written around 335 BC, while describing the historical development of tragedy, directly attributes this innovation to Sophocles (5th century BC) and states: “Sophocles brought the third actor and scenographia.” (Aristotle, ca. 335 B.C.E./1995, 1449a18). Halliwell (1998) notes that although Aristotle places visuality (opsis) last among the six elements of tragedy, he considers scenographia (1449a) important as a historical milestone (Halliwell, 1995/1998). For Aristotle, tragedy should have an impact even if it is not staged but only read (Halliwell, 1995/1998). Therefore, visual elements are considered the work of the stage technician

(skeuopoios), not the poet; however, Halliwell (1998) interprets Sophocles' introduction of scenographia not merely as adding scenery, but as the theatre acquiring a mimetic environment. This transformation marks the moment when the stage ceases to be an empty playing area and is conceived as a specific space (e.g., a palace or a forest), and theatre history gains a spatial consciousness.

In this context, the skene, initially a small wooden structure located behind the performance area and serving as a dressing room for the actors, gradually transformed into a powerful narrative tool. For that period, scenography was not merely decorative scenery, but a spatial response to the needs of the dramatic story. For example, since violence was forbidden on stage, characters killed inside the skene were brought out and shown to the audience using an ekkylema (a wheeled platform). Gods did not appear on stage suddenly; they were lowered onto the stage from above, as if descending from the heavens, using a crane-like mechanism called a mechane (Brockett & Hildy, 2007). This staging gave rise to the concept of "Deus ex Machina." Therefore, even in those years, space was a functional and kinetic system that combined physical reality with the metaphysical necessities of the text (Brockett & Hildy, 2007).

Following a long period of stagnation, stage design in the Renaissance underwent a radical transformation that would shape it for centuries. With architects like Sebastiano Serlio, the concept of perspective was introduced to the stage (Serlio, 1545/1996). The aim became creating the illusion of infinite depth on a flat canvas. However, this development also had a dark side, which we might call the perspective trap. The entire stage was designed so that the image appeared perfectly from a single fixed point in the audience hall (the ruler's eye) (Aronson, 2005). The scenography was laid out against a passive, two-dimensional backdrop that reduced the audience to mere observers. This designed space was more a space existing in

the architect's mind than in the physical experience of the actors. By the end of the nineteenth century, artists like Adolphe Appia and Edward Gordon Craig rebelled against the tyranny of the painted canvas. Their main argument was simple: a living, three-dimensional actor appeared incongruous and ridiculous in front of a two-dimensional, painted set (Appia, 1962). Appia demanded a rhythmic space composed of ramps that resisted and highlighted the actor's body, while he conceived of light not merely as illumination but as vibrant music appealing to the eye and the rhythm of movement. Craig, on the other hand, envisioned a stage that could be moved like a musical instrument, and in 1910 invented Screens: movable, neutral walls that could create countless spaces with light and shadow (Craig, 2008).

By the twentieth century, the stage had acquired a political and industrial character. Vsevolod Meyerhold, in order to capture the energy of the new Soviet society, transformed the stage into a game machine resembling a production factory (Braun, 1998). During the same period, Oskar Schlemmer, at the Bauhaus, sought a geometrical spatial arrangement that transformed the human being into an abstract art figure (Trimingham, 2017). Bertolt Brecht and Caspar Neher took a different path. They did not want to create an illusion that would make the audience forget their real world, anxieties, and troubles. Neher defined himself as a Bühnenbauer (Sokel, 1966). By leaving the stage lights exposed and using half-curtains, he reminded the audience that this was an illusion and that there were social realities to consider. In the second half of the twentieth century, Josef Svoboda combined technology and the stage. He invented a psycho-plastic space that worked with mirrors, lasers, and projections (Burian, 1974). Svoboda's stage is like a living organism, reflecting the character's mood and mind, capable of changing in seconds (Svoboda, 1993). Meanwhile, Tadeusz Kantor embodies the burden of memories and history by using old and devalued objects such as

rusty wheels and decaying school desks. He creates bio-objects in which the human being and the stage props are tightly intertwined, transforming into a single, suffering entity (Kantor, 1993).

In order to understand the transformation that scenography has undergone in the present day, we must change our perspective on space. Thinkers such as Henri Lefebvre (1974) and Edward W. Soja (1996) argue that space is not merely a concrete presence. According to Lefebvre, space is produced through our actions, emotions, and politics. Soja, following Lefebvre, introduces the concept of Thirdspace. In scenography, this means that the stage is not merely a physical place (firstspace) or the designer's idea (secondspace), but a living space where reality and fantasy are synthesized during the performance (Soja, 1996). Today, we are in the age of expanded field, as defined by Joslin McKinney & Scott Palmer (2017) and especially Rachel Hann (2018). Hann (2018) argues that scenography is no longer a concept solely tied to theatrical space. We encounter scenography when we attend a street festival, watch a political rally, or experience a compelling museum exhibition. According to Hann's (2018) concept of worlding, scenography is a method of creating a separate world with its own rules and atmosphere. Hann (2018) speaks of place-orientation; scenography not only shows us an image but also directs us to a place, making us feel who we are and where we stand.

In today's postdramatic world, where directors like Robert Wilson and Heiner Goebbels have worked, the image now occupies an equal position with the dramatic text (Jürs-Munby & Lehmann, 2006). Scenography is no longer the servant of the text, but an independent stage partner that appeals to the senses (Howard, 2009). While scenography is broadly considered the manipulation and orchestration of the performance environment, it encompasses the dynamic relationship between lighting, sound, costumes, performance objects, and spatial structures with the performing

bodies and the text, beyond the stage set (McKinney & Butterworth, 2009). From the twentieth century onwards, scenography has broken away from the static and pictorial understanding of set design, reconstructing the stage as a three-dimensional architectural space that contributes kinesthetically to the performance experience (Aronson, 2005). Consequently, this study examines the definition, scope, and paradigmatic transformation of scenography, a discipline central to performance production, from stage design to scenography.

2.Conceptual and Etymological Origins of Scenography

To understand the workings of contemporary theatre creation, it is necessary to examine the complex historical and etymological transformation of the term scenography, which has undergone significant change from its ancient origins to its modern applications. Often confused with stage design or set design in English-speaking traditions, scenography represents a far more holistic discipline meaning the manipulation and arrangement of the performance environment (McKinney & Butterworth, 2009). Scholars such as Joslin McKinney, Philip Butterworth, and Scott Palmer treat scenography not as creating a backdrop for the action, but as an active element comprised of components such as space, text, actors, directors, and audience (McKinney & Palmer, 2017). To grasp this transformation, we must return to Ancient Greece, the foundation of Western theatre. In Ancient Greece, the interaction between the physical architecture of the stage and the fictional world of the play led to the first need for a vocabulary for visual and spatial organization.

The etymological roots of the word scenography (Skenographia) are entirely Greek, derived from the combination of the words skene and grapho (Aristotle, ca. 335 B.C.E./1995). Grapho simply means to write, to depict, to describe (Grapho, n.d.). Skene, on the other hand, has a more concrete meaning. In the early days of

ancient Greek theatre, the skene was a modest tent or wooden hut located behind the performance area, primarily serving as a dressing room for the actors. Over time, it evolved into a permanent wooden or stone structure with a central door and eventually side entrances. This structure sometimes represented a facade, sometimes a palace, temple, or a general outdoor space, forming the inevitable backdrop of the dramatic action (Arnott, 1991). Consequently, the word scenography can be understood as "Stage Painting" or "Description of the Scene".

Historical records indicate that the practice of painting skene to represent specific locations began in the 5th century BC (Aristotle, ca. 335 B.C.E./1995; Brown, 2014; Halliwell, 1998). While Aristotle attributes the origin of skene painting to Sophocles in the relevant passage of his work Poetics, the Roman architect Vitruvius attributes this innovation to Agatharchus of Samos, who is reported to have painted a scene for a tragedy by Aeschylus (Aristotle, ca. 335 B.C.E./1995; Vitruvius, ca. 15 B.C.E./2001, 7.Praef.11). Vitruvius notes that this artistic contribution was not limited to a purely decorative innovation, but inspired philosophers Anaxagoras and Democritus to write treatises on perspective (Vitruvius, ca. 15 B.C.E./2001). He states that this led to new ideas, particularly regarding how the rays of vision should react to the central point to create the illusion of a building in the background (McKinney & Butterworth, 2009; Vitruvius, ca. 15 B.C.E./2001).

3.Scenography as a Spatial Response in Ancient Greece

The stage design of ancient Greek theatre was not limited to painted panels; it relied on a sophisticated integration of architectural elements defining the relationship between the spectator and the spectated (Rehm, 2009; Wiles, 1999). The theatre was divided into three distinct zones: the theatron (the viewing area or audience hall), the orchestra (the circular area where the chorus was located), and the skene (the stage building) (Bieber, 1961; Csapo & Slater, 1995).

The theatron usually surrounded the orchestra in a semicircle slightly larger than 180 degrees, allowing the audience to see each other and emphasizing the social and political nature of the event (Rehm, 2009; Wiles, 1999). The chorus, representing the people, occupied the orchestra, acting as intermediaries between the audience and the heroic or divine characters in the area in front of the skene (proskenion) (Csapo & Slater, 1995; Taplin, 2003). To facilitate scene changes or convey narrative information, the Greeks developed specialized mechanisms that constituted some of the earliest forms of stage technology (Bieber, 1961; Ley, 2010). Pinakes were painted panels, probably made of wood and canvas, that could be placed in the openings of the skene (thyromata) and indicated scene changes (Bieber, 1961; Csapo & Slater, 1995). Periaktoi were rotating triangular prisms, each of whose three faces depicted a different scene (Bieber, 1961; Vitruvius, ca. 15 B.C.E./2001). These mechanisms possessed the power to instantly alter the visual context of the drama.

In ancient Greece, scenography was a spatial response to the structural problems of dramatic narrative (Rehm, 2009; Wiles, 1999). For example, since the depiction of violent acts on stage was forbidden, these events took place inside the skene, outside the audience's field of vision (Csapo & Slater, 1995; Taplin, 2003). Corpses or the consequences of violence were shown to the audience via a wheeled device called an ekkylema, which was pushed out through the central door of the skene (Bieber, 1961; Ley, 2010). Similarly, the vertical dimension of the stage was also part of the production of dramatic meaning. A crane-like device called a mechane would lower the actor portraying the god onto the stage from above (Csapo & Slater, 1995; Taplin, 2003). In this way, divine figures appeared to descend from heaven to earth, ending seemingly intractable conflicts with divine intervention (Rehm, 2009). These mechanisms demonstrate that Greek stage design was not a static

decoration but a functional, kinetic system for conveying meaning and depicting space, integrating the physical realities of theatre with the metaphysical requirements of the text.

4.The Perspective Trap and Terminological Loss in Rome and the Renaissance

In ancient Greece, scenography served as an active spatial response, but by the Roman and Renaissance periods, as the focus of representation shifted from theatre production to the systematization of architectural knowledge, it had transformed into a perspective-based drawing technique and a passive illusion (Damisch, 1994; Pérez Gómez & Pelletier, 1997). Vitruvius, in his important work on architecture, Ten Books on Architecture, formalized the definition of scenography in the 1st century BC, not as stage decoration but as an architectural drawing method (Vitruvius, ca. 15 B.C.E./2001). He defined it as the shading of the front and back sides of a building, where all lines converge at a central point using ichnographia (ground plan) and orthographia (height) (Vitruvius, ca. 15 B.C.E./2001; McEwen, 2004).

This definition foreshadowed the concept of perspective, which would remain dormant until it was forcibly revived during the Italian Renaissance (Pérez Gómez & Pelletier, 1997). In 1545, Sebastiano Serlio published his book Architettura, in which he applied Vitruvius's principles of perspective to theatre (Serlio, 1545/1996). Serlio's study revealed the dominance of the perspective stage, where the stage was sloping (upwardly inclined) and surrounded by angled wings painted to create the illusion of infinite depth (Anderson, 1992; Serlio, 1545/1996). For the next few centuries, scenography became synonymous with the art of creating two-dimensional pictorial illusions that attempted to mimic three-dimensional reality (Damisch, 1994; Grafton, 2002). During this period, the widespread use of the term scenography largely disappeared, and it was replaced by terms such as "Decor," "Stage

Design," or "Theatre Decoration," which defined visual elements as the background of the text (Anderson, 1992).

5.Modern Fractures

Scenography underwent a radical transformation in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, influenced by a rebellion against the Renaissance tradition of two-dimensional illusionism (Beacham, 2014; Innes, 2013). The profound changes in the visual and spatial language of theatre redefined the concept of stage design (Howard, 2009; Aronson, 2005). As mentioned in the section on the Conceptual and Etymological Origins of Scenography, the term scenography (skenographia) originates from Ancient Greek and initially referred to the painting of the stage wall, but it evolved over the centuries, gaining particular significance with the Renaissance (Pérez Gómez & Pelletier, 1997; Vitruvius, ca. 15 B.C.E./2001). In the works of architects such as Sebastiano Serlio, the dominant model in stage design was based on creating an illusion of accelerated perspective and depth (Anderson, 1992; Serlio, 1545/1996). This model prioritized the pictorial element over the physical element, resulting in scenes dominated by flat, two-dimensional, painted backgrounds that served only as a decorative backdrop for dramatic action (Aronson, 2005; Beacham, 2014). However, with the emergence of the modern director and the radical changes in the theatre scene during the twentieth century, the term scenography gained new life (Innes, 2013). This paradigmatic shift was largely driven by two important pioneers, Adolphe Appia and Edward Gordon Craig (Craig, 2008; Innes, 2013). Visionaries like Adolphe Appia and Edward Gordon Craig laid the foundations of modern scenography by recognizing the incompatibility of a three-dimensional, moving actor with static, two-dimensional, painted images, thereby completely eliminating reliance on pictorial illusionism (Appia, 1962; Beacham, 2014; Craig, 2008).

5.1.Rhythmic Spaces, Hierarchy, and Theory of Light: Adolphe Appia

Adolphe Appia's visionary theories were fundamentally catalyzed by his profound disillusionment with the staging traditions that dominated the late 19th century. Appia recognized that the reliance on elaborate sets composed of a combination of painted planes, borders, and backgrounds was a fatal flaw (Appia, 1962; Bablet & Bablet, 1981; Beacham, 2014). These sets aimed to create a realistic illusion of a physical space through meticulous stage painting. However, Appia argued that this illusion was entirely false and inherently contradictory because it placed the actor's plastic, living, and three-dimensional body in front of a flat, two-dimensional canvas (Appia, 1962; Innes, 2013). According to Appia, the undeniable physical reality of the human body invalidated the painted perspective, rendering the visual medium lifeless and detached from the action (Beacham, 2014; Fischer-Lichte, 2008). For Appia, however, a genuine, organic fusion between the actor and the performance space was absolutely essential; that is, everything on stage had to actively contribute to a three-dimensional harmony tightly woven around the performer's physical presence (Appia, 1962; Aronson, 2005).

Appia's quest for a harmonious stage setting was inextricably linked to Richard Wagner's operas and his concept of the Gesamtkunstwerk, or integrated work of art (Innes, 2013). Appia developed his fundamental theories of scenography by creating highly detailed scenarios and designs for Wagner's operas (Beacham, 2014). In his works La mise en scène du drame Wagnérien (1895) and Die Musik und die Inscenierung (1899), Appia argued for a return to a kinetic and living stage. He proposed structures composed of rigid, three-dimensional forms such as stairs, ramps, and platforms that resisted the actor's body, but his visionary proposals were often rejected by the Wagner family. Appia admired Wagner's

ability to embed the emotional and psychological essence of the drama within the music; for him, music was a key that unlocked the spirit of the play. However, while Wagner's music was powerful and three-dimensional, the stage design used at the time was artificial and weak. According to Appia, if a work of art comes to life through music, then everything that appears on stage should conform to the rhythm of that music. Appia believed that in order to achieve true aesthetic reality on stage, this weakening dissonance between the art of sound and the art of spatial movement had to be definitively overcome (Fischer-Lichte, 2008; Innes, 2013).

To resolve this internal staging conflict, Appia developed a theory of a hierarchy of organically constructed production elements consisting of musical notation, actor, spatial arrangement, and lighting (Appia, 1962; Beacham, 2014). At the top of this hierarchy was the music, which Appia saw as the soul of the drama (Appia, 1962). The music gave life to the performance, its internal vibrations, rhythms, and the way it tightly determined every physical movement of the organism in terms of both proportion and sequence (Appia, 1962; Innes, 2013). If any link in this organic chain were broken or missing, the expressive power of the music would be interrupted. Consequently, the three-dimensional reality of the actor's body became the critical starting point for Appia's spatial considerations (Beacham, 2014). The stage space was not merely an abstract concept to be embellished, but a physicalization to be actively defined by the perception of the actor in motion and the audience, both ultimately determined by the structural timing of the music (Appia, 1962; Fischer-Lichte, 2008).

In keeping with this hierarchy, Appia proposed the complete elimination of the dominance of painted planes in theatre, demanding that the focus shift from the realistic depiction of the scene to the creation of the scene's emotional atmosphere (Appia, 1962; Beacham, 2014). Using Wagner's Siegfried as a prime

example, Appia opposed attempting to present the audience with a realistic illusion of the forest; instead, the stage designer should strive to create the illusion of a man within the atmosphere of the forest (Appia, 1962). The man was the only reality that mattered, and everything else on stage existed only to contribute to the surrounding atmosphere (Appia, 1962). This philosophy led Appia to replace visual clutter with a simple and meticulous arrangement of three-dimensional space (Beacham, 2014). He used horizontal, vertical, and diagonal lines and planes to define spatial volumes, and frequently designed gradual levels of receding that naturally guided the eye towards the horizon. In Appia's spatial mapping, moving the actor towards the back of the stage connected the character with universal or cosmic themes, while moving them towards the front of the stage created space for deeper, more personal and intimate interactions (Innes, 2013).

A significant turning point in Appia's development of stage design was his encounter with the work of Émile Jacques-Dalcroze, particularly his Eurhythmics system (Beacham, 2014; Innes, 2013). Originally designed to help musicians develop a physical sense for rhythmic playing, this system provided Appia with the practical mechanism he needed to integrate music and the human body (Beacham, 2014). After watching Dalcroze's lecture-demonstration in 1906, Appia felt he had finally found an answer to his passionate desire for synthesis, discovering a dramatic art that led to the externalization of the body in space. In direct response, Appia developed the concept of rhythmic space and presented Dalcroze with stage designs utilizing solid architectural masses such as stairs, ramps, platforms, walls, and columns. These rigid, sharp, and immobile geometric forms were deliberately designed to create a stark contrast with the softness, delicacy, and fluidity of the human body, thus acquiring a borrowed kinetic life through physical contrast (Appia, 1962; Beacham, 2014).

This theoretical collaboration came to life practically when Jacques-Dalcroze founded an institute in Hellerau in 1910. Appia took on a consulting role and fundamentally influenced the architectural layout of the Hellerau Festival Auditorium. His design, a radical departure from tradition, eliminated the separation between stage and auditorium, creating an open, unobstructed space fifty meters long, sixteen meters wide, and twelve meters high, without a raised stage or hidden orchestra pit. This space hosted the inaugural festival of Eurhythmics in 1912 and was the setting for the highly successful production of Christoph Willibald Gluck's 1762 work, Orpheus and Eurydice (Beacham, 2014). Appia's theories were masterfully brought to life in the scene depicting Orpheus's descent into the underworld. Orpheus entered from the highest point of the monumental staircase, illuminated by bright light, and slowly descended into the ever-increasing darkness despite the active resistance of the Furies. The Furies, clad in dark tights, moved rhythmically along the stairs and platforms, forming a veritable mountain of moving, monstrous shapes in a realm bathed in Hades' otherworldly blue light (Appia, 1962; Beacham, 2014).

At the heart of Appia's revolution in stage design lay his profound understanding and elevation of stage lighting. For Appia, lighting was not merely a tool for visibility; it was the expressive power of music in the visual realm. He argued that light, like music, could uniquely express the intrinsic essence of seeing (Appia, 1962; Palmer, 2015). Working closely with Alexander von Salzmann in Hellerau, Appia classified stage lighting into two distinct and essential qualities: diffused light and live light. Diffused light provided a general layer of light achieved through stationary devices placed behind translucent curtains and dipped in cedar oil to deepen their brightness (Appia, 1962; Beacham, 2014, Palmer, 2015). Live light, in contrast, was produced by movable devices that emitted intense, directional beams, specifically positioned to create intense

shadows. Appia understood very well that the direction and quality of light could only be perceived through shadow, and argued that without shadow there could be no light, and therefore no true visibility or expression (Palmer, 2015). Live light served as an extraordinarily subtle tool for the stage designer, used like a sculptor's chisel to emphasize objects, distort forms, and give mass to physical elements on stage or dematerialize them, thus allowing the space to expand, contract, and move (Appia, 1962; Beacham, 2014; Palmer, 2015).

In conclusion, Appia's spatial and lighting innovations signaled a radical social vision for the future of theatre (Fischer-Lichte, 2008; Innes, 2013). His intense dissatisfaction with the proscenium arch, which he saw as both a real and metaphorical barrier, fueled his desire to unify the stage and the audience as a common, shared space. Appia envisioned a future where the separation between performers and audience would completely disappear (Appia, 1962; Beacham, 2014). He believed that the term "production" would eventually become obsolete, and that theatrical events would transform into magnificent, harmonious festivals in which the entire audience actively participated, eliminating the role of the passive spectator.

5.2.Über-Marionette and Kinetic Architecture: Edward Gordon Craig

Edward Gordon Craig, who was active during the same period as Appia, represents another cornerstone of twentieth-century stage design. Their visions share many similarities, particularly their shared disdain for two-dimensional realism and their vehement advocacy for three-dimensional, light-enhanced spaces, leading to misunderstandings that Craig directly copied Appia's ideas. In reality, however, they developed their philosophies entirely independently (Innes, 2013). Craig only became aware of Appia's designs for Wagner in 1908 and believed Appia had died by 1911.

The two never actually met until they did so at the Zurich Theatre Exhibition in 1914. Until then, their theatrical backgrounds were vastly different. Appia was deeply immersed in the world of opera and music, while Craig was rooted in the practical, everyday realities of the dramatic stage (Beacham, 2014). Craig, the son of the famous actress Ellen Terry, trained as a respected actor at Sir Henry Irving's Lyceum Theatre in London from 1889 to 1897, even playing the role of Hamlet on several occasions (Craig, 1931; Holroyd, 2009).

However, in 1897, due to his profound dissatisfaction with the state of British theatre, Craig abandoned acting entirely. He then turned his attention to directing, design, and theoretical studies. He edited the magazine The Mask (1907) and published important texts such as On the Art of the Theatre (1911) and Towards a New Theatre (1913) (Taxidou, 2014). When Craig and Appia began corresponding after 1914, they realized a deep spiritual affinity, sharing the same enthusiasm and desire for theatre. However, Craig criticized Appia's vision, claiming it was clouded by his adherence to Wagner and Dalcroze. Craig, on the contrary, believed he had discovered the absolute and pure materials for true theatrical art: light and movement through light (Eynat-Confino, 1987; Innes, 2013).

Craig's experience as an actor formed the basis for his theoretical rejection of the human actor as the primary medium of theatrical art. Having witnessed firsthand how an actor's ego and emotional instability could affect a performance, Craig introduced one of his most famous and often misunderstood concepts in his 1908 work, The Actor and the Über-Marionette (Craig, 2013). Craig vehemently argued that acting could not be considered a true art form because it relied on material constantly susceptible to accidents and inconsistencies- namely human emotions. For Craig, art was the complete opposite of chaos, requiring absolute design and calculation (Innes, 2013). Human actors were incapable of maintaining perfect control over their bodily expressions because

they were prisoners of unpredictable emotions; therefore, movement and speech were always prone to accidental expressions (Eynat-Confino, 1987; Walton, 1983).

Consequently, Craig sought to completely eliminate the actors' attempts to imitate reality and portray real life. He sought a new form of acting characterized by symbolic gestures and proposed replacing the unbalanced human actors with the lifeless and completely controllable Über-Marionette figure (Craig, 2008/2013; Innes, 2013). This concept was less a demand for filling the stage with string puppets and more a theoretical provocation toward a transcendent performance figure capable of representing simple truths without the complex intervention of personal psychology (Taxidou, 2014). Craig drew inspiration from Asian theatre and the art of ancient civilizations, admiring their abstract, refined, and controllable aesthetics (Eynat-Confino, 1987; Leiter, 1991). He believed that masks and puppets possessed a calm and transcendent clarity that faithfully reflected the artist's pure thoughts. Craig, who saw himself as a complete theatre artist, viewed the entire physical stage as an uncompromising tool and believed the actor was only one part of the whole composition (Craig, 2008/2013).

If the actor wanted to represent rather than imitate, the stage setting had to be similarly abstracted. Craig actively worked to eliminate all elements of pictorial realism and replace the traditional pictorial stage with an architectural stage (Craig, 2008/2013). The main mechanism he used to achieve this change was a kinetic stage that allowed for infinite spatial manipulation (Innes, 2013). Craig's most famous stage design, the patented Screens (1910), consisted of movable, neutral surfaces that could be rearranged using height and shadow rather than representing a specific location (McKinney & Butterworth, 2009). The Screens were self-supporting, double-hinged flat surfaces made of canvas stretched over wooden frames, moving on wheels (Craig, 1913). Although their structure was

simple, their application in stage design was revolutionary. Craig suggested that the spatial arrangement of these flat screens could create numerous effects. Screens was a scene that completely avoided realistic illusion while also stimulating the viewer's imagination with architectural suggestions (Walton, 1983).

What was important was that the space was never designed independently of the artists. Craig's design sketches consistently depicted human figures in specific, carefully defined dramatic poses, interacting with the geometry of the screens to show how the elements intersected (Innes, 2013). The most defining characteristic of the screens' design was its capacity for infinite variability. This structural potential was amplified exponentially by the precise application of light (McKinney & Butterworth, 2009; Walton, 1983). Visitors to Craig's famous Arena Goldoni studio in Florence were amazed by the ability of the small cardboard screens, hand-arranged and illuminated, to instantly create majestic spaces and profound scales through the meticulous balance of light, shadow, and architectural lines (Craig, 2008; Innes, 2013).

Craig's theories faced their most significant and public test during his historic collaboration with Konstantin Stanislavsky in the Moscow Art Theatre's production of Hamlet in 1912 (Senelick, 1982). This partnership was inherently volatile, as Craig's uncompromising insistence on abstraction and symbolic representation directly clashed with Stanislavsky's pursuit of perfection in psychological realism (Innes, 2013; Leiter, 1991). However, Stanislavsky, eager to explore new forms of expression beyond naturalism, invited Craig to Moscow and embraced his three-dimensional architectural concepts instead of painted backgrounds. Craig envisioned a radical concept and an aggressive theatrical presentation aimed at emphasizing the realism of the performance, suggesting that the play begin before the curtain rises and that the audience actively watch the stagehands move the set and adjust the

lights (Taxidou, 2014). However, practical realities prevented this. The massive screens that were constructed were not robust enough to be moved safely in full view of the public, necessitating the use of a traditional curtain (Senelick, 1982; Walton, 1983).

Despite significant compromises, such as the use of traditional curtains, the stage design for the Moscow production of Hamlet was groundbreaking. Craig approached the play conceptually as a monodrama, meaning the entire stage picture was designed as a reflection of Hamlet's internal, psychological nightmare (Senelick, 1982). In the second scene, the golden court scene, representing the oppressive world of Claudius's court, was largely dominated by tall, gilded screens arranged in a semicircle (Apoleon, 2013; Innes, 2013). Claudius and Gertrude sat on a raised platform, wearing enormous gold brocade cloaks that stretched across the entire width of the stage, with the heads of the courtiers protruding unsettlingly from between these cloaks (Senelick, 1982). Opposite this gleaming, monumental mass of authority, Hamlet sits completely isolated in the shadows at the front of the stage, lost in daydreams, visually revealing his spiritual and psychological detachment (Apoleon, 2013; Senelick, 1982). Contemporary critics agree on Craig's extraordinary ability to evoke intense feelings of time and space using the simplest architectural tools, and to successfully bring the play's profound spiritual meaning to the stage (Taxidou, 2014; Walton, 1983).

With his theoretical concept Scene (1923), Craig continued to push the boundaries of spatial manipulation beyond the screen. He envisioned a unique and infinitely flexible stage design that could change mood and expression as fluidly and sensitively as the human face (Craig, 1923; Innes, 2013). Inspired by Sebastiano Serlio's (1545/1996) Renaissance perspective, Craig actively experimented with stage floors that could mechanically rise and fall in sections, creating abrupt voids, platforms, and steps (Craig, 2008; Carrick,

1968). Using simplification on geometric shapes and strategic lighting, he envisioned an infinitely variable cube that expanded or contracted to perfectly suit dramatic moments (Innes, 2013; Walton, 1983). Craig was ultimately looking for a living stage that moved like sound, dynamically adapting to the emotional trajectory of the play, and even envisioned a director-designer being able to operate the physical stage like a living instrument, responding directly and in real time to the emotional vibrations of the audience (Craig, 1923; Taxidou, 2014).

In summary, Adolphe Appia and Edward Gordon Craig's profound theories and practical approaches to stage design triggered a lasting and necessary paradigm shift in theatrical production. The term "Stage Design," historically functioning only as a technical description for perspective drawings of building facades or painting stage sets, was effectively revitalized and redefined by their pioneering work. Appia and Craig successfully waged a conceptual battle against the tyranny of the two-dimensional painted background, unequivocally proving that the stage should be a living, architectural space that interacts physically, kinetically, and psychologically with the three-dimensional artist. By transforming light from a simple lighting tool into an active, highly expressive medium, and arguing that spatial architecture can actively convey the deepest emotional echoes of a text, they completely liberated the visual medium from its historical status as mere decoration. Their collective, visionary legacy reinforced the modern understanding that the theatrical space is an indispensable, dynamic co-author of the performance event.

6.20th Century Paradigms

The evolution of modern stage design represents a profound paradigm shift in the history of theatre, marking a transition from a passive, two-dimensional illustrative background to an active, three-dimensional, and performative spatial reality (Nevolina, 2024). This

transformation did not occur in a single movement, but rather through a series of radical, philosophical, and practical interventions by pioneering theatre artists and theorists throughout the twentieth century. These visionaries fundamentally dismantled the Renaissance tradition of pictorial illusionism, replacing it with kinetic, psychological, and socially interactive spatial architectures (Aronson, 2005). Rejecting the subordination of the visual medium to the written text, these artists positioned stage design as an independent, dynamic, and vital co-author of theatrical activity. To fully understand this historical and artistic process, it is necessary to examine the approaches and enduring legacies of artists such as Vsevolod Meyerhold, Lyubov Popova, Oskar Schlemmer, Antonin Artaud, Bertolt Brecht, and Caspar Neher. Through their bold experiments, the stage was transformed into a machine, a geometrical grid, a sensory assault, an ideological forum, a psychological landscape, a memory repository, and a canvas of slowed-down time. Consequently, the historical trajectory of modern scenographer is not a singular, linear progression but a rich mosaic of competing and complementary visions. Vsevolod Meyerhold and Lyubov Popova transformed the stage into a kinetic, industrial machine to reflect the new social order, demanding a vital revision (actualization) of the grotesque from the viewer (Braun, 1998). Oskar Schlemmer, by abstracting the human body, transformed the stage into a geometrical grid, replacing psychological narrative with the concept of Space Dance (Whitford, 1984). Antonin Artaud used space as a weapon, employing spatial poetry and sensory assault to disable consciousness and reach the viewer's primal essence (Artaud, 1958). Bertolt Brecht and Caspar Neher created a critical distance through the separation of elements and the deliberate revelation of theatrical mechanisms, transforming the stage into a forum for socio-political analysis (Sokel, 1966). Josef Svoboda (1993) created psycho-plastic spaces that expanded and contracted with the human

mind using technology, projection, and light (Burian, 1974). Tadeusz Kantor (1993) embodied the reality of the impoverished class and the heavy burden of memory in stage designs based on historical trauma, using bio-objects (Kobialka, 1993). Finally, Robert Wilson liberated the visual image from the tyranny of text to create hypnotic landscapes of pure perception using visual dramaturgy and slowed-down time (Holmberg, 1996). These theorists and practitioners definitively proved that stage design is not merely a visual backdrop but a holistic, living experience, a dynamic force that draws the audience in, constructs profound meanings, and functions as the architecture of theatrical activity.

6.1.Constructivism and Acting Apparatus: Vsevolod Meyerhold

The assault on the illusion of traditional theatre found one of its most powerful expressions in the groundbreaking works of Vsevolod Meyerhold and his collaborator, the Constructivist artist Lyubov Popova (Braun, 1998; Leach, 1989). Meyerhold, reacting vehemently against the rigorous, psychological naturalism championed by his former mentor Konstantin Stanislavsky at the Moscow Art Theatre, sought a theatrical language that reflected the industrial and social realities of the Soviet era (Leach, 2003). Meyerhold believed that naturalism was a bourgeois relic that calmed the audience by presenting a closed and perfect illusion of reality (Braun, 1998). Conversely, he developed a theory of stylization that required theatre to proudly acknowledge its own artificiality. Stylization demanded the elimination of all superfluous, realistic details to reveal the structural essence of the drama. This approach was inextricably linked to the concept of the grotesque, a deliberate aesthetic strategy that juxtaposes contrasts such as the tragic and the comic, the beautiful and the ugly, the sublime and the commonplace to throw the viewer out of their comfort zone (Braun, 2016; Meyerhold, 2021). The grotesque forced the viewer to actively engage with the contradictions of human existence and social

structures by presenting unsettling juxtapositions. Meyerhold vehemently opposed the idea that the viewer is a passive consumer sitting in the dark, arguing instead that a theatrical production is fundamentally incomplete until it engages with its audience. He maintained that the viewer must perform a vital revision of the performance, actively synthesizing the fragmented, stylized, and grotesque elements on stage to construct the ultimate meaning of the artistic image in their own mind (Braun, 2016; Pitches, 2004).

This ideological and aesthetic revolution demanded a radical and new approach to both the actor's body and the physical stage space. Inspired by Frederick Winslow Taylor's work on time and movement and Ivan Pavlov's reflexology, Meyerhold developed a system called Biomechanics for training actors (Braun, 1998; Leach, 1989). Biomechanics rejected the actor's internal, psychological motivation, instead focusing on the body's external, physical competence (Pitches, 2004). Actors were trained to become efficient and athletic machines capable of performing precise, rhythmic, and acrobatic movements. Traditional painted stage sets were completely abandoned to accommodate these new performers. Meyerhold turned to Constructivism, an avant-garde art movement that glorified industrial materials, engineering, and utilitarian purposes (Bell, 1983). The culmination of this collaboration was Fernand Crommelynck's 1922 production of The Magnanimous Cuckold, designed by Lyubov Popova (Braun, 1998; Worrall, 1989). Popova completely abandoned the concept of a decorative set. Instead, she erected an acting apparatus system on the bare stage, consisting of raw wood, platforms, ladders, slides, and large rotating wheels. This structure did not represent a specific location; it was merely a functional workspace designed to facilitate the biomechanical movements of the actors (Rudnitsky, 1981). Stripped of historical costumes and dressed in blue canvas jumpsuits (prozodezhda), the actors used this apparatus like the gears of an industrial machine

(Bell, 1983). The scenography was no longer a backdrop but a dynamic partner offering physical resistance and setting the kinetic rhythm of the performance, perfectly reflecting the industrialized vision of the new Soviet proletariat.

6.2.Bauhaus and the Geometrical Grid: Oskar Schlemmer

Around the same time as Meyerhold, in Weimar Germany, the relationship between the human body and space was being explored at the Bauhaus by Oskar Schlemmer from a highly analytical and geometrical perspective (Whitford, 1984). While Meyerhold sought to integrate the actor with the industrial machine, Schlemmer was concerned with the fundamental tension between the organic, irrational nature of the human form and the abstract, rational geometry of the space surrounding it (Trimingham, 2017). Founded by Walter Gropius, the Bauhaus aimed to combine art, craft, and technology, and Schlemmer's theatre workshop became a vital laboratory for these ideas (Gropius, 1965). Schlemmer perceived theatre as a dualistic space caught between Dionysus and Apollo. Dionysus represented the chaotic, emotional, and primal origins of dance and human expression, while Apollo represented order, structure, proportion, and mechanics (Trimingham, 2017). Schlemmer believed that theatre had become excessively dependent on the psychological and emotional outbursts of individual actors, neglecting the fundamental architectural laws of space. To correct this imbalance, he designed theatre as Space Dance (Goldberg, 2013). It was a highly formal aesthetic exercise where the primary aim was not storytelling but the visual arrangement of geometric forms, colors, and movements (Trimingham, 2017).

Schlemmer's most famous and comprehensive implementation of these theories was in his Triadic Ballet, which premiered in 1922. In this work, Schlemmer radically reversed the traditional hierarchy of performance. Instead of the costume being a secondary garment designed to fit the actor's body and character, the

actor became merely the physical bearer of the costume (Trimingham, 2017). Schlemmer designed thick, rigid costumes based on basic geometric solids such as the sphere, cylinder, cone, and cube, and colored them with bold colours. These costumes severely restricted the dancers' natural, organic movements, forcing them to adopt a mechanical, puppet-like language of movement (Trimingham, 2017). The dancer was transformed into an Kunstfigur, an abstract spatial organism moving according to the geometrical rules of the costume and stage grid (Goldberg, 2013). By masking the face and transforming the silhouette, Schlemmer neutralized the performer's psychological presence, turning them into an objective, sculptural element interacting in perfect balance with the linear networks of the stage space (Whitford, 1984). Through his other spatial experiments such as Triadic Ballet and Pole Dance and Hoop Dance, Schlemmer proved that scenography could be an autonomous visual art form creating its own intellectual resonance of the geometrical mechanics of forms in space (Trimingham, 2017).

6.3.Spatial Poetry and Sensory Offensive: Antonin Artaud

While Schlemmer sought an Apollonian order, the French visionary Antonin Artaud vehemently advocated a return to the Dionysian chaos of theatre. Particularly in the 1930s, Artaud strongly opposed the tyranny of the written text that dominated Western theatre (Artaud, 1958). He believed that the psychological realism and literary focus of the European tradition had stripped theatre of its primal, mythical, and transformative power (Scheer, 2004; Sheringham, 1980). Artaud argued that dialogue and rational discourse were utterly inadequate for expressing the deepest, darkest, and most urgent truths of the human condition. In his groundbreaking essay collection, The Theatre and Its Double, Artaud proposed the theory of Theatre of Cruelty (Artaud, 1958; Esslin, 2018). It is important to understand that in Artaud's vocabulary, the

term cruelty does not mean unnecessary sadism or physical torture, but rather a ruthless determination to shatter the false realities of daily life and expose the raw, trembling nerves of existence (Barber, 1993; Innes, 2013; Sheringham, 1980). Artaud aimed to create a theatre that acted like a plague, affecting the audience, overcoming their intellectual defenses, and directly impacting their central nervous system, offering a holistic and immersive experience (Artaud, 1958).

To achieve this sensory assault, Artaud demanded a radical change in stage design and proposed a concrete and physical language which he called spatial poetry (Artaud, 1958). Spatial poetry aimed to completely seize the supremacy of verbal expression. Artaud envisioned a theatre stage that was unadorned but actively vibrating with danger and intensity (Esslin, 2018). He wanted a spectacle of stroboscopic intensity and deep shadows created by the use of rapidly fluctuating, dazzling lights. The auditory environment had to be equally overwhelming, employing dissonant sounds, spells, screams, and massive, vibrating percussion instruments designed to physically shock the audience (Artaud, 1958). Furthermore, Artaud wanted to create a mythical and surreal visual landscape by filling the stage not only with human actors but also with enormous, oversized puppets, masks, and sculptures of bizarre and disturbing proportions (Barber, 1993). Artaud also demanded the elimination of the traditional architectural separation between the stage and the audience seating. He wanted the audience to be in swivel chairs, surrounded by the performance, at the very center of the action (Artaud, 1958; Innes, 2013). Artaud's stage design was intended to trigger states of trance and dread, and fundamentally alter the viewer's perception of reality, by enveloping the audience in a whirlwind of spatial poetry, light, sound, and oversized forms (Esslin, 2018).

6.4.Epic Theatre and the Separation of its Elements: Bertolt Brecht and Caspar Neher

Bertolt Brecht and Caspar Neher responded to the metaphysical ecstasy provoked by Artaud with a theatrical language that centered on rationality, political consciousness, and intellectual distance (Sokel, 1966). Operating in the turbulent political environment of Weimar Germany and later in East Berlin, Brecht and Neher developed their theories of Epic Theatre (Curran, 2008). Brecht believed that traditional Aristotelian dramatic theatre was a narcotic. According to Brecht, traditional theatre convinced the audience that the social conditions presented on stage were natural, inevitable, and unchangeable by putting them in a passive state of empathy through immersive, illusionistic stage design and the demand for emotional identification with the characters (Squiers, 2012). Brecht's aim was explicitly Marxist. He wanted to awaken the audience, to make them realize that society is constructed by people and therefore can be changed by people (Sokel, 1966). To achieve this, Brecht developed the theory of the Verfremdungseffekt, often referred to as the alienation or distancing effect. The aim of the Verfremdung concept was to alienate the familiar, interrupt the narrative flow and emotional immersion, and thus force the audience to maintain a critical and objective distance from the events unfolding on stage (Sokel, 1966; Unwin, 2015).

Caspar Neher's stage design was the visual engine of the Verfremdungseffekt. Brecht and Neher vehemently rejected Wagner's Gesamtkunstwerk concept, where all elements were seamlessly blended to create a single illusion (Sokel, 1966). Instead, they argued that the elements should be separated. In this approach, text, music, and stage design did not harmoniously support each other; rather, they existed independently, often contradicting or interpreting each other, creating a dialectical tension (Innes, 2013). Neher was fundamentally opposed to the idea of a stage painter

creating illusions. Instead, he defined himself as a Bühnenbauer, that is, a stage maker or builder (Baugh, 2012). Neher's stage designs were deliberately fragmented and divided. He did not conceal what was happening on stage, for example, by using half-curtains on visible wires, constantly reminding the audience that they were in a theatre. He refused to conceal lighting equipment and left large light apparatuses exposed to destroy the illusion of natural light (Sokel, 1966). Neher frequently used projections and painted banners announcing the end of the scene beforehand, thus eliminating excitement and forcing the audience to focus on how and why the event occurred rather than on the idea of what would happen next. Furthermore, Neher had a keen sensitivity to the sociological reality of the materials. Instead of designing a generic, decorative stage, he carefully selected worn, used objects (a worn chair, a rusted car, a worn coat) that bore the physical traces of human labor and historical time (Aronson, 2005; Sokel, 1966). Here, the scenography not merely depicts the text but does more, producing a concrete and historical argument, thus functioning as an independent stage companion that compels the audience to critically analyze the socio-political mechanisms of the play.

7.Contemporary Theatre Stage

In the 20th century, the psychological effects of scenography were explored in the United States by designers such as Jo Mielziner. In plays like Death of Salesman (1949), Mielziner eliminated walls using transparency and lighting, allowing the scene to exist simultaneously in both present reality and the protagonist's memory (Aronson & Smith, 1985; Mielziner, 1965). However, in the second half of the 20th century, with the emergence of sophisticated technologies and the liberation of the image, this discipline underwent even greater development. Czech stage designer Josef Svoboda described his work as Psycho-plastic. Using a combination of movement, mirrors, and laser lights, he created spaces that could

change volume and atmosphere in real time, responding to dramatic action (Burian, 1974; Svoboda, 1993). Similarly, Polish director-designer Tadeusz Kantor (1993) challenged the hierarchy of the stage with his concept of Bio-object, which eliminated the distinction between human actors and inanimate stage props. In productions such as The Dead Class (1975), actors physically integrated the performance with the stage object by carrying mannequins representing their younger selves (Kobialka, 1993; Miklaszewski, 2013).

The terms set and stage design, which in the contemporary era referred to the scenery placed behind the actors and only the physical background, have given way to the term scenography, which creates a vibrant narrative with elements such as light, sound, video, body, and audience placement (McKinney & Butterworth, 2009). As Olga Nevolina points out, this term has begun to encompass a wide range of applications beyond theatre, such as exhibition design, fashion shows, and urban interventions (Nevolina, 2024). This linguistic shift acknowledges that the visual composition of a performance is no longer a static craft like painting or carpentry, but a dynamic arrangement of time, space, and sensory perception (Aronson, 2005). Hans-Thies Lehmann's conceptualization of postdramatic theatre has elevated scenography from its secondary position vis-à-vis the dramatic text, restoring to it absolute aesthetic autonomy (Jürs-Munby & Lehmann, 2006). In the works of contemporary directors like Robert Wilson, narrative on stage is produced not through text but through imagery. The determining factor in dramaturgy is not what speaks on stage, but what is seen (Holmberg, 1996). For example, the slow movement of a beam of light or the millimeter-precise placement of a chair. The resulting concept of visual dramaturgy does not rely on text, but on the composition of image, space, and rhythm. While this transformation takes us back to the etymological roots of the concept of stage

depiction, in contemporary depiction, not only painted sets but also light, sound, technology, and the body are part of this depiction.

7.1.Psycho-plastic Spaces and Kinetic Embodiment: Josef Svoboda

While Brecht and Neher used the stage to examine social realities, Czech stage designer Josef Svoboda used advances in post-war technology to map the complex and volatile landscapes of the human mind. Working from the 1950s onwards, Svoboda can be considered the most technologically innovative stage designer of the twentieth century (Aronson, 2005; Burian, 1974). He completely separated stage design from the art of static decoration. For Svoboda, stage design was not a state of being but an action. He famously said that true stage design cannot be judged by looking at a sketch or model, but only truly exists when the curtain rises and the space dynamically interacts with the actors in real time (Svoboda, 1993). Svoboda defined stage design as an event that must occur at the very moment of the performance. To achieve this kinetic, constantly changing environment, Svoboda sought to create a stage where the physical architecture was as fluid, responsive, and variable as a character's psychological state (Burian, 1974; Vincent, 2021). This quest led to his groundbreaking theory of Psycho-plastic Space. Svoboda envisioned a theatrical volume that could literally stretch, contract, and alter its shape, texture, and atmosphere according to the psychological rhythms of the drama (Burian, 1974; Svoboda, 1993). He achieved this flexibility primarily through revolutionary light manipulation. Svoboda was the first to successfully treat light not merely as illumination but as a tangible, architectural substance suspended in the air (Vincent, 2021). By combining low-voltage lighting fixtures originally designed for military searchlights with aerosols or fine dust suspended in the atmosphere, Svoboda created dense, three-dimensional columns and walls of light (Svoboda, 1993). These walls of light appeared completely solid and acted like

physical barriers that could instantly vanish or change color at the touch of a button, allowing the architecture of the stage to be dematerialized and reshaped at the speed of thought (Burian, 1974). Furthermore, Svoboda established complex technological systems that radically altered the relationship between live performance and mediated images. At the 1958 Brussels World Fair (Expo 58), Svoboda introduced Laterna Magika, a dazzling integration in which live actors seamlessly interacted with multiple cinematic projections (Burian, 1974; Svoboda, 1993). He further developed this with the Polyekran (multi-screen) system, which projected a collage of simultaneous images using numerous suspended screens of varying shapes and sizes (Burian, 1974; Vincent, 2021). These technological innovations were never used solely for show purposes. Svoboda used projection to reveal the characters' inner thoughts, memories, and dreams, creating a multi-layered visual dramaturgy in which live actors constantly engaged with their own vast and projected consciousness (Aronson, 2005; Burian, 1974). Through the combination of light, kinetics, mechanics, and projection, Svoboda proved that technology can significantly enhance the psychological and intellectual depth of the stage design experience.

7.2.Bio-Objects of Memory and the Reality of the Lowest Rank: Tadeusz Kantor

In contrast to Svoboda’s highly refined, technologically advanced psycho-plastic spaces, Polish artist and director Tadeusz Kantor created a profoundly personal and memorable scenography of memory using the wreckage of history (Aronson, 2005). Working with the independent theatre company Cricot 2 in the aftermath of the devastating effects of World War II and the Holocaust, Kantor approached the illusion and polished aesthetics of traditional theatre with deep skepticism (Miklaszewski, 2013). He actively strived to dismantle the classical illusion of the stage, arguing that traditional theatre was a lie attempting to conceal the brutal realities of human

existence. To counter this, Kantor formulated the aesthetic theory of the Reality of the Lowest Rank (Kobialka, 1993). Kantor rejected well-crafted stage props and flawless stage sets. Instead, he sought out discarded, deteriorated, and despised objects from the real world (for example, a rusty wheel, a broken chair, a decaying school desk, a mud-stained board.) Kantor believed that these impoverished objects, precisely because they were deprived of their practical function and abandoned by society, carried a deep, poetic echo and the heavy burden of human history (Kobialka, 1993; Miklaszewski, 2013).

Kantor's (1993) stage design was inseparable from the physical bodies of his actors, which led to his concept of the Bio-object. In Kantor's theatre, actor and object did not merely interact, they merged to form a single symbiotic organism (Kobialka, 1993; Witts, 2009). The object became a physical burden, a grotesque extension of the actor's body, determining their movements and psychological state. This concept was most powerfully realized in his 1975 masterpiece, The Dead Class. The stage design consisted of decaying wooden school desks. The actors portraying the elderly, the deceased, entered the stage carrying hyper-realistic, life-sized child mannequins representing their own deceased childhood selves (Miklaszewski, 2013). These mannequins were literally attached to the actors, functioning as bio-objects of unbearable memories and traumas. By dragging these dead statues around the space, the actors were trapped in a cyclical, nightmarish repetition of the past (Kobialka, 1993). Kantor, remaining on stage like an orchestra conductor during the performance, shattered the illusion of the fictional world (Miklaszewski, 2013; Witts, 2009). By moving the decayed objects and merging the animate and the inanimate, Kantor created a stage design that functioned as a physical manifestation of trauma, forcing the audience to confront the ghosts of history and the inevitable reality of death.

7.3.The Manipulation of Time and Pure Perception: Robert Wilson

As the 20th century moved towards a postmodern understanding, American director and designer Robert Wilson fundamentally reshaped the temporal and visual logic of the stage, bringing stage design into the realm of postdramatic theatre (Jürs-Munby & Lehmann, 2006). Wilson explicitly criticized the traditional, logocentric theatre hierarchy where written text was superior and visual elements were relegated to a secondary role, such as depicting dialogue (Holmberg, 1996). Wilson argued that the image has its own inherent reality and complex syntax, and should not be seen as a slave to the word. He pioneered the practice of visual dramaturgy, a methodology in which the visual landscape (the precise composition of light, geometry, bodies, and objects in space) creates its own autonomous logic and narrative rhythm, independent of literary causality (Holmberg, 1996). In Wilson's theatre, what the audience sees is as important, and often even more important, than what they hear. A defining characteristic of Wilson's visual dramaturgy is its radical manipulation of time. In response to the frantic pace and rapid dialogues brought about by modernity, Wilson developed the technique of slowing down time (Otto-Bernstein, 2006). He choreographed his actors' movements at an extremely slow pace. It would often take several minutes for an actor to cross the stage or raise their hand. This temporal slowing functioned as a mechanism of perceptual shift (Jürs-Munby & Lehmann, 2006). By slowing down the action as if it were frozen, Wilson forced the audience to abandon their traditional expectation of narrative momentum. Instead of rushing to find out what would happen next, the audience was invited into a hypnotic contemplation. This slowed-down time allowed the audience to visually navigate the meticulously structured scene, observing subtle changes in lighting, sharp architectural lines, and microscopic tensions in the actors'

bodies (Holmberg, 1996). In iconic productions such as Einstein on the Beach (1979), created in collaboration with composer Philip Glass, Wilson uses expansive, architectural lighting structures and slow, repetitive movements to create a landscape reminiscent of a moving tableau or a waking dream (Glass et al., 1979). Rather than telling the viewer what to think, Wilson's stage design presents a highly structured and open visual space where the viewer actively deciphers the images. By giving the image a narrative power equivalent to text, and by bending the temporal texture of the scene, Wilson proves that scenography is an independent aesthetic language expressing the most abstract and inexpressible layers of human perception (Shyer, 1989).

8.Beyond Scenography: Henri Lefebvre, Edward W. Soja and Rachel Hann

Approaches to contemporary stage design after the 20th century constitute a significant turning point in the historical transformation of the scenography discipline. Historically, there has been a shift from the pictorial illusion of a static stage set to the active production of space. This theoretical development can be understood primarily through the interaction of the works of Henri Lefebvre (1974), Edward W. Soja (1996), and subsequently Rachel Hann (2018). While Henri Lefebvre laid a sociological foundation, Edward W. Soja radicalized his approaches for postmodernism, and Rachel Hann made these concepts functional for performance theory.

8.1.Space as a Sociology: Henri Lefebvre

According to Henri Lefebvre's definition, space is not an empty, neutral, or natural container passively waiting to be filled with objects and people, but a social product that has emerged historically and politically (Lefebvre, 1974; Schmid, 2008). The definition of a "natural" space is a profound ideological illusion that

conceals the fact that space is always intertwined with human actions, modes of production, and power relations. Even nature, considered as a natural space, has largely been replaced by the "secondary nature" of urbanization in the course of social development (Lefebvre, 1974). Therefore, space is never neutral; on the contrary, it is always an expression of domination and social relations (Lefebvre, 1974).

Lefebvre's (1974) tripartite theory of space forms the conceptual basis of his analyses and breaks away from a dualistic mode of thought by introducing a triad of spatiality (Elden, 2007). This theory suggests that the production of space takes place in three inseparable dialectical stages. Spatial practice (perceived space), spatial representations (conceptualized or designed space), and spaces of representation (lived space). This threefold dialectic serves as an analytical tool for deciphering the modern spatial complexity between everyday actions, scientific planning, and symbolic adoption (Lefebvre, 1974). Perceived space refers to the material and physical dimension of social activity. This encompasses physical mobility, daily routines, and networks connecting spaces of production (work), private life, and leisure. In modern neocapitalism, this practice guarantees a certain level of social cohesion and continuity because it embodies urban reality and the everyday reality of its inhabitants through constructed infrastructures and physical processes. Designed space constitutes the dominant spatial dimension of every society and is the product of scientists, urban planners, architects, and technocrats (Lefebvre, 1974). This space is designed through information, signs, codes, and geometric abstractions. Through construction plans, maps, and urban theories, this practice attempts to impose a seemingly rational, legible, and controllable order on space, but in the process often ruthlessly suppresses what has been lived and perceived. The Lived Space, however, is the space of its inhabitants and users (Lefebvre,

1974). This space is directly experienced through images, symbols, and human imagination, yet it is also a space that escapes the rigid logic of spatial representations, a space that is subjugated and passively endured. Here resides passion, possession, memories, and unconscious reflections. This is the place of poetry, art, and subversive potential, where users attempt to symbolically alter and reoccupy physical space (Lefebvre, 1974).

Space is socially produced as groups within society shape their physical and mental environments within the framework of their own specific modes of production (through the interaction of productive forces, labor, knowledge, and social relations) (Lefebvre, 1974). In this process, space is both the result and the precondition of social action; that is, it is both its product and its producer. Although materially constructed and used, space also has a concrete abstraction function because it contains structural, invisible social relations (Lefebvre, 1974). Space is not only a physical but also an ideological and political product because social order and inequalities are embodied in the produced space in a way that appears natural and inevitable. Lefebvre emphasizes this by saying, "The order of space is hidden behind the space of order" (Lefebvre, 1974, p. 333, my translation). Daily practices contribute to the production of space by constantly restructuring and revitalizing it through use, appropriation, and habituation. Daily life is both a reservoir of human potential and the place where capitalist alienation exerts its strongest influence. Inhabitants do not merely passively consume a space as a living area (shelter); when they actively live there, transforming it into their habitat, they organically shape the space through spontaneous interactions, social networks, and creative practices, thus transforming the rigid projects of planners. The perceived, designed, and experienced dimensions of space condition each other in a dialectical and often conflicting relationship, but never fully overlap. Designed representations of

space (planning) constantly attempt to dominate spatial practice and colonize the lived space. However, the lived space stubbornly resists, escaping complete intellectual control, and through the dynamics of human bodies and symbols, constantly imposes changes on the planned reality. As a result, the urban space is no longer just an empty vessel for production, but itself a consumable commodity and a central engine of accumulation.

Theatres, as spaces that overlap different locations, museums as spaces of accumulated time, and festival grounds as temporary spaces are generally considered in the literature in conjunction with Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia, but Henri Lefebvre (1974) develops his own unique socio-spatial perspective on these spaces (Foucault, 1967/2008). Lefebvre analyzes these three spaces through the lens of the production of space and a critique of everyday life. According to Lefebvre, the theatre space is unique and irreducible, a non-verbal system of signs that brings together gestures, masks, costumes, and staging. According to Lefebvre (1974), the classical theatre space is a thirdspace that is simultaneously fictional and real. This space emerges at the intersection between spatial representations (thought-out stage design) and the representational space (directly experienced dramatic play). He evaluates museums and exhibition spaces with a highly critical perspective within the context of modern, capitalist abstract space. In these spaces, objects are isolated and deprived of their original uses, serving only visual purposes. According to Lefebvre, an object displayed in a museum or shop window to be looked at symbolizes the acceptance and suppression of this passive use, as it is deprived of its direct use. These spaces are manifestations of passive urban planning, where people are deprived of active participation, reduced to passive consumers and spectators of an alienated urban spectacle. Festival spaces, according to Lefebvre, have a highly dialectical dual role. On the one hand, spontaneous festivals, such as the Paris Commune of

1871 or May 1968, are the ultimate expression of the creative re-appropriation of space and a utopian moment of liberation from the grey everyday life (Lefebvre, 1974). However, he warns against organized festival spaces and private entertainment areas. While these entertainment spaces seem to function as counter-spaces escaping the control of the established world, they are in reality tightly integrated into bureaucratic society as managed consumption. In these spaces, leisure time is transformed into a functional industry, commercializing and turning the supposed liberation of the body and desires into a spectacle. Ultimately, it is subjected to hierarchies and the reproduction of bourgeois hegemony.

8.2.The Radicalization in Thirdspace: Edward W. Soja

Henri Lefebvre's theory of space has undergone a defining postmodern reorientation thanks to Edward W. Soja's work, Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places (1996). Soja critiques the traditional Cartesian mode of thought that treats space solely as material-physical or entirely intellectual-conceptual. Soja takes Lefebvre's threefold theory of space production as a starting point but transforms it into a more explicit conceptual model that systematically names and frames it. While Lefebvre considers the production of space as the dialectical interaction of spatial practice, spatial representations, and representational spaces, Soja classifies these as Firstspace, Secondspace, and Thirdspace. Firstspace focuses on embodied spatial practice, that is, the empirically perceptible physical form of spatiality. Secondspace represents the designed space existing in intellectual and mental forms for planners and scientists. Finally, Thirdspace is a real and imaginary space understood as a comprehensive synthesis of physical reality and social imagination, forming the core of Soja's theory (Soja, 1996). Focusing on the concept of Thirdspace, Soja designs an understanding of space that breaks down and transcends traditional binary oppositions such as

real/imaginary or material/mental. For Soja, Thirdspace is where the real and imaginary dimensions of space inextricably coexist. To concretize this epistemological fusion, he introduces the methodological concept of Thirding-as-Othering. This concept, instead of settling for a simple additive combination of opposites, deconstructs established dualities, bringing them together in an entirely new, infinitely expandable, and radically open alternative (Soja, 1996).

Soja approaches space not as a rigid physical ontology, but as an open, hybrid, and multi-layered social process. He no longer limits spatial theory primarily to urban planning or Marxist political economy, but rather significantly extends Lefebvre's tripartite dialectic to discourses of culture, politics, and everyday experience. By incorporating postcolonial and feminist critiques, Thirdspace is understood as a multi-centric space where axes such as class, race, gender, and subjectivity intersect. In this understanding, spatiality deeply permeates human life culturally and politically, opening up space for liberation and radical resistance.

Soja's work radically reinterprets Lefebvre's theory within the context of postmodern and critical geography, but this powerful postmodern and cultural scientific reorientation is not without controversy in critical Lefebvre studies. As Christian Schmid notes in his review of Soja's theory, Soja's model carries the risk of dividing Lefebvre's dialectically interconnected elements of space production into ontologically independent spaces or isolated epistemologies (Schmid, 2008). While Lefebvre's tripartite dialectic is conceived as an interconnected production process in which no dimension is absolutely privileged, Soja tends to stylize Thirdspace as an isolated space of unrepresentability and radical openness. This may contradict Lefebvre's concept of totality (Schmid, 2008). Despite these systematic criticisms, Soja's approach impressively demonstrates the immense potential for connection that Lefebvre's

theory of radical geography holds for extending to contemporary cultural and social critiques.

While Henri Lefebvre primarily analyzes performance spaces within the context of capitalist alienation and consumer society, Edward W. Soja largely examines spaces such as theatres, exhibitions, museums, and festival areas within the context of postmodernism, hyperrealism, and Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia (Foucault, 1967/2008; Soja, 1996). Soja defines theatre spaces as temporary heterotopias because they possess the ability to overlap and intertwine many spaces that are actually incompatible within a single real space, and festival areas as temporary heterotopias because they simultaneously eliminate and preserve time and culture in condensed, artificial environments (Soja, 1996). Exhibitions and museums, on the other hand, are considered by Soja as complex, real, and imagined thirdpaces (Soja, 1996). He defines exhibition spaces as historical-social-spatial palimpsests (Soja, 1996). In these spaces, temporal, social, and spatial relationships are constantly rewritten, erased, and superimposed, opening up entirely new avenues for understanding urban geohistory. Soja notes that these spaces foreshadow a Disneyed world in which the ephemeral and the transient paradoxically appear as the permanent and the fixed (Soja, 1996).

8.3.Scenography as Worlding: Rachel Hann

Rachel Hann (2018) completes this cycle by directly applying the spatial-theoretical works of Lefebvre and Soja to the field of performance. In her work Beyond Scenography (2018), she introduces the concept of Scenographics to define stage design not as decoration but as a guiding force. She argues that stage design is a process of worlding (Hann, 2018).

Rachel Hann's pioneering work, Beyond Scenography (2018), serves as a methodological and theoretical bridge to directly translate the spatial theories put forth by Henri Lefebvre and Edward

Soja into the materiality and practice of the performing arts (Hann, 2018). Hann firmly opposes the historical subordination of stage design to the dramatic text, particularly questioning British traditions that often incorrectly reduce scenography to mere set design (Hann, 2018). Instead, Hann positions scenography as a fundamental and independent force in theatrical production, functioning on equal footing with directing, choreography, and dramaturgy (Hann, 2018). At the heart of his argument is the introduction of the concept of Scenographics (Hann, 2018). In this context, Hann makes a clear distinction between scenography, a craft-based practice, and Scenographics, which are emotional, site-oriented features that shape an event or space (Hann, 2018). These features are not limited to visual decor but encompass a holistic, multi-sensory interaction of costumes, stage geography, lighting, and sound (Hann, 2018). Hann demonstrates that scenography is not a passive background but actively intervenes in the design and perception of situations through place orientation, thus proactively managing the world-building process (Hann, 2018).

In Hann's approach, the performance space is not merely an empty, neutral container in which an action takes place, but rather an active co-creator of reality, intertwined with energetic and material dynamics (Wiles, 2003). Drawing strongly on Martin Heidegger's concept of worlding and Kathleen Stewart's anthropological analyses, she conceives of the performance space as an ongoing process of creating the world (Hann, 2018; Heidegger, 1963, Stewart, 2016/2020). For Hann, a theatre stage is a productive structure, a mindful singularity, that brings together human and non-human actors and shapes our perception (Hann, 2018). The performance space functions as a worlding envelope that makes specific atmospheres perceptible and establishes alternative networks of relationships (Hann, 2021). Hann argues that scenographies function as extra-daily and hypertrophic

interventions, their primary aim being to consciously disrupt and question the disciplined, normative orders of the everyday world (Hann, 2018/2021). Instead of passively reflecting the illusion of another reality, the space is a performative landscape where bodies, emotions, and materials engage in direct dialogue (Hann, 2018). Thus, the performance space transforms into a dynamic machine for generating aesthetic and social emotions (McCormack, 2017).

While Lefebvre and Soja offer broad philosophical foundations for the production of space, Hann concretizes these mechanisms for aesthetic and theatrical practice. Henri Lefebvre defines social space as a duality in which our physical perception, understanding, and actual spatial experience constantly permeate each other, and power relations are manifested (Lefebvre, 1974). Edward W. Soja expands on this perspective with the concept of Thirdspace, which is both material and metaphorical, both real and imaginary, and serves as a ground for social discourse and liberation (Soja, 1996). The fundamental difference in Hann's approach is that it shifts the focus from macro-sociological geography to the concrete, microscopic tactics of Scenographics (Hann, 2018). Hann distinguishes himself by showing that scenographics function as atmospheric tactics. These tactics are consciously designed artificial conditions that create a targeted emotional effect through the skillful combination of light, sound, and costume (Hann, 2021). Another defining difference from classical theories of space is Hann's emphasis on the concept of withness in performance space (Hann, 2021). Unlike the objectifying, detached approach to space (the so-called “stage” or “picturesque”), scenographics require a temporal and bodily co-existence (Hann, 2018/2021). The audience is not outside the space; they are inextricably intertwined with the texture of the scenography (Hann, 2021). Therefore, for Hann, scenography is not merely an intellectual reflection or metaphor of social space,

but an active, activating catalyst for its continuous reinvention (Hann, 2018).

Today, Hann ultimately classifies the theatre stage as an unlimited, expanded field where the production of space through stage design takes place beyond the intermedial and traditional norms (Hann, 2018). Inspired by Frederick Kiesler's 1926 manifesto on theatre that "keeps theatre alive" (Kiesler, 1926), Hann argues that modern stage design has moved beyond theatre buildings and is now applying its logic of creating space to architectural projects, art installations, gardens, and social protest movements (Hann, 2018).

9.From Skene to Scenography: Thinking About the Paradigmatic Transformation of the Theatre Stage with Henri Lefebvre, Edward W. Soja, and Rachel Hann

This chapter analyzes the historical and paradigmatic transformation of the theatre stage from antiquity to the present day through the theoretical perspectives of Lefebvre, Soja, and Hann. It examines how the stage space evolved from a purely pictorial backdrop into an active, performative spatial production in terms of scenography.

9.1.The Theatre Stage in Ancient Greece

Henri Lefebvre (1974) argues that space is a social product generated through the dialectical interaction of three distinct moments. This framework perfectly reflects the transformation of stage design in theatre. The first of these moments in our historical context is the Ancient Greek stage, representing a phase of spatial response. In Ancient Greece, space is not static, and mechanisms such as skene, ekklyklema, periaktoi, and mechane are used for the changes brought about by dramatic action. In Lefebvre's theory, Ancient Greece directly coincides with Perceived Space (Lefebvre, 1974). The physical reality on the theatre stage is based on the physical reality of nature (e.g., the slope of a hill) or acoustics. Here,

space is not abstract; it is a concrete volume in which the body and sound resonate. For example, the movements of the chorus and actors on the orchestra (playing area) produce space through bodily action. From Soja's perspective, the Ancient Greek stage is a pure example of Firstspace (Soja, 1996). In ancient Greece, the theatrical stage was measurable, tangible, and integrated with the geography; the stage was not separated from the audience by a sharp fourth wall. The audience was physically present, sitting on that hill under the same sun as the dramatic action on stage. This aligns with the experience of space rather than its representation. Rachel Hann (2018) calls the ancient Greek theatrical stage an Integrated Skene and interprets it through the concept of the skene. She considers the existence of the skene as an early indicator of the idea of spatial orientation (Hann, 2018). According to her, even long before stage and set design emerged, the simple placement of the skene was an element that influenced how both the theatron and the orchestra were perceived and experienced. This temporary structure fundamentally alters the conceptual and material dynamics of staging. Drawing on the work of Marvin Carlson (1989), Hann states that the skene is a tangible indicator of the actor's off-stage or hidden world (Hann, 2018). The spatial orientation provided by the skene gradually blurs the conceptual boundary between the orchestra and the stage set. Hann uses the term stage-scene hybrid for this organic synthesis (Hann, 2018). She points out that traces of this historical symbiosis (variants of the term "skene" directly transforming into the word "scene") can be seen in many European languages.

9.2.The Theatre Stage in the Renaissance

Lefebvre defines the Designed Space (Representations of Space) as the dominant space of scientists, planners, and architects that is, a conceptualized space bound by a system of production, knowledge, and hierarchical relationships (Lefebvre, 1974). In the history of theatre, this perfectly matches the Renaissance perspective

stage and the perspective trap. Perspective techniques applied to the theatre stage create a highly artificial, two-dimensional spatial representation dominated by a single privileged point of view. This architectural space is rational, geometrically calculated, and designed to be viewed only by a static observer perfectly positioned in the auditorium. This creates a rigid visualization logic that separates the image from the living body, trapping the viewer's eye in an illusion of transparency that masks the artificiality of the power structures governing the stage. The Renaissance perspective stage is the ultimate Designed Space a purely optical field where the supremacy of representation reigns, rendering the environment passive and immobile the viewer (Lefebvre, 1974). According to Soja's theory, the Renaissance stage is not a reality but rather a space constructed, designed, and represented in the mind a Secondspace (Soja, 1996). Here, the stage transforms into a form of thought constructed with geometric rules. Perspective presents the viewer with a depth and order that is not present, through illusion. In Renaissance perspective, the stage is an ideologically constructed space, stripped of Firstspace, that is, of materiality, reduced to an idealized image of space in the artist's mind. According to Soja's theory, one of the most important characteristics of the Renaissance perspective stage is that all perception of depth appears perfect from the seat of the ruler, that is, from a single point (Soja, 1996). This shows that space is a representation constructed by authority, detached from objective reality. The definition of Secondspace precisely encompasses the way power constructs space. Here, the physical space is now a victim of ideological representation. Soja (1996) calls this situation the abstraction of space. Rachel Hann (2018) considers the Renaissance a historical turning point that significantly altered the organic relationship between the stage and the performance space. According to Hann, the development of the perspective stage in the Renaissance led to the material separation of

the concept of the stage from the concept of space. This created an ideological format that aimed to sharply isolate the stage from the outside world and the staged scene from the audience. The unity that dominated the stage in Ancient Greece was disrupted by this artificial separation. Hann (2018) strictly rejects this separation in her scenographics theory. Therefore, she calls the Renaissance perspective stage the Isolated Stage (Hann, 2018).

9.3.Modern Fractures and the Theatre Stage in the 20th Century

The modernist rebellion against the dominance of perspective brought about by the Renaissance corresponds to Lefebvre's concept of Perceived Space (Spatial Practice) (Lefebvre, 1974). Perceived Space encompasses the physical reproduction of space. It ensures continuity through the immediate realities of daily life and physical interaction. On stage, this is seen in the radical innovations of Adolphe Appia (1899) and Edward Gordon Craig, who rejected the two-dimensional painted background and opted for the three-dimensional architectural stage (Craig, 2008). Appia sought to create a rhythmic space composed of rigid, sharp lines, steps, and platforms that contrasted sharply with the softness and mobility of the living body. Similarly, Craig's kinetic curtains replaced the pictorial stage with the architectural stage, creating a three-dimensional environment of infinite flexibility that directly interacted with the physical movements of the performers. Space is no longer a flat picture to be looked at, but a physical terrain requiring a physical and rhythmic interaction between the actor's body and the architectural mass. This modernist rebellion reconnects stage design to Perceived Space, focusing on the concrete, bodily, and kinetic realities of the stage rather than the pure optical illusions of the past. Here, the theories of the Production of Space and the Trialectics of Spatiality operate like a pendulum. The pendulum, which swung towards mental constructs (second space) in the Renaissance, returns to materiality (first space) with the modernist

rebellion (Soja, 1996). While the return in the modernist rebellion was to the architectural and volumetric reality of space, in the 20th-century avant-garde period it was more radically to the functional and productive reality of space. If the modernist rebellion is considered in terms of a living first space, the 20th-century avant-garde period can be interpreted as an industrial first space. Meyerhold's Game Machine transforms the stage into a factory, while Schlemmer at the Bauhaus transforms the stage into a geometrical grid. From Soja's perspective, this is no longer a representational space (secondspace) but an industrial space, and the most naked form of the materiality of space (firstspace) (Soja, 1996). Rachel Hann (2018) describes the early 20th century as a revolutionary period for stage design. Inspired by theatre scholars such as Kenneth Macgowan and Robert Edmond Jones, she refers to this period as New Stagecraft (Hann, 2018; Macgowan & Jones, 1922). Hann (2018) considers this period as the historical origin of a holistic and symbiotic understanding of scenography, based on new conceptual ideas about spatial integrity and balance. According to Hann, the main aim of this period was to break the restrictive framework of the proscenium and create a new theatrical rhetoric called place orientation.

9.4.Contemporary Theatre Stage

In the contemporary period, contemporary space is a stage of synthesis where the pendulum movement in the history of scenography reaches equilibrium, uniting both worlds (the reality of firstspace and the illusion of secondspace). According to Lefebvre (1974), contemporary space can be interpreted as the Lived Space, while according to Soja (1996), it is the Thirdspace. From the perspective of Soja and Lefebvre, the contemporary theatre stage, for example in Robert Wilson or Josef Svoboda, is a physical object (firstspace) that is simultaneously both the object itself and the carrier of a mental atmosphere and memory (secondspace). Here, the

space is produced by the performance. The space is no longer ready before the play begins. It is produced in that moment, before the audience's eyes, with light, sound, technology, or the actor's action. Questions like "Is it a set, reality, mind, or matter?" become meaningless. This space, transcending dualities, becomes a performative thirdspace or a lived space. For example, Svoboda's (1993) Psycho-plastic Space design involves the merging of the material (mirrors, lasers, kinetic platforms), i.e., firstspace, with the psychological (emotion, atmosphere, unconscious) secondspace, transforming into a lived experience called thirdspace. Kantor's (1993) bio-object design, for instance, blurs the line between inanimate matter, i.e., firstspace, and a living human being, i.e., secondspace. Here, the object is no longer a mere item but a living organism. Wilson's productions, for example, move the physical boundaries of space, i.e., firstspace, into a mental infinity, i.e., secondspace, by manipulating light and the perception of time. In this synthesis of firstspace and secondspace, the production of a performative thirdspace depends entirely on the presence and influence of the audience. The audience is no longer a passive observer safely positioned behind the fourth wall, but an active collaborator in the construction of meaning. Scenography therefore structures audience participation through a deliberate strategy of ambiguity, gaps, and deficiencies, requiring the audience to fill in the gaps and make connections with their own imagination. The scenograph image is truly completed only in the audience's Thirdspace of imagination, the Living Space, where the physical reality of the scene intersects with the audience's subjective, emotional, and cognitive response (Soja, 1996). Rachel Hann (2018) notes that in the 21st century, the contemporary theatre scene is largely driven by site-specific shows and has expanded into an expanded field formed in everyday settings.

10.Conclusion

The transformation of stage design over the past century represents a profound ontological shift in theatrical art, marking a definitive transition from the decorative to the performative realm (Aronson, 2005). For centuries, the visual aspect of the stage has been dominated by the Bühnenbildner concept, whose primary function is to depict a space or create a passive atmosphere. This traditional stage design essentially functions as a static frame, subordinate to the literary text and attempting to create an illusion of reality through a painted canvas. However, pioneers of modern stage design vehemently reject this superficial decoration. Josef Svoboda (1993) expresses his discomfort with terms like Bühnenbildner or décorateur, highlighting their reliance on two-dimensional paintings that fail to capture the essence of theatre. This concept is practically realized by Bertolt Brecht and Caspar Neher with the invention of the term Bühnenbauer in place of Bühnenbildner (Baugh, 2012). Neher's scenography not only decorates the stage but also intervenes in the rehearsal process, shaping the actors' blockage and essentially functioning as a performance companion that physically embodies the performance and relates to the dramatic action (Baugh, 2012).

These transformations necessitate a reconceptualization of the philosophy of space, turning the understanding of the stage from a static container into a living system (Wiles, 2003). In traditional Western thought, space is often fetishized as an empty, neutral container, but this Cartesian illusion masks the true nature of space (Lefebvre, 1974). Space is a social morphology that provides kinesthetic resistance and actively shapes human behavior. As Henri Lefebvre (1974) argues, activities within space are inherently constrained by that space. Space governs and determines bodies, gestures, routes, and distances to be covered. Therefore, scenography is the manipulation and orchestration of this living system in which architectural structures, light, and performance

objects dynamically interact with the performer (Hann, 2018). The environment is now a reality that constantly contributes kinesthetically to the performance experience, actively conditioning the physical and emotional rhythm of the theatrical activity (Hann, 2018).

Scenography, transforming from a decorative background into an active and vibrant system, overturns the traditional hierarchies that govern theatre productions (Hann, 2018). With the emergence of postdramatic theatre, this logocentric hierarchy completely disappears (Jürs-Munby & Lehmann, 2006). In this new paradigm, visual and auditory elements achieve absolute equality, creating an independent and powerful visual dramaturgy. Instead of relying on linear narrative structures, visual dramaturgy develops its own logic, operating through sequences, contrasts, and nodal points of perception (Jürs-Munby & Lehmann, 2006). The lighting used by visionaries like Heiner Goebbels and Robert Wilson is so powerful that the audience forgets the text. These visionaries actively demonstrate this equality by inventing a theatre where even the costumes speak their own autonomous language (Jürs-Munby & Lehmann, 2006). The scenographer is no longer an illustrator of words but someone who visually liberates the text (Hann, 2018). The scenographer is a master of theatre who shows what the eyes cannot see and what the ears cannot hear.

The liberation of the image blurs physical and conceptual boundaries, pushing staging beyond the traditional confines of the theatre building. Historically, the proscenium functions as a rigid picture frame physically and symbolically separating the fictional world of the stage from the real world of the audience hall, but technological advancements and the avant-garde drive to redefine the audience's relationship with performance are eliminating this separation. The proliferation of environmental theatre and site-specific performance brings scenography into urban spaces and

public areas. Artists reject the traditions of specially constructed theatre venues, transforming non-theatre spaces such as streets, rooftops, and abandoned factories into high-energy performance environments. By stepping outside the proscenium, scenography eliminates the physical distance required for traditional voyeuristic theatre, surrounding the viewer with an integrated, multiple environment where the distinction between art and everyday life is radically blurred. The perception of scenography bypasses pure intelligence and rationality, creating a phenomenological encounter. As Antonin Artaud (1958) argued in Theatre of Cruelty, the physical language of the stage should first satisfy the senses, bypassing the mind and directly affecting the nervous system. Scenography achieves this by arranging a multisensory environment that engages the viewer through tactile, kinesthetic, and proxemic channels. According to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception, our understanding of the world is inherently related to the body, and we not only look at space but also become a part of it (Merleau-Ponty, 1976/1945). Therefore, when a viewer sees a scenographic environment, they interact with it somatosensorily. Spatial dimensions such as height, depth, and scale trigger automatic muscle empathy (Garner, 2019). The texture of the costume or the harshness of the light evokes tactile memories related to touch and warmth. Stanton B. Garner (2019) notes that this phenomenological concretization instinctively connects the audience to the performance space, transforming theatre from a realm of visual objectification into a shared, living environment. Through these kinesthetic and proxemic relationships, scenography establishes a deeply concrete, multi-sensory exchange, affirming the audience as an indispensable participant in the theatrical event. This transformation also shows that the theatre space has historically assumed different functions: an active/kinetic function in Ancient Greece, a passive/illusionstic function in Rome and the Renaissance,

an architectural-kinetic function in the modern era, a political, psychological and technological function in the twentieth century, and a social and experiential function in contemporary scenography.

The table below illustrates the paradigmatic shift of the theatre space from a two-dimensional image to a social reality produced within it.

Table 1: Paradigmatic Shift from Stage to Space

The Role of Space	Spatial Responses	Basic Paradigm	Period	Techniques
Active/Kinetic: It is a functional and three-dimensional counterpart to the dramatic narrative.	Firstspace	Spatial Response	Ancient Greece (Antiquity)	Skene, Ekkylema, Periaktoi, Mechane
Passive/Illusionistic: The stage is reduced to a two-dimensional pictorial illusion and a decorative background.	Secondspace	Perspective Trap	Rome and Renaissance (Pre-modern)	Ichnographia, Orthographia, perspective scene
Three-Dimensional Harmony: The space is a physical volume that interacts with the actor's body.	Firstspace	Architectural Stage	Modern Fractures (Modern)	Living Light, Rhythmic Space, Screens
Industrial/Analytical: The space is a forum for social analysis or a biomechanical workspace.	Firstspace	Stage as Mechanism	20th Century Avant-garde (Modern)	Acting Apparatus
Performative/Dynamic: It is a meaning-maker independent of the text, managing the senses with light, sound, and technology.	Thirdspace	Visual Dramaturgy and the Production of Space	Postmodern	Psychoplastic Space, Bio-object, Slowed-Down Time
Social/Cultural: The space is no longer a container but a performative living space constantly produced through social relations.	Expanded Field	The Production of Space	Postmodern	Worlding, Place-orientation

Note. The table was created by the author.

As the conceptual framework of scenography expands to encompass the phenomenological experience of the audience, its methodology inevitably transcends the traditional boundaries of

theatre. The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries witnessed the rise of scenography, a paradigm where scenographic thought was applied to a wide variety of disciplines beyond theatre. Today, scenographic thought has reached an interdisciplinary dimension, appearing in a broad spectrum ranging from contemporary museology, which makes historical narratives experiential, to fashion shows that utilize space as a dynamic narrative field, and to civic architecture that controls social interaction within the urban fabric. The arrangement of visual, auditory, and spatial environments marks the emergence of a culture of place as a tool shaping human behavior in the public sphere. This expansion represents a return to the etymological origin of the term. Derived from the Greek words skene (stage or landscape) and grapho (to write or depict), scenography, in its contemporary sense, is no longer merely a way of perceiving and constructing the stage, but a powerful methodology for constructing perception and creating reality (Hann, 2018). Scenographers, applying theatrical techniques to everyday spaces, transform everyday environments into festival venues by making the ordinary extraordinary. Artists like Kathleen Irwin (2007) use site-specific scenographic strategies to reveal the internal, complex, intense, and controversial histories of physical environments. In this way, they reclaim spaces for people and re-establish the reciprocal relationship between who we are and where we are (Irwin, 2007). In this sense, scenography functions as a critical spatial practice, actively reproducing the environments we live in, proving that the entire world can be considered as a performative text.

Given the ontological and methodological shifts within this discipline, terminological distinctions aimed at accurately reflecting the diverse practices encompassed within it are central to current debates in theatre studies. The historical term, Stage Design, is primarily used for traditional practices concerned with creating two-

dimensional, decorative backdrops designed to illustrate a literary text. In contrast, the concept of active scenography, based on the modernist and postmodernist revolutions that make the performance medium an equal partner in the three-dimensional, kinetic, and dramatic event, has been used by theorists such as Arnold Aronson (2005). Finally, contemporary practices that completely eliminate the boundaries of theatre to apply these performative strategies to museums, urban spaces, and digital realms have been termed extended scenography and used by Joslin McKinney & Scott Palmer (2017). However, Rachel Hann (2018) challenges these classifications in her work Beyond Scenography. Hann (2018) criticizes the concept of Extended Scenography because it implies a true center from which the discipline has moved away. According to Hann, scenography is not a central location but an approach (Hann, 2018). When we talk about expansion, we remain mentally bound to the institution of theatre. For the sake of ontological equality, Hann argues that traditional stage design (pictorial) is also an active form of space production. According to Hann, any arrangement of objects that creates a world, even an illusionary one, should be considered a scenographic act, a practice of world-creation. Instead of making distinctions such as traditional, active, and expanded for scenography, Hann (2018) proposes a terminological shift: Scenographics/Worlding/Place-orientation. In Hann's definition, scenographics is a craft with a directional quality, the performative design of space to create a specific perception of the world, and this is a universal principle not tied to theatre (Hann, 2018). The definition of worlding, instead of viewing scenography as background design, defines it as an act of worlding, where scenography produces a world with its own rules and atmospheres. In the definition of place-orientation, scenography is an encounter between the body and space. Here, place-orientation suggests

understanding scenography as a practice that directs space (Hann, 2018).

Thus, the history of scenography is the history of the changing relationship between humans and their environment. Scenography is a broader way of thinking that reconstructs perception through space, from the stone skene and rotating periaktoi in Aeschylus's Greece, to the illusionist perspectives of Serlio's (1545/1996) Renaissance, to the kinetic machines of Constructivism, and to the light fields of the digital age. This way of thinking is a meaning-maker that shapes experience not only on stage but also in urban planning such as square, street, and public space design, exhibition arrangements, communication, and event design. This is proof of how scenography can intervene in our perception of reality.

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