Beyond Scenography

Focused on the Anglophone adoption from the 1960s onwards, *Beyond Scenography* explores the porous state of contemporary theatre-making to argue a critical distinction between scenography (as a crafting of place orientation) and scenographics (that which orientate acts of worlding). With sections on installation art and gardening as well as marketing and placemaking, this book is an argument for what scenography does: how assemblages of scenographic traits orientate, situate, and shape staged events. Established stage orthodoxies are revisited – including the symbiosis of stage and scene and the aesthetic ideology of ‘the scenic’ – to propose how scenographics are formative to staged atmospheres. Consequently, one of the conclusions of this book is that there is no theatre practice without scenography, no stages without scenographics. *Beyond Scenography* offers a manifesto for a renewed theory of scenographic practice.

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First and foremost I wish to thank those colleagues who have supported my academic development. I acknowledge the influence, advice and provocations of Christopher Baugh and Scott Palmer as being foundational to all my research. I also remain indebted to Sidsel Bech for listening and debating my positions on scenography, along with all the colleagues and students at Edge Hill University who gave encouragement and focus to my critical thinking. Many of the ideas featured here first converged as part of those student discussions. I have written this book in the same challenging, yet supportive, spirit that I conducted those workshops and seminars.

Since arriving at the University of Surrey in 2015, I have been deeply inspired by the level of debate and thoughtful critique that my colleagues cultivate. In particular, I wish to recognize the detailed feedback from Adam Alston, Patrick Duggan and Shantel Ehrenberg. Your generosity and challenging questions have shaped my research process. You are all stars.

The manifesto that features within this book was first shared at the 2nd International Performance Design Symposium in Rome and Fara Sabina, January 2014. I acknowledge the feedback and encouragement from colleagues received at that event as being formative to the ideas that feature in this book. These include Dorita Hannah, Kathleen Irwin, Anna Birch, Reija Hirvikoski and Mónica Raya, who suggested that I publish the manifesto.

I wish to acknowledge colleagues from the Theatre & Performance Research Association who have reviewed, commented and challenged me on the arguments included within my presentations featured as part of the Scenography working group (at Glasgow, 2013), Dramaturgy and Directing (Worcester, 2015) and Performance and the Body (Salford, 2017).

There are also the many discussions that I have had with colleagues and peers on the topic of scenography that, while often informal, have been crucial to the development of this book. These include Emily Orley, Elizabeth Wright, Joslin McKinney, Nick Hunt, Rodrigo Tisi, Juliet Rufford, David Shearing, Anrette McClosey, Andy Lavender, Luis Campos and Siobhán O’Gorman.

I am indebted to the following colleagues who have offered explicit comments on translations, interdisciplinary usages, aligned content and histories of terminologies – thanks to Sofia Pantouvaki, Kirsty Lohman, Pamela Howard, Arnold Aronson, Thea Brejzek and Christin Essin.

Research is always a porous process and filters into all aspects of debate and discussion. In that regard, I wish to thank the PhD researchers I am fortunate enough to supervise for their searching questions – specifically: Michelle Man for prompting discussions on ‘withness’; Ele Slade for debating orientation; Meg Cunningham for querying worlding; Susannah Henry for approaches to landscape and embodiment; Will Osmond for discussions on auto-ethnographic writing; and Melissa Addey for world-building in literature.

I wish to thank Talia Rodgers for commissioning the book and Stacey Walker for her support in its completion. There are also those nameless colleagues who acted as reviewers for the proposal and drafts. Your comments and encouragement have been a guide throughout.

Lastly, I am hugely thankful to my beautiful partner, Nicola, for her support and love while I was squirreled away writing this book. I am also grateful that she convinced me to take weekend breaks with our friends Martin and Chris. To celebrate the importance of a work-life balance, I have included accounts of our experiences within the pages of this book. It seemed a fitting tribute.
Scenographics irritate the disciplined orders of world.
Introduction

Scenographer and architect Frederick Kiesler’s (1890–1965) manifesto ‘The Theatre is Dead’ (1926, see Figure 1) offers a point of departure for this book. The crux of my argument begins from the provocation that, to paraphrase Kiesler, we are working for a scenography that has survived scenography. I trace how in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries there have been numerous cases for succeeding, transgressing, de-centring away from the institutional orthodoxies of theatre. Anticipating the taxonomies of performance as well as the postdramatic, Kiesler’s proposition of a theatre beyond theatre informs my reappraisal of scenography in response to intermedial and immersive practices. It also frames my argument for how scenographic traits operate within diverse material cultures such as installation art or gardening. Accordingly, this book is a study in scenographic excess; of going beyond scenography.

The title is influenced by Hans-Thies Lehmann’s usage of ‘beyond’ in his argument for postdramatic theatre, where the ‘adjective “postdramatic” denotes a theatre that feels bound to operate beyond drama, at a time “after” the authority of the dramatic paradigm in theatre’ (Lehmann 2006: 27). However, this book does not aim to offer a departure from the term ‘scenography’. It is not an argument for ideas of post-scenography per se. Instead, I am concerned with the crucial returns that an investigation of the beyond entails. Cultural theorist Homi Bhabha outlines how the term ‘signifies spatial distance, marks progress, promises the future; but our intimations of exceeding the barrier or boundary – the very act of going beyond – are unknowable, unrepresentable, without a return to the “present” which, in the process of repetition, becomes disjunct and displaced’ (Bhabha 1994: 4). Bhabha considers how the task of going beyond ‘is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past’, but rather a ‘here and there, on all sides, fort/da, hither and thither, back and forth’ (Bhabha 1994: 1). In framing this study in terms of the beyond, I seek to recognize how concepts and practices of scenography are in a state of toing and froing, of moving between learned certitudes.
and potentials of practice. I argue that scenography sustains a feeling of the beyond where the crafting of a ‘scene’—inclusive of the orientating qualities of light and sound as well as costume and scenery—encompasses a range of distinct methods for atmospheric transformation that score how encounters of ‘world’ are conceptualized and rendered attentive.

Evidenced with accounts of my own experiences, I outline how the idiosyncratic practices of contemporary scenography have exceeded the old certitudes of scene painting and set design. I argue that scenography isolates how an accumulation of material and technological methods ‘score’ ongoing processes of ‘worlding’. A combination of Welten and Weltet were employed by Martin Heidegger (1927) to stress how the ongoing active qualities of ‘the world’ are irreducible and can only be conceptualized in terms of worlding. Anthropologist Kathleen Stewart (2007, 2011, 2014) expands upon this position to argue how multiple thresholds of worlding are negotiated as part of everyday life. Stewart frames this notion of worlding in terms of compositional theory:

Here, compositional theory takes the form of a sharply impassive attunement to the ways in which an assemblage of elements comes to hang together as a thing that has qualities, sensory aesthetics and lines of force and how such things come into sense already composed and generative and pulling matter and mind into a making: a worlding.

(Stewart 2014: 119)

The attunement that Stewart describes is predicated on how a worlding assemblage operates as a generative force that orientates moments of action, reflection, and worldly experience. In relation to scenography, Stewart argues that these multiple perceptual worldings are encountered as momentary ‘scenes’, where ‘Scenes becoming worlds are singularities of rhythm and attachment. They require and initiate the kind of attention that both thinks through matter and accords it a life of its own’ (Stewart 2014: 119). Consequently, the scene as an attentive singularity scores—irritates, highlights, reveals—orders of world; a scoring that is equally evident at land borders between nations, the attentiveness of stage geographies, or the imposition of a crime scene. In that regard, I propose that scenographic traits score ongoing processes of worlding through discrete interventional acts of ‘place orientation’, where orientation is inclusive of haptic proxemics and orders of knowledge. My argument for place orientation situates scenography’s intellectual and practical concerns as complementary to the established lexicon of theatrical design whether stage design or mise en scène. While also a mediator for spatial figuring, I outline how scenography happens as a temporal assemblage that is linguistically more akin to notions of ‘staging’ than ‘set’. I argue that a renewed differentiation affords scenography a platform from which to invite intellectual bridges with other academic disciplines beyond theatre. To study scenography in the early twenty-first century is to study a practice that is always seeking, always implicated, within a transgression of borders, whether disciplinary, linguistic, geographic or practical. It is, however, Bhabha and Kiesler’s promise of a return that informs the overall shape of this book’s argument. I contend that the holistic implications of the contemporary approach render scenography a trait of all theatre. I summarize this argument by revisiting the deterministic assumption that has defined conceptions of scenography. Specifically, that there is no theatre practice without scenography.

My proposal for scenography’s centrality to all acts of theatre is evidenced through a re-reading of the ‘stage-scene’ symbiosis. I argue that the Ancient Greek σκηνή (skēnē), a tent or hut, was an act of place orientation. Before any etchings on the surface, the placement of the skēnē changed how the θέατρον (theatron, a place for seeing) was conceived, understood and experienced. As Marvin Carlson observes, ‘The skene house, in addition to its practical service, provided a tangible sign for the hidden “other” world of the actor, the place of appearance and disappearance, the realm of events not seen but whose effects condition the visible world of the stage’ (Carlson 1989: 131). The very act of introducing a temporary structure onto the ὀρχήστρα (orchēstra), the place for dancing, radically changed the conceptual and material circumstances of staging henceforth. While Carlson focuses on how the skēnē gave material and symbolic credence to ‘off-stage’ worlds, this intervention also confirms how scenography scores perceptual encounters of ‘world’ more broadly construed.

‘Stage’ as a discrete concept arguably began with the notion of the proskenion (a platform constructed
‘in front of the scene’). Centuries later the stage concept would be rendered discrete from scene forming the basis for the perspective stages of the Renaissance, which sought to isolate stage from world, scene from spectators. Nevertheless, I argue that stages and scenes are symbiotic in conception and execution – where all stages are also scenes. This reading is evident in the etymology of many continental European languages (such as French and Norwegian) where variants on the term skēnē translate as ‘stage’. The ‘skene house’, as Carlson terms it, reshaped the spatial orientations of the orchestra and, over time, would flatten the conceptual distinction between a place for dancing with the orientating qualities of the skēnē. I express this tension through the hybrid term ‘stage-scene’.

Furthermore, I confront the assumption that a singular legacy emerged from σκηνογραφία (skeno-graphia) and instead argue how each linguistic variation is conditioned by distinct theatrical cultures of place orientation. From skenographia to scénographie, escenografia to szenografie, I recognize these linguistic variations and their associated conventions by consciously applying the Anglophone scenography (with a ‘y’) throughout this book. When discussing a continental variant, the Latinized spelling of the variant in question is employed in recognition of these distinct histories. Beyond the politics of the term’s usage, the overall aim is to map how the orientating qualities of the skēnē, and its symbiosis with the stage concept, have become fundamental to all conceptions of theatre.

Contrary to my argument on the centrality of scenography to contemporary theatre-making, I write this book at a time when the English-language appropriation is being actively contested and challenged. Whether its lacklustre adoption by the professional Anglophone theatres or its removal from the subtitle for the Prague Quadrennial (PQ), scenography is in a state of uncertainty that has been magnified by an expansion of its practical remit in the last few decades. Arguments for scenography’s application beyond the institutional orthodoxies of theatre has rendered the term politically loaded and, in certain quarters, been supplanted by ‘Performance Design’. Correspondingly, the idea of scenography is often ignored by English-speaking theatre communities, with accusations of academic pretension. This association partly stems from the adoption of scenography as a critical argument for why ‘designers’ should have creative and conceptual parity with directors, performers, choreographers, dramaturgs, etc. The notion that scenography is conceptually for designers has been an underlying feature of this argument. Yet, I contend that scenography is formative to all theatre-making and is, therefore, implicated within the labours of directors and performers, as well as choreographers and dramaturgs. I am arguing for the recognition of scenography as a holistic strategy of theatre-making. Therefore, when introducing an example or case study I apply a form of thick description (Geertz 1973) rather than images to describe the experience. These are typically written in the first person and recount my own encounter with a scenography or scenographic culture. My aim is to capture a sense of the multiplicities involved within the bodily act of place orientation. From masks to costume, light to sound, architecture to bodies, these discrete stimuli are connected through the act of scenography. Each stimulus acts upon performers and spectators as part of a wider encounter of place orientation. I argue that, within the collaborative context of theatre-making, scenography exceeds the defined role of a singular scenographer.

While many of the interdisciplinary relationships I describe have been conceptualized as part of an expanded ethos, Beyond Scenography operates as my critique of ‘expanded scenography’ – a terminology that has come to account for scenographic ideas or practices that exceed the ideologies and orthodoxies of the institutionalized theatres. Whether in terms of the spatial configuration of a public garden or the staged quality of interior design, I argue that the expanded ethos reflects a wider politics that seeks to de-centre the practice of scenography away from theatre. The argument for Performance Design stems from a similar position. The borderless concept of performance offers a framework for transgressing the professional hierarchies (of supporting a director or playtext) along with an anti-theatrical negative charge (of conventional or inauthentic). As an act of dissociation and transgression, an expanded remit promotes an expanded ownership of scenography and invites those beyond conventional design roles to critique and argue the case for scenography. This approach also affords those within conventional roles to exceed defined design crafts. In light of this critical expansion, the plural condition of an expanded field has arguably
rendered scenography an inclusive material practice that is potentially borderless in its scope and intention. The term 'scenography' is now applied to the design of a parliament building (Filmer 2013) as well as the experience of mountaineering (Carver 2013). Scenography is potentially everywhere. However, this post-disciplinary positioning sustains a counterargument on the critical usefulness of scenography for other disciplines that already sustain established critiques on theatricality and performativity. My response centres on the critical capacity of a scenographic ‘potential’. I isolate this trait within the distinction between the terms 'scenography' and 'scenographic'.

I contend that the potentiality of a scenographic trait is one of the driving forces behind scenography’s current state of excess. I argue that the proposal for an expanded scenography is founded on the assumption that a scenographic trait exceeds the artistic and professional orthodoxies of the institutional theatres: where scenography and scenographers are often partitioned as additional and illustrative, rather than formative and critical. My call to consider the critical implications of scenographic traits aligns with art critic Dorothea von Hantelmann’s critique on the overuse of the term ‘performativity’ in art cultures. Indeed, von Hantelmann isolates this relationship directly:

Today it is widely believed that ‘performativity’ can be understood as ‘performance-like’. Understood in this false sense it has become a ubiquitous catchword for a broad range of contemporary art phenomena that, in the widest sense, show an affinity to forms of staging, theatricality and mise-en-scène.

(von Hantelmann 2010: 17)

The affinity that von Hantelmann describes – with staging, theatricality and mise en scène – are, I argue, directed towards how art practices evoke the scenographic traits of theatre. Furthermore, I complicate how the application of mise en scène in art cultures is typically in reference to the ‘stage-like’ or ‘set-like’ qualities of the work. Instead, I position mise en scène as a distinct system of interpretation and translation that frames the situational orientations of scenography.

Scenographer Thea Brejzek argues that, with the expansion of scenographic traits beyond theatre orthodoxies, the scenographer emerges not as the spatial organizer of scripted narratives but as the author of constructed situations and as an agent of interaction and communication (Brejzek 2010: 112). I adopt Brejzek’s focus on ‘constructed situations’ to consider how certain art or social practices evoke an affinity with situational acts of staging. Crucially, if scenography happens as an interventional situation, then the orientations of scenographic traits are inclusive of all human and non-human agents that render a place as eventful, attentive.

To capture the multiple and porous orientations that render place attentive, I employ the notion of ‘scenographics’ as a collective term for how the methods of costume, stage geography, light and sound orientate interventional encounters of place. Moreover, I argue that the term ‘scenographic’ is critically distinct to scenography, with the implication being that an object or event can impart a scenographic trait without necessarily being considered scenography. This conceptual distinction is akin to the relationship between performance and performativity, theatre and theatricality, choreography and choreographic. As part of this differentiation, I approach a scenographic trait as orientating and scenography as a crafting. My intention is to map how these evidently related concepts apply to artistic and social scenarios beyond institutional conceptions of theatre. I attempt to dissuade the reader from understanding notions of scenographic as singular and monolithic. My adoption of scenographics stresses the inherent plurality and multiplicities that sustain a scenographic encounter. Consequently, scenographic traits result from a combination of orientating stimuli that exceed strict ontologies of empiricism and complicate the neat separation of theatrical crafts.

The scenographer Darwin Reid Payne employed the term ‘scenographics’ within the opening paragraph of Computer Scenographics (1994): ‘While the first word of the title – computer – is ubiquitous in the present-day world, the second – scenographics – is not found in any dictionary to date’ (Reid Payne 1994: xi; emphasis in original). Reid Payne continues to note that:

scenographics has yet to find a place … And yet, I can think of no better word – coined or not – to describe the subject of the book that follows. Scenographics seems to me to be an apt description of the kinds of drawings scenographers make.

(Reid Payne 1994: xi; emphasis in original)
While Reid Payne’s adoption stems from the ‘graphics’ of drawing or plurality of ‘computer graphics’, my own usage moves beyond perspectival rendering methods to consider how broader conceptions of place orientation are enacted by situational acts of staging. I also eschew terms such as ‘scenographically’ or ‘scenographical’ for matters of comparative ease, although I would argue that these terms proceed from scenographic orientations rather than the crafting of scenography. While my arguments on place orientation remain significant to my argument on the potentialities of a scenographic trait, the concept is presented as a lens through which to critique the historicity and peculiarity of staging techniques within interdisciplinary critical territories. In this regard, I propose that the orientating potentials of scenographics occupy a similar critical territory to performatives or dramaturgies in performance theory and afford a renewed lens on how material cultures evoke scenographic methods more generally.

While the critical potential of scenographics drives the through-line of this book, there is an underlying concern that with the expansion of scenography beyond theatre the particularities of scenography as conditioned by theatrical orthodoxies may become obscured or lost. Interestingly, Czech scholars of scenography were aware of the possible issues that a holistic approach poses when applied beyond the institutional theatre. Scenography historian Barbara Příhodová outlines how theatre theorist Růžena Vacková (1901–82) was wary of how scenography may struggle to retain its distinctiveness within a wider interdisciplinary context:

> Although Vacková considers the visual components of theatrical production to be a kind of visual art, she vigorously draws attention to their specificity, which she argues rests in their service to deliberate theatricality and to the sense of temporality they evoke.

(Příhodová 2011: 256)

Theatre historian and scenographer Christopher Baugh (2013: 224) shares this concern, as he argues that the lack of a centralizing practice, such as the conditioning factors of theatre, may necessitate that scenography loses its distinctiveness before that distinctiveness has been appropriately accounted for within academic circles. In focusing on the methods of scenography as ‘of the theatre’, I argue that this affords a means of articulating scenography’s ‘specificity’, to employ Příhodová’s term. However, this position does not account for situations that may employ, or appear to employ, these methods that exceed the institutional contexts of theatre. My argument for scenographics isolates how the place-orientating methods of scenography shape other social and art practices beyond the institutional theatres.

**Scenography as theatre-making**

My overall methodological focus for this book is to consider what scenography does; how it orientates, situates and shapes theatre practice. This is a departure from other studies that have begun by asking what scenography is (Howard 2002, 2009; McKinney and Butterworth 2009). To achieve this aim, I draw upon a range of critical frameworks; including ‘queer phenomenology’ (Ahmed 2006), ‘new materialism’ (Bennett 2009), ‘wording’ (Stewart 2014), ‘affective atmospheres’ (Anderson 2009; Böhme 2013) and ‘assemblage’ (Deleuze 2006). My intention is to argue why the intangible affective qualities, or ‘affects’, of scenography are formative to all contemporary theatre-making to consider how scenographies move spectators and performers emotionally as well as physically.

Edward Gordon Craig (1872–1966) is often cited as a decisive influence on scenography within academic studies (Howard 2002; Baugh 2005), having worked as an actor, director and designer. While he would not have used the term, Craig’s association is partly due to his instance in 1908 that theatre would remain literary and kinaesthetically restricted in its artistic focus ‘until the painter shows a little more fight’ (Craig 2009: 65). Craig proposed that the theatre artist of the future would be versed in all manner of stagecrafts, which blurred the division between ‘creative’ practices (movement, gesture, direction, poetry) and ‘technical’ practices (stage management, scenery, costume, lighting, sound). The legacy of this position is evident in Duška Radosavljević’s (2013) argument that the collaborative contexts of contemporary theatre have sustained the idea of a ‘theatre-maker’ that collapses the hierarchal roles of author, director, designer, performer, etc. Interestingly, Radosavljević cites the notion of
‘theatre-making’ as an Anglophone innovation that complicates pre-defined roles into a holistic approach: ‘theatre-making anticipates an all-inclusive collaborative process whether the outcome is a solo show or an ensemble piece, a new play or a performance installation’ (Radosavljević 2013: 23). Consequently, the notion of scenography as technical or supplementary to other practices (such as acting or dance) is challenged within the blurred models of collaboration that theatre-making sustains. No one aspect of theatre-making is any more or less integral to the creative process than any other. Within this context, scenography emerges as a distinct strategy for how theatre happens that extends to the movement and placement of performers, as well as the affective qualities of light and sound.

The provocation of scenography as theatre-making aligns with how the Czech scenographer Josef Svoboda (1920–2002) sought to argue the case for scenography. This position is aptly summarized by Jarka Burian, who argued that Svoboda’s ‘urge toward creativity based on synthesis rather than exclusiveness [rejected] narrow connotations of stage “design” in favor of the more inclusive demands of “scenography”’ (Burian 1974: xxii). As evident within Burian’s assessment, since the 1960s scenography within the Anglophone has operated as a provocation in a similar model of Kiesler’s call (1926) for a theatre that has survived the theatre. Scenography asks individuals to revisit the established concepts and practices of ‘design’ in theatre-making, while also promising theatrical designers a means of creative liberation and recognition. This tension is at the crux of scenography’s current state of excess. Svoboda’s argument for scenography as synthesis has afforded a conceptual plurality that sustains projects from architecture to live art. Yet this inclusive approach has confused established orthodoxies, as scenography’s practical reference points contradict the neat separation of theatre crafts and tasks that partition creatives from technicians, directing from design, or costume from set. Accordingly, the linguistic and practical boundaries of what is, and is not, scenography remain contested in the early twenty-first century.

I argue that the uncertainty associated with the Anglophone usage of scenography has led to it being positioned as an academic surrogate (for stage design), misapplied (as set design) and, in interdisciplinary contexts, often avoided (in favour of staging or *mise en scène*). Likewise, without a recognized critical framework applicable beyond the immediate contexts of a theatre event, in the manner of the dramaturgical or choreographic, the analysis of a scenographic perspective as a cultural trait has been negligible. Concurrently, in the first decades of the twenty-first century, contemporary theatre has seen a renewed focus on spatial and material affordances. Immersive and intermedial practices employ a range of scenographic approaches that invite an explicit emphasis on the assemblages that orientate a staged encounter – whether situated in a theatre, gallery, on the street or distributed via digital processes. Baugh summarizes the current status of scenography within contemporary theatre:

One might argue that scenography has become the principal dramaturgy of performance-making – perhaps close to a direct translation of *scaena* and *graphos* ‘drawing with the scene’ – where all aspect of ‘the scene’ (scenic space, embodied action, material, clothes, light and sound) may become the materials laid out on the performance-maker’s ‘palette’.

(Baugh 2013: 240)

In light of these practices and the holistic reading indicated by Baugh, scenography has grown in scope and confidence. This newfound assertiveness is articulated by the former artistic director of the PQ, Sodja Zupanc Lotker, and performance scholar Richard Gough, who propose that multiple scenographies are encountered in daily life:

Notions of expanded scenography such as environments that we perform in – our home, a restaurant, a cruise ship, a parking lot, a public square, a theatre venue, a parliamentary building and Everest – make us rethink scenography as a system. Scenography is not a setting that illustrates our actions any more – it is a body (a discipline, a method, a foundation) in its own right. It is a discipline that has its own logic, its own distinctive rules.

(Lotker and Gough 2013: 3)

Beyond the interpretation of stage figurations, Lotker and Gough’s provocation positions scenography as a
system for conceiving and encountering environments—whether designed or found. The notion of a scenography that exists beyond the crafts of scene painting and set construction challenges the orthodoxies of theatrical design. The allied practices of set design or scenic art are rendered historic or diminished in relationship to the theoretical and practical implications of, what curator Hans Peter Schwarz (2011: xix) has termed the ‘new scenography’. What is more, Lotker and Gough’s phraseology situates scenography as a distinct discipline of study, independent of theatre and performance studies. Whereas Baugh’s description of scenography as a holistic theatrical practice is one cause for debate, the conception of a new or expanded scenography invites an altogether different challenge—one that operates beyond the established crafts and disciplinary situation of theatre design.

The idea of an expanded scenography is a subject that Brejzek defines as a ‘transdisciplinary practice [that can] no longer be assigned to a singular genre—set design comes to mind—and a singular author’ (Brejzek 2011a: 8). Performance designers Dorita Hannah and Olav Harsløf also evoke the expanded context of scenography, as they ask: ‘But what happens when design leaves the confines of the stage and begins to wander?’ (Hannah and Harsløf 2008: 12). Scenography as an expanded field is contextualized as a distinct strategy or approach to artistic practice that focuses on how design performs: from intermedial graphics to dance architecture. This argument has been summarized within the heading of Performance Design, which allows artists to emphasize the ‘performative nature of their creative work as both the speculative and projective act of designing performance and the embodied and ongoing practice of performing design’ (Hannah and Harsløf 2008: 14; emphasis in original). Hannah and Harsløf stress that, unlike the established orthodoxies of theatrical production, the practice of performance design can exist in isolation; it is not a means of designing for performance. With the wider communities of architecture and fine art now applying the language of performativity on a regular basis, the banner of Performance Design also aims to account for the diverse range of practices that investigate how objects, environments and assemblages also perform. With an intentionally broad remit, Performance Design is, at least in part, a redefining of the methods of scenography as a critical and artistic practice that operates beyond the institutional remit of theatre.

Intrinsic to these new tensions between allied terms and communities of practice is that scenography operates as a radical proposition. Yet, within Europe this situation is linguistically almost unique to the Anglophone (and Germanic) contexts given the apparent ‘introduction’ of scenography. This linguistic obstacle is not present in the majority of continental European languages, which already host variants on the ancient Greek in place of the variation that comes with notions of ‘stage design’, ‘theatre design’, ‘scenic design’, etc. The theatre scholar Kenneth Macgowan (1888–1963) and stage designer Robert Edmond Jones (1887–1954) summarized how a new and, importantly for this book, ‘Continental Stagecraft’ emerged across Europe in the 1910s that also challenged theatrical design orthodoxies. Macgowan and Jones cite how individuals such as Adolphe Appia (1862–1928) and Craig confronted the presumptions of the ‘realistic theatre’ that had become a dominant theatrical form in this period. A New Stagecraft would demand a new theatrical rhetoric of place orientation, where artists are:

constantly at work upon plans for breaking down the proscenium-frame type of production, and for reaching a simple platform stage or podium … This means, curiously enough, that the designers of scenery are trying to eliminate scenery, to abolish their vocation.

(Macgowan and Jones 1923: 126)

Similarly, the stage designer Joseph Urban (1872–1933) argued that this ‘new art is a fusion of the pictorial with the dramatic [demanding] not only new designers of scenery, but new [directors] who understand how to train actors in speech, gesture and movement, harmonizing with the scenery’ (Urban 1913 cited in Aronson 2005: 137). The theatre-maker Tadeusz Kantor (1915–90) forty-eight years after Urban echoes this position, arguing that

[the] terms ‘the stage set,’ ‘scenery’ or ‘stage design’ become useless and unnecessary in the new theatre. They imply a distinction. What is understood by
these terms ought to be integrated with the theatrical whole so strongly as to melt into the entire stage matter. It should not be discernible.

(Kantor 1961: 212)

Approached as a conceptually inclusive and holistic strategy of theatre-making, scenography in English has been strongly associated with the legacy of the New Stagecraft’s non-representational approach to theatre-making, an approach that has also been thought of as ‘continental’ in conception. The provocation of scenography is, therefore, often qualified in certain quarters by a political lens that implies a historic distinction between ‘continental’ and ‘Anglophone’ theatrical orthodoxies. While this is more contextual than critical in its relevance to this study, the perception that scenography operates as a challenge to Anglophone theatrical orthodoxies frames its adoption and current status.

The notion of scenography as theatre-making features throughout this book and is, in part, a provocation and a challenge to argue otherwise. With notions of dramaturgy and choreography now being considered formative to theatre-making, scenography, too, must make a claim for its centrality if it is to take its place as an equal partner within this triad. The chapters that follow plot a framework for arguing scenography’s centrality to theatre-making. The critical and political potential for scenography is unmistakable when considering the ubiquity of the term ‘staging’ within academic scholarship, artistic practice and everyday life. Used as a verb, ‘to stage’ is to ‘put on an event’ that stresses a sense of situational temporality and material placement. This, I argue, is to isolate the orientating traits that scenography enacts within theatre. Svoboda’s legacy in arguing scenography as synthesis – of light, sound, movement and materiality – is that the concept and practice now applies to all manner of staged events. Scenography exceeds a strict focus on model boxes, scenery and perspective stages as well as the logistical remit of a solo scenographer. Consequently, the challenge is to argue why scenography is to staging as choreography is to movement, as dramaturgy is to sequencing. In doing so, I argue that scenography will emerge as a vital and formative strategy of theatre-making and lay the groundwork for realizing its capacity as critical framework for how ‘scenes’ render ‘place’ attentive more generally. Yet, my focus on theatre-making affirms scenography as ‘of the theatre’. This position is reflective of a number of practical and conceptual challenges in the twentieth century that questioned the very need for theatre at all.

### Theatre, performance and scenography

Kiesler’s provocation that ‘we are working for the theatre that has survived the theatre’ (1926: 1) summarized a number of tensions that defined and framed theatrical experimentation in the twentieth century. The call for a theatre beyond theatre became a familiar trope within experimental practice and theory. The expanded remit of scenography echoes how the idea of theatre was transformed in the last century – with the increase in site-specific practices or performer-less theatres, as well as the formation of performance theory, challenging previous positions on what constituted theatre-making. Paradoxically, theatre as a familiar concept has arguably remained stable within the popular domain.

In his 1968 manifesto on the state of theatre, the first line of Peter Brook’s *The Empty Space* has been cited countless times. While Brook’s first line defines theatre as an actor on a ‘bare stage’ while ‘someone else is watching’, it is the rest of that same opening paragraph that has remained dominant to how theatre is perceived in popular culture:

Yet, when we talk about theatre this is not quite what we mean. Red curtains, spotlights, blank verse, laughter, darkness, these are all confusedly superimposed in a messy image covered by one all-purpose word. We talk of cinema killing the theatre, and in that phrase we refer to the theatre as it was when the cinema was born, a theatre of box office, foyer, tip-up seats, footlights, scene changes, intervals, music, as though the theatre was by very definition these and little more.

(Brook 1968: 11)

Cited significantly less than the bare stage idea, the rest of Brook’s opening paragraph articulates an understanding of theatre that, beyond those aligned with the academic study of theatre and performance studies,
remains largely intact. Central to Brook’s argument is that, when cinematic methods challenged theatre’s cultural place as a predominant leisure activity, this shifted theatre as an experimental art form beyond the gaze of popular consumption. High schools and community groups often enact theatrical conventions reminiscent of theatre before modernism and the twentieth century, for the same reasons that many commercial producers still produce work that speaks to this understanding: because it is recognizably theatre. There is no need to become familiar with the form or methods. The rest of Brook’s paragraph is theatre for many within our shared global cultures. The forebears of our contemporary usage of scenography – namely Appia, Craig and Svoboda – worked in theatre forms and mediums that operated beyond the popular Anglophone orthodoxies that Brook outlines. To understand scenography’s provocation is also to understand how theatre – both as a practice and concept – was changed by a series of intellectual and practical challenges in the twentieth century.

While the advent of cinema challenged theatre as a primary leisure activity, theatre scholarship was confronted with the concept of ‘performance’. Diane Taylor states that performance ‘is not always about art’ (Taylor 2016: 6). While noting that it relates to the work of actors or the actions of dancers, Taylor stresses that the term ‘performance’ does not denote that the ‘actions are not “real” or have no long term consequences’ (Taylor 2016: 25). Marina Abramović has also emphasized the actuality of her performance art works, which she compares to the artificiality of theatre. ‘Theatre was an absolute enemy. It was something bad, it was something we should not deal with. It was artificial … We refused the theatrical structure’ (Abramović in Kaye 1996: 180). Abramović conflates wider sociological readings of performance, as refined by Erving Goffman (1958), to position her work as an artist who creates events that are ‘real’ and ‘authentic’. The anthropologist Victor Turner approaches the distinction between performance and theatre – the politically real and the contrived – from an altogether different perspective. ‘Theatre is, indeed, a hypertrophy, an exaggeration, of jural and ritual processes; it is not a simple replication of the “natural” total processual pattern of the social drama’ (Turner 1982: 12). Turner’s reading of theatre as a ‘hypertrophy’ – as a state of excess that emerges from its surroundings and yet is peculiar to it – aligns with Eugenio Barba’s observations on the ‘extra-daily’ actions of performers. Barba argues that extra daily techniques ‘move away from daily techniques creating tension, a difference in potential … which appear to be based on the reality with which everyone is familiar, but which follow a logic which is not immediately recognisable’ (Barba and Savarese 1991: 18). As distinct from the daily techniques of appearance and behaviour, the extra-daily is a hypertrophic act that exceeds and demarcates itself from the disciplined expectations of day-to-day normativity.

Alan Read in Theatre in the Expanded Field (2013) echoes Barba’s conception of theatre as extra-daily when arguing that ‘a capacity for performance is a capacity to irritate, and to be irritated’ (Read 2013: xviii). As with Turner’s hypertrophy, Read argues that performance ‘could be said to act as a foreign body, as a third person, always at odds with those things upon which it does its work’ (Read 2013: xix). Likewise, performance scholar Cathy Turner applies Barba’s term to differentiate ‘theatre dramaturgy’ from everyday dramaturgies, observing that ‘if we are not able to separate conceptually the dramaturgy of the artwork from that of the everyday, at least temporarily, the effect will be to dismiss the transformative potential of theatre’s alternative worlds’ (Turner 2015: 4). Accordingly, I argue that scenes operate as worlding irritants. Framed by Stewart’s (2007, 2011, 2014) implied position that ‘worlding’ accounts for the ongoing negotiations of worlds aside worlds (as discrete from an essentialist conception of ‘the world’), I propose that the scene concept isolates how the constituent elements of place are rendered attentive through a hypertrophic act that intervenes, others, and scores normative experiences of human-centric worlding. Moreover, a stage-scene operates as an enacted land border that demarcates the thresholds between perceptual worlds. The operational situations of dance, opera, live art, and theatre are all extra-daily forms of staging – acts of human-centric worlding. Each sustains a particular situation of viewing, of watching, or participation. These situations are, in scenographic terms, tantamount to the same situational practice of staging.

Abramović’s criticisms of theatre are directed towards a politics of theatricality rather than operational
situations of staging. Carlson has described how the duality of theatricality, in that it is simultaneously a thing and a representation of a thing, has provided a distinct challenge to wider ontological binaries of real and not real for centuries: ‘From Plato onward one of the most predictable attacks on theater has been precisely that it provided empty representations that if unchallenged threatened the authenticity of the real self’ (Carlson 2002: 240–41). Nevertheless, Carlson argues that the codified and eventual act of theatre can be viewed under different terms:

Theatricality can be and has been regarded in a far more positive manner if we regard theater not as its detractors from Plato onward have done – as a pale, inadequate, or artificially abstract copy of the life process – but if we view it as a heightened celebration of that process and its possibilities.

(Carlson 2002: 244)

In considering how theatre and theatricality presents extra-daily acts of communication beyond the disciplined systems of normativity, Carlson proposed that the positive attributes of theatricality’s politics might be considered more directly. As Tracy C. Davis points out, the tensions between self and role, authentic and contrived, is theatricality’s ‘virtue, recognizing the gap between signifier and signified, truth and effect’ (Davis 2003: 142). Jill Dolan extends this position to argue that the ‘affective consequences of theatre and performance are indeed real and useful, whether or not we can measure them empirically’ (cited in Essin 2012: 98). Performance has, nevertheless, sustained a distinct critical territory from theatre when considering questions of ‘reality’. J. L. Austin (1962) defines performatives as linguistic ‘doings’ that exceed the binaries of constative statements that affirm an idea as either ‘true’ or ‘false’. Similarly, Judith Butler (1990) stresses that the performativity of contrived learned social traits – such as the enactment of gender characteristics – are rendered normative due to their very repetition and reinforcement by systems of power (such as language). In both Austin and Butler’s frameworks, performatives and performativity focus on acts that in and of themselves are agnostic to questions of ‘truth’. Yet, these same traits and acts are ‘reality-producing’ in that they affirm experiences as ‘true’ through their very repetition, their normativity.

In light of the politics of theatricality and the assumed authenticity of performance, Richard Schechner has argued that the conceptual and practical concerns of performance relegate theatre to the ‘string quartet of the twenty-first century: a beloved but extremely limited genre’ (Schechner 1992: 8). While he later retracts this statement (2000), Schechner’s observation stems from a modelling of a feedback loop where the social dramas of life are informed, yet distinct from, the aesthetic dramas of theatre (see Figure 2). Citing Victor Turner’s notion of ‘social dramas’ as moments of conflict that can be eventful (Watergate, migrations) or institutional (school, church), Schechner’s underlying argument is that it is ‘performance’ not ‘theatre’ that connects the social and aesthetic dramas of life. Lehmann, while recognizing theatre as a sub-area of performance, has offered a useful counterargument to Schechner’s positioning of theatre as historic. The German scholar argues that ‘the decline of the dramatic is by no means synonymous with the decline of the theatrical. On the contrary: theatricalization permeates the entire social life’ (Lehmann 2006: 183). Honing in on the significance of aesthetic works (broadly defined as art) within any art–life loop, Lehmann suggests that ‘the real of our experiential worlds is to a large extent created by art in the first place … Human sentiment imitates art, as much as the other way around, art imitates life’ (Lehmann 2006: 37). Andy Lavender agrees with Lehmann and cites that, after postmodernism and the increased focus on how cultures are performed, ‘theatre’ became a verb. ‘The processes of theatring were all around us, as cultural production staged individuals (actual and fictional) across diverse platforms, presenting them for spectatorship’ (Lavender 2016: 197). Lehmann’s expanded notion of theatre as a theatricalization of social life, and Lavender’s notion of ‘theatring’, encompass the critical perspectives of performance while also focusing on the representational questions exposed through a politics of theatricality. Crucially, the notion of theatring isolates the orientating potentials of staged acts (whether framed as art or life) as an activity that transcends institutional concepts of theatre as a finite medium.

If we concede that to do theatre is to stage events, then the affective qualities of theatre are no less real
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being disciplinary and politically tied to ‘The Theatre’ as a cultural practice. The visibility of these techniques as contrived systems for ‘seeing’ is heightened in an institutional theatre and, more often than not, rendered invisible through an ideological nullification that frames operational acts of theatring. The term ‘theatre’ is, nevertheless, applied in both distinctions where the notion of theatring is collapsed into the operational usage for linguistic ease. ‘Theatricality’ is reserved for discussions on the ideological structures of (re)presentation within art and social behaviours, which is distinct from staging as a situated material practice.

On a whim, I decide to attend the Royal Academy of Art’s exhibition on ‘Sensing Spaces: Architecture Reimagined’ in March 2014. Upon entering the entrance hall and purchasing my ticket I find myself within an atrium with projections of citations upon calico-like hangings on the walls. To my surprise, a citation by Appia appears. I’m surprised because Appia was not an architect. I’m surprised because he was a scenographer. I’m reminded of the conversations I have had with colleagues who lackadaisically term ‘bad’ architecture as ‘scenographic’: as inauthentic or physically flimsy. As I traverse the installations evidently hosted within the broader architecture of the Royal Academy (RA), I cannot help but view these in terms of scenography. They exist as temporary structures that have been constructed for the purpose of evoking an experience of architecture: of a particular studio’s principles or working methods. While I spend some time with all of the exhibits, it is the last installation by Grafton Architects that drew my attention. In particular, upon first entering the final room of their section I looked up at the grey cuboid structures that

![Figure 2](Schechner's mutual feedback loop of performance between Turner's social drama and aesthetic performances)

Source: Schechner (2013: 77)
hung form the RA’s ceiling. The bottom edges of these structures were just at arm’s length. The greyish tones of the hung structures appeared tarnished and weathered in an uneven texture scored by the shadows from the light sources high above. I reach up and knock the surface in the full expectation of it being solid and rendered in a metallic or solid material. I’m surprised for the second time. My knock makes no noise. The structures are constructed from fabric with a (possibly) wooden internal frame, which reminds me of the techniques applied to theatrical scenery: stretched material over a frame that has been textured with a dye or paint. I cannot avoid the association and sit to consider this thought. I watch numerous other patrons enter the room, look up, and knock the structures just as I had done. Each time there is a moment of surprise. I realize that Grafton Architects are examining architecture through means of scenography. I realize that these structures are scenographic in conception and experience. Yet, they are removed (or protected) from the negative politics of theatre as disingenuous. While these structures might be termed ‘theatrical’ in their material surrogate, the installation itself is ideologically removed from the institution of theatre. I remember Appia’s inclusion at the start. I realize that, while this is not scenography in an institutional sense, it is also not scenography.

The moment of surprise that occurred when knocking upon the fabric surface at the RA’s Sensing Spaces exhibition is also a moment of ideology in action: it invites the question ‘Is this architecture or scenography?’. Schechner applies the double negative of ‘not not’ to argue how actors perform within an anti-structure, where an actor ‘no longer has a “me” but has a “not not me”’ (Schechner 1985: 112). This double negative of performing character, while still being a recognizable individual, stresses an inherent duality, a duality that is symptomatic of the act of staging. The institutional framing of the gallery situates the experience in terms of installation art. While not institutionally theatre, the spatial and material interventions of installation art share many of the same place orientating affects of scenography. Furthermore, the ideological framing of the exhibition in terms of architecture enforces an ideological distance from scenography by matter of the two practices’ critical histories. The philosopher Gernot Böhme summarized this relationship by citing a version of the poet Friedrich Schiller’s phrase ‘art serene, life is serious’, arguing that this asymmetry of art and life ‘continues to distinguish architecture from stage design. Architecture does not build for the sake of the engaged or detached spectator watching a play, but rather for the people who experience, in space, the seriousness of life’ (Böhme 2006: 406). In this instance, the seriousness and imposed ‘realness’ of architecture is privileged over the speculative conditions of theatre.

Yet, the situational and temporary contexts of this exhibition render it scenographic. The explicit crafting of how spectators attend to and interact with the attentive objects as a speculative act (of architecture) positions the situation as operationally theatre. The installation has spectators and a scene of action; it is an extra-daily temporary staging within the gallery; it moves people in terms of the choreographic; it orders participation in terms of the dramaturgical; it orientates a feeling of place in terms of scenographics. The experience of the installation is operationally an act of theatring. Consequently, the ‘performance’ of installation art is, I propose, intrinsically bound to the scenographic (as well as the choreographic and dramaturgical) traits that orientate and situate the encounter as an act of staging, of theatring.

Performance, as both a concept and genre of art-making, is readily applied to all manner of cultural and art contexts (see Diamond 1996; Fischer-Lichte 2008). The interdisciplinarity afforded by this familiarity has led to notions of the performative and performance occupying the critical territory of the scenographic and scenography. The increased status of performance within art institutions over the last twenty years (i.e. MoMA’s retrospective of Abramović in 2010 or the opening of The Tanks devoted to live art at Tate Modern in 2012) has seemingly lent itself to the critical expansion of scenography given its focus on the ephemeral agency of material and design.
Emerging as a new disciplinary heading, Performance Design was originally applied in support of undergraduate programmes in Denmark and New Zealand that combined the study of architecture/spatial design and theatrical design. The convenors of these degree programmes, Hannah and Harsløf, define this heading thusly:

As a loose and inclusive term Performance Design asserts the role of artists/designers in the conception and realization of events, as well as their awareness of how design elements not only actively extend the performing body, but also perform without and in spite of the human body.

(Hannah and Harsløf 2008: 18)

The usage of the term ‘performance’ within this heading intentionally echoes the remit of Performance Studies, which Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes as a ‘post-discipline of inclusions’ (2004: 43). This post-disciplinary remit informs Brejzek’s reading of an expanded scenography as a transdisciplinary practice. While scenography has a particular history with the emergence of Performance Studies through TDR: The Drama Review, there is a danger that a slippage has begun to occur between Performance Design and scenography: an implied surrogacy that is reminiscent of how scenography has been conflated with notions of set design in English. In order to avoid this linguistic and disciplinary confusion, the particularities of each terminology require outlining in relation to its partner.

Performance Design, argue Hannah and Harsløf, offers theatrical designers a means of emancipation from the established hierarchies of the production team within many Anglophone and continental theatres: ‘the contemporary scenographer is generally expected to serve and supplement the theatre director’s imagination rather than initiate projects or experiments with their spatial realm’ (Hannah and Harsløf 2008: 12). Interestingly, Hannah and Harsløf’s usage of the term ‘scenographer’ implies the Danish scenograf, what in English would typically be translated as ‘stage designer’. Notably, the idea of servitude is aligned with the notion of a scenograf, which is counter to the liberating vision as outlined by Svoboda, Howard and other Czech-influenced readings. The two groups are discussing two different forms of liberation: from the hierarchical structure of theatrical production and from theatre itself. Svoboda’s scenography is a means of collaboration within the institutionalized theatre, while Performance Design is an argument for emancipation from the theatre institution. Moreover, the emergence of this shift in focus is scored by an increase in theatre work taking place beyond a theatre building.

In a publication by the Victoria & Albert Museum (London) on twentieth- and twenty-first-century plays in the United Kingdom, actor Simon Callow labels the first decade of the new century as ‘the decade of the site-specific show’ (cited in Dorney and Gray 2014). Theatre beyond the theatre challenges the disciplinary conditions of theatre design and has invited the expanded territory of Performance Design. Scenographer Kathleen Irwin relates this shift to the new approaches demanded from these ‘found’ environments: ‘The impulse to experiment with found space redefined the scenographic function; the scenographer’s focus shifted from interpreting text within prescribed stage space to deconstructing found space within a critical context’ (Irwin 2008: 44). This blurring of theatrical and non-theatrical environments has led to a number of academic enquiries into how ‘space’ performs (see McKinney and Palmer 2017). In line with this surge in academic scholarship on the performance place/space, the remit of Performance Design recognizes the expansive range of scenographic practices undertaken within and beyond the theatre, both as a professional institution and disciplinary remit. Consequently, Performance Design sustains a post-disciplinary heading that is not aligned with any one institutionalized arts practice. It is a borderless grouping of a range of topological, anthropological and political approaches to spatial/material design. Scenography is a practice of theatrical place orientation, indicative of the methods and encounter of theatrical environments. Performance Design is the post-disciplinary context of scenography. In turn, scenography is one possible strategy of Performance Design.

My usage of scenography is qualified by the post-disciplinary framing of Performance Design. Yet, I contend that scenography remains a distinct strategy within this critical landscape. In this regard, I argue that Svoboda’s inclusive and holistic approach to theatrical design is a ‘radical’ departure from the prescriptive qualities of the pre-1960s French décorateur
and the English ‘set designer’. Indeed, Svoboda was conscious of this radical differentiation, as Burian outlines:

He does not believe the English-American term ‘designer’ to be adequate, and other general terms such as ‘bühnenbilder’ or ‘décorateur’ are even less satisfactory because, according to him, they all imply a person who conceives a setting for a play, renders it two-dimensionally on paper – perhaps stunningly – and then in effect retires from the field, having fulfilled his commission. Svoboda’s concept of his work involves much more than this; hence his preference for the term ‘scenography’.

(Burian 1974: 15)

In rejecting the terminologies of other theatre cultures (whether Germanic, Francophone or Anglophone), Svoboda argued that scenography operated as a form of ‘psycho-plasticity’, where ‘[d]ramatic space is psycho-plastic space, which means that it is elastic in its scope and alterable in its quality’ (cited in Burian 1974: 30).

The intangible qualities of movement and rhythm, as exposed by the experience of material in time, were for Svoboda the fundamental materials of scenography. Indeed, the history of scenography’s holistic usage in English has been intertwined with conceptual ideas on unity and balance that emerged with the New Stagecraft of the 1910s and 1920s.

Histories on early twentieth-century theatrical experimentation often present the ideas of scenography and the New Stagecraft as being interchangeable and deterministic – with the assumption that one is merely a precursor for the other. Theatre scholar Dennis Kennedy (1993, 2001) describes this period as a ‘scenographic revolution’. Indeed, the influence of the French understanding that positions scénographie as a predominantly visual exercise can be seen in Kennedy’s definition: ‘Scenography can profitably be thought of as a visual counterpart to text; while the spoken dialogue of the play creates the verbal sphere of the production, the scenography creates the visual’ (Kennedy 2001: 12). This is a significant distinction from the radical Czech approach, as defined by Svoboda, that embraces sound, and other temporal non-visual elements, as concerns of scenography. Aside from German and English, all other continental variants of the Greek skenographia are institutionally tied to the theatre and typically translate as either ‘theatre design’, ‘stage design’, ‘set design’ or ‘scenic design’.

The term ‘theatre design’ is taken to signal a distinct alignment with a particular institutionalized practice. While theatre now occupies a broad conceptual territory, the connotation of an institutionalized understanding of theatre (as theatre building or theatre orthodoxy) positions theatre design as institutionally specific. Theatrical design, within this context, does offer a useful means of recognizing the extension of theatre-based stagecrafts and design techniques beyond institutional theatres, such as music festivals and sports stadiums. Subsequently, ‘theatrical design’ is employed within this book to denote a collection of material and technological staging techniques that have been developed in response to theatrical orthodoxies. These orthodoxies include stage delineation, scenery, costume, sound design, and all forms of stage lighting (from footlights to spotlights). Other terms to have emerged within the higher education environment include ‘design for performance’ and ‘design for the stage’. While these phraseologies embrace multiple platforms of practice, they also retain an alignment with the established orthodoxies of theatre practice, such as scenography’s symbiosis with stage and design as a servicing for performance. Performance Design, in this regard, sustains multiple readings without any focus on theatre as a central practice, and is approached as a post-disciplinary field of practice with no allegiance to an established set of disciplinary orthodoxies or techniques.

Research questions and chapters

Focused on the Anglophone adoption from the 1960s onwards, this book explores the porous state of contemporary theatre-making to argue a critical distinction between scenography (as place orientation) and scenographics (that which orientate interventional acts of worlding, of staging). Therefore, Beyond Scenography is less an investigation into how to make scenography or even why make scenography, but rather an argument for what scenography does. The following research questions inform the overall structure and sequence of the chapters:

- What is the status of the term scenography in the English language?
• How has a holistic reading of scenography influenced the study and practice of staging?
• What is the critical distinction between scenography and scenographic?
• How does a scenographic trait apply beyond theatre practice?

Prompted by Kiesler’s manifesto, the key ideas and positions that feature as part of these investigations are summarized within statements placed on insert pages throughout the book. These operate as a manifesto on scenography and scenographics that focuses on the principal arguments and critiques that inform the overall conclusions.

Chapter 1, ‘Place orientation, scenic politics and scenographics’, details the theoretical framework that underpins my approach on scenography and scenographics. To argue this point, I review distinct approaches from human geography and performance theory to conceptions of space, place, material and body with a particular focus on the dual implications of ‘orientation’, which accounts for haptic proximities (distance, scale, etc.) and social perceptions (normativity, otherness, etc.). I contend that in approaching scenography as place orientation this considers how staged acts are understood from a holistic-bodily perspective. I also consider how ‘the scenic’ operates as a distinct aesthetic ideology that co-opts experiential encounters as-if-it-were a quantifiable painted image: as a fixed commodified object. This method of quantifying experience is, I propose, aligned with the aesthetic politics of the ‘picturesque’. This aesthetic position is discrete from the interventional and situational affects of scenographics. Taking the position that the terms performative and theatricality are often overused within art criticism and practice, I outline how the argument for scenographics augments these established concepts to provide a more precise framework for how staged atmospheres and situations affect materials and bodies alike. Last, this chapter concludes by introducing how scenographics enact the othering tactics of queering and surrogacy.

Chapter 2, ‘Scenography and the Anglophone theatres’, provides a historiography of scenography in the English language and how this has shifted in response to changes in theory and practice. I outline why a radical Czech-influenced scenography emerged within English-speaking theatrical cultures and how this holistic approach (inclusive of sound, stage geography, objects, light, costume) challenges the established linguistic variations across continental Europe. This chapter concludes by considering the hierarchies of scenography. Specifically, I review the inclusion of costume and sound within this holistic remit and how this has challenged established orthodoxies on scenography, principally that scenography is neither exclusively visual nor spatial.

Chapter 3, ‘Scenography beyond scenographers’, investigates how the English language adoption of scenography confronts base assumptions on the interrelationships between directing and design. Beyond universities and art schools, I trace how the term is often ignored or distrusted due to its apparent resistance to the Anglophone theatrical hierarchies (of playwright, director, designer, performer). I relate this explicitly to scenography’s ill-defined relationship with mise en scène. As part of a renewed lexicon of scenographic practice, I review the history of mise en scène in English and how this concept relates to contemporary approaches to staging. Scenography’s potential to emerge as a key concept within the English language theatres is furthered by the histories of two other continental practices and terminologies that met initial resistance, but were later adopted – namely choreography and dramaturgy. I review how the steady adoption of choreography in the 1930s and now dramaturgy in the last twenty years emerged out of the need to better define and articulate the complex acts of theatre-making; to offer new directions of practice and shared authorship, as well as further refining the established lexicon. One of the conclusions of this book is that, while the Anglophone adoption of scenography is formative to all theatre practice, this holistic approach has exceeded the strict capacity of the scenographer role. As choreography has exceeded the choreographer and dramaturgy has exceeded the dramaturg, I argue that the blurred conditions of contemporary theatre-making render scenography a shared undertaking whose authorship is not typically exclusive to any one named individual. When scenography exceeded the conventions of scenery, I propose that scenography also exceeded the exclusive role of the scenographer.

Chapter 4, ‘Scenography happens’, consolidates my argument for scenography to stand alongside its
sister continental European theatre-making strategies, both conceptually and practically. Informed by new materialist notions of atmosphere and assemblage, this chapter argues that the linguistic associations of the term ‘set’ do not fully stress the temporal qualities that are intrinsic to the experience of place orientation. In particular, this chapter examines how Gilles Deleuze’s (1925–95) articulation of an assemblage offers a framework for arguing the peculiarities of scenography. Deleuze approaches an assemblage as a coalition of components that are qualified by a shared association, which is ad hoc or informal. As Deleuze argues, in ‘assemblages you find states of things, bodies, various combinations of bodies, hodgepodes; but you also find utterances, modes of expression, and whole regimes of signs’ (Deleuze 2006: 177). Accordingly, new materialist Jane Bennett stresses an assemblage ‘not only has a distinctive history of formation but a finite life span’ (Bennett 2009: 24). The ‘finite life’ of an assemblage is to observe that the relationships, or coherence, of a network of things become manifest within a particular moment, at a particular time. Evidence by a case study on the Gecko Physical Theatre’s re-staging of MISSING (2012), I propose that in isolating how scenography happens this confronts an underlying misconception about scenography within the Anglophone theatres: that it is an academic surrogate for set design, as distinct from a strategy for how theatre is manifested in time. I conclude this chapter by confronting the linguistic bias that positions scenography as the introduction of visual objects into the ‘stage space’.

Chapter 5, ‘Scenographic worlding’, reviews the symbiosis between stage and scenography. In particular, scenographics are considered in relation to their potential to render ‘worlds’ attentive and defined. As Jean-Luc Nancy puts it, the ‘world is always the plurality of worlds’ (Nancy 1997: 155). Worlding is approached as a series of ongoing and irreducible processes that qualify the porous and interconnected manifestation of worldly encounter. Accordingly, I argue how scenographics score perceptual orientations of world. The hybrid concept of a ‘stage-scene’ is proposed to stress how scenographics score the process of worlding in the same manner as land borders. Stages-scenes simultaneously reveal and affirm how worlds are felt, whether politically speculative or ‘real’.

In this regard, I consider how stage geographies are rendered attentive through material interventions and ideologies. I revisit the assumption that stages precede scenography as an ‘empty space’. I contend that stages are manifested through the orientating qualities of scenographics. This is inclusive of how stages occur within the mixed reality events of Blast Theory as well as the immersive practices of Punchdrunk. I conclude by mapping the conceptual importance of conceiving scenographics beyond vision and how stages are bound to situational stage-scenes through scenographics.

Chapter 6, ‘Scenographic cultures’, applies the conclusions of the previous chapters to argue the scenographic qualities of wider art events and social practices. From installation art to gardening, I argue that the communication and encounter of certain cultural practices evoke scenographic orientations. Critical discourse on the status of practices such as marketing and interior design in the twentieth century has presented an alternative canon that rarely acknowledges scenography’s shared traits. I argue how a focus on scenographics exposes these tensions and offers a means of reconsidering the conceptual affordances of scenography beyond theatre. I outline how scenographics more appropriately account for the affective qualities of these practices than notions of performativity or theatricality. While not intended as a proxy for these concepts, in applying the principles of scenographics to art events and social practices, my objective is to propose renewed intellectual conversations with other disciplines on what constitutes a scenographic trait. To grow the critical capacity of scenography within theatre, I argue that we must consider how scenographics occur beyond theatre.

In Chapter 7, ‘Scenographic architecture’, I contemplate how architectural discourse has sought to distance itself from scenography. Adopting the position that scenographics are ontologically agnostic, I argue for a renewed reassessment of the role of a scenographic perspective within architectural criticism. In particular, I consider how notions of fast architecture score the slow architectures of monumentality. From scaffolding to projected images, I argue how the interventions of fast architecture are scenographic in conception and execution. To further illustrate this point, I return to two examples of ‘classical’
scenographic architecture; namely French *trompe-l’oeil* (forced perspective art) and Russian Potemkin villages (staged towns). My aim is to outline how these practices sustain scenographic orientations *alongside-and-with* slow architectures.

In summary, this book plots how the contemporary adoption of scenography in the 1960s arises out of an academic and artistic interest in innovative European design practices. If the legacies of Aristotle’s *skenographia* are multiple, then the Anglophone usage has a distinctly Czech flavour in its scope and intent. The history of this contemporary adoption also positions scenography, at least in part, within an academic context – with the term’s disciplinary familiarity growing out its usage within the higher education environment alongside experimental artistic practice. Overall, I propose that there is a distinct advantage to recognizing the critical distinction between scenography (as place orientation) and scenographics (that which orientate interventional acts of worlding). Consequently, I propose that the expanded disciplinary contexts of scenography that have emerged in the last decade dictate that our current linguistic conventions for articulating scenography are no longer adequate. Equally, in order to investigate the blurred boundaries between scenography and other disciplinary contexts – be that practices of interior design or protest – it is productive to consider the critical potentials of scenographics beyond scenography.


