

The Evolution of Theatre and Scenography

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Abstract

The aim and object of this study will be an essential analysis from the simple forms of ancient Greek theater to the complex images and advanced technology of contemporary stages. Starting from the initial function of the theatrical space in antiquity for narration and ritual, the research examines the influence of artistic movements, technological developments, social and cultural changes on the evolution of theater.

The study will follow a historical and interdisciplinary approach, examining important periods of theater: such as the theater of the Italian Renaissance with the invention of illusionistic perspective, the Baroque theater with its grandiose effects, the 19th century movements towards realism and naturalism, the avant-gardes of the early 20th century that challenged traditional conventions, and the integration of digital technologies in 21st century scenography.

The methodology will include the analysis of the changing architecture of the theatre, which brings about a changing concept of theatre scenography. The expected results of this research aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the forces that have shaped European scenography, revealing key trends and technical innovations. The study will analyze how the evolution of scenography has influenced the perception of drama, the relationship between performer and spectator, and the potential of new forms of stage expression.

The scientific question will be: What impact does the development of technology have on theater and scenography? The results of this study will focus on the history of theaters in Europe, from the period of antiquity to the present day and the personal realizations of various activities. This research has the potential to contribute to the field of theater and performance studies by offering a broad perspective on the development of a central element of European theater and its interaction with the historical, artistic and technological context.

Keywords: Theater, Scenography, History, Performing Arts, Technology, Evolution.

Introduction

Theatre is one of the oldest forms of human artistic expression and has played a central role in European culture and society. In its beginnings, during the period of ancient Greek theatre, the theatrical space had a ritual and communal function, serving as a gathering place for the transmission of mythology and cultural values. The origin of theatre is closely linked to ancient cultures, particularly the Greek and Roman civilizations. Greek theatre,

developed in the 5th century BCE, forms the foundation of many dramatic and scenographic elements still used today. Initially, theatre had a ritual and religious character, functioning as part of ceremonies dedicated to the gods - especially Dionysus.

Ancient Greek theatre marks the beginning of organized forms of scenography, where the stage space was mainly simple and symbolic, representing a place where storytelling and ritual were

united. The use of architectural elements such as the fixed scene (skene) and orchestra were created to serve ritual and dramatic functions. At that time, scenography was very primitive and focused primarily on costumes and masks, which helped actors identify with their roles and express emotions. Decorations were minimal, allowing the audience's imagination to fill in the rest.

Ancient theatre is often imagined as a simple art form, reliant solely on speech and the actor's performance. However, archaeological and literary evidence reveals an advanced use of technology as early as the 5th century BCE, serving various functions - from dramatic support to spectacular scenic effects. This research seeks to examine how technology functioned not only as a technical tool but as a dramatic instrument in constructing the theatrical experience.

Over time, technological advancements, social changes, and artistic developments have radically transformed theatre, shifting it from a purely ritual form into a complex multimedia experience. Scenography, as the art of creating space and atmosphere on stage, has been one of the most sensitive elements to these changes.

The evolution of theatre and scenography is a reflection of the cultural, technological, and artistic changes that have occurred throughout history. This topic aims to explore the journey of theatre and scenography from their origins in antiquity to contemporary technologies, highlighting the various influences and the ongoing significance these art forms hold in society. Theatre is one of the richest and most enduring forms of art, which for thousands of years has served as a means of expressing emotion, telling stories, and communicating social and cultural messages.

The Aim of this Study is to Examine:

- What was the relationship between theatrical space and scenography in Ancient Greek theatre?
- How was theatrical space and scenography transformed in Italian Renaissance Theatre?
- How did theatrical space and scenography change during the Baroque Period?
- What occurred during the rapid transformations of the 19th century?
- What are the challenges of scenography in the 21st century?

The study will follow a historical and interdisciplinary approach, examining important theatrical periods such as: Ancient Greek Theatre, the Italian Renaissance Theatre with the invention of illusionist perspective, Baroque Theatre with its majestic effects, the 19th-century movements toward realism and naturalism, the avant-gardes of the early 20th century that challenged traditional conventions, and the integration of digital technologies in 21st-century scenography.

Methodology of the Study

Objective of the Study

The aim and objective of this study is to provide an essential analysis from the simple forms of ancient Greek theatre to the complex images and advanced technologies of contemporary stages. It aims to examine how the relationship between space, scenography, and technology has evolved - not merely as supportive elements of performance, but as structuring agents of the theatrical experience.

- To analyze the history and development of scenogra-

phy in theatre.

- To identify the main technological and artistic influences on scenography.
- To explore different modes of interaction between stage and audience across various eras.
- To analyze changes in theatre architecture, which in turn lead to changes in the concept of theatrical scenography.
- The study seeks to demonstrate the influence of technological developments in transforming the concept of scenography and theatrical experience, as well as the role of cultural and social changes in this evolution.

Research Questions of the Study

- How has theatrical space and scenography transformed from antiquity to the contemporary period?
- What impact have technological developments - especially digital technologies - had on stage design and the theatrical experience?
- How have social and artistic changes influenced the interpretation and use of space in theatre?
- In what ways does contemporary scenography change its relationship with technology?

Research Methodology

- This study employs a qualitative, historical - analytical approach to examine the evolution of scenography across different historical and cultural periods.
- Historical analysis : To trace the chronological development of scenography from antiquity to the 21st century.
- Semiotic and visual analysis : To interpret the aesthetic messages and symbolic functions of scenography.

Data Collection Methods

- Literature review: Analysis of academic sources and published articles on platforms such as JSTOR, OAPEN, Taylor & Francis, etc.
- Case studies: Examination of concrete examples from scenographers such as Giacomo Torelli, Giovanni Battista Aleotti, Adolphe Appia, Robert Wilson, among others.
- Visual documentation: Use of photographs, theatres, and recorded stage scenes to support the analysis.

Criteria for Material Selection

- Works published by recognized authors in scenography and various artistic performances.
- Representative examples from different periods (antiquity, Renaissance, Baroque, modernism, digital era, etc.).
- Scenographic projects that are well documented at both theoretical and practical levels.

Methods of Analysis

- Comparative analysis: Comparison of scenographic concepts and techniques across different periods.
- Discourse analysis: Interpretation of how aesthetic and technological discourse is reflected in scenography.
- Contextual analysis: Scenography is placed within the social and cultural context of the respective period.

Limitations of the Study

- Lack of documentation for certain traditional scenographic forms.

- Difficulty in comparing stage forms that have not been physically preserved (e.g., pre-theatrical rituals).

Technology in Ancient Greek Theatre

This study examines the role of technology in ancient Greek theatre by analyzing the construction of stage space, the use of specialized mechanisms, and their impact on audience experience. Since the Archaic period of Ancient Greece, technology has been a fundamental element in the development of theatre. Through historical and comparative research methodology, the study sheds light on the technical innovations that shaped theatre as an art form integrated with technology. Scenography, on the other hand, constitutes the visual element and environment in which theatrical action unfolds, creating the atmosphere and framework that helps the audience more deeply experience the performance [1].

Beginning with the initial function of theatrical space in antiquity—as a place for storytelling and ritual - this research explores the influence of artistic movements, technological advancements, and socio - cultural changes on the evolution of theatre. Theatre in ancient Greece was not only an art form but also a remarkable example of the use of contemporary technology. It combined architecture, acoustics, and mechanical devices to create an extraordinary experience for the audience.

Theatrical Architecture – Theatron (Greek: θέατρον) means “the place where one sees” and refers to the audience seating area in ancient Greek theatres. This zone, where spectators sat, was constructed in a semi-circular shape, often built into a hillside.

Orchestra the center of the theatre where the chorus stood and the main parts of the drama took place.

Skene (Stage Building) a structure behind the orchestra used for scene changes and as a backdrop for the performance.

Stage Technology – Mekane² (Greek: μηχανή) was a wooden crane used to lift actors into the air, typically to depict the gods descending from the sky. It functioned as a hoisting device with ropes to lower actors from above - used for the “entrance of the gods.” In ancient Greek theatre, violence was not shown on stage - especially in tragic scenes involving murder or its aftermath. This led to the creation of a rolling platform called the Ekkyklema³ (Greek: ἐκκύκλημα), used to reveal scenes that had taken place inside the skene [2].

Special Effects included smoke, sound, and various props to create dramatic sensations according to the needs of the play.

Acoustics theatres had extraordinary acoustics—actors’ voices could be heard clearly throughout the amphitheater. The circular design and materials used contributed to sound distribution. Masks with open mouths helped amplify sound.

Costumes and Masks used to distinguish between characters, including female roles (as all actors were men). Costumes were simple but symbolic, depending on the character portrayed.

Problem Statement

In this research, the core issue lies in the undervaluation or neglect of the role of technology in ancient theatre, which has influenced how the history of scenography and stage direction is studied and perceived. In the ancient period, theatrical space was closely connected to ritual and social function, while scenography was symbolic and metaphorical. While many studies on ancient theatre focus on the literary, ritual, or philosophical aspects of drama, the technical and technological dimensions of theatrical production are often overlooked - considered secondary or merely supportive. In reality, the technologies employed - from the construction of theatre structures to the stage effect mechanisms - were essential to the functioning of performances and the transmission of dramatic messages [3].

This study aims to reassert the significance of technology in the ancient stage - not merely as a technical aspect but as a fundamental tool for structuring the theatrical experience. It argues that technology facilitated an early coexistence between art and engineering. In conclusion, the technology used in Ancient Greek Theatre reflects the intelligence and creativity of an ancient civilization. It served to create a rich cultural experience that continued to influence theatre for centuries to come.

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1. Theatron (Greek: θέατρον): Literally means “the place where one sees” and refers to the seating area for the audience in ancient Greek theatres
2. Mekane (Greek: μηχανή): A wooden crane used to lift actors into the air, typically to depict gods descending from the sky.
3. Ekkyklema (Greek: ἐκκύκλημα): A wheeled platform used to reveal hidden scenes, usually those that occurred offstage or inside the skene.



Photo 1 (Ancient Greek Theatre of Epidauros)

Technology in Italian Renaissance Theatre

During the Renaissance period (15th - 16th centuries), theatre experienced significant advancements not only in content and script but also in technical and scenographic aspects. Italy became the epicenter of theatrical technological innovations. With the Renaissance came a renewed importance of theatre, and major developments emerged across all its dimensions, including scenography. The Renaissance revived interest in the arts, sciences, and culture, encouraging a new exploration of human nature and the physical world.

In this period, scenography evolved substantially, becoming more complex and detailed. The use of perspective in set design became widespread, creating an illusion of depth on stage. At the same time, the construction of enclosed stage spaces and the application of new technologies - such as mechanisms for moving scenic elements - transformed the theatrical experience. Renaissance theatre represents a profound synthesis between technological innovation and the aesthetic concept of art. Inspired by classical Greco - Roman theatre, the Renaissance stage became a technically organized space designed to enhance the emotional and visual impact of the performance. The theatrical technologies of the Italian Renaissance laid the foundation for modern theatre. Innovations in scenography, acoustics, and special effects influenced European theatre development for centuries to come [4].

The Renaissance also introduced the construction of enclosed theatres, fundamentally transforming stage architecture. Theatres such as the Teatro Olimpico (Vicenza, 1585), designed by Andrea Palladio, represent one of the earliest enclosed theatres in the world and a classical example of Renaissance stage architecture. Similarly, the Teatro Farnese presented a new approach to audience experience by immersing spectators in a carefully crafted aesthetic environment. The introduction of sloped stages, tiered galleries for spectators, and a functional division of the stage marked a new spatial concept.

For the first time, the audience was positioned to be visually - but not physically - immersed in the theatrical events. One of the greatest innovations of the Renaissance was the use of the rules of linear perspective in scenography. In 1545, Sebastiano Serlio developed the first documented model of using perspective on stage, creating optical depth and painted spaces that visually deceived the eye. Painted scenery was used to create the illusion of depth by employing advanced techniques of linear perspective. The backdrops and side wings were painted in a way that gave the impression of a much larger space than actually existed. The development of movable wings and periaktoi allowed for rapid transformation of scenic backgrounds. These developments contributed to an increased rhythm of performance and the capacity to create dramatic contrasts between scenes.

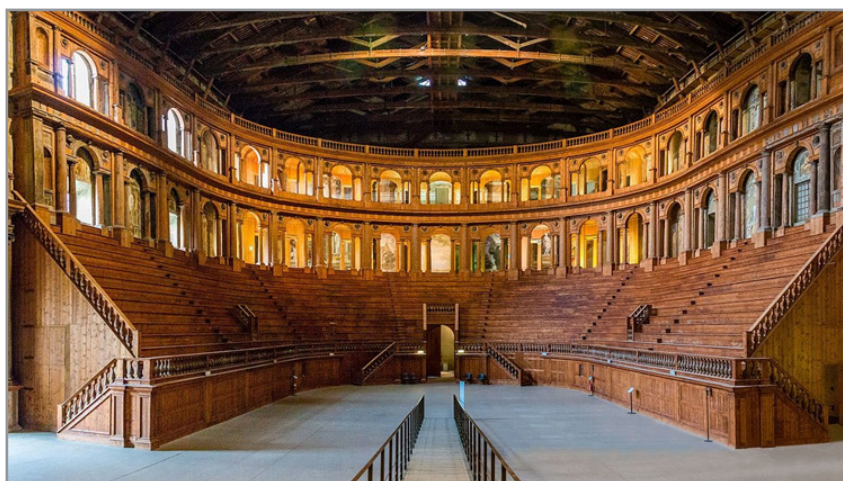


Photo 2 (The Farnese Theatre in Parma)

Technology in Renaissance theatre was more than a scenic aid - it became an integral part of the aesthetic and narrative language of the performance. The innovations of this period marked the beginning of a new era for European theatre and laid the foundation for contemporary stage design. During the Italian Renaissance, a revolution occurred with the invention of illusionist perspective, transforming space into a stage that imitated reality. This technique was applied to both the architecture and decor of theatres, introducing a new dramatic and visual dimension.

Technology in the Baroque Period

During the Baroque period (approximately the 17th century to the early 18th century), scenography experienced significant development due to advances in both technology and theatrical art. Emotion, grandeur, and dramatic effect emerged as essential elements of creativity. In this context, theatre transformed into an arena where visual art, music, and technology interacted to create an engaging and immersive experience for the audience. One of the most important contributions of the Baroque period to European theatre was the systematic use of linear perspective to create visual depth on stage [5].

This development is also known as the “scena alla italiana”, a form of scenography and stage construction that emerged during the Italian Baroque period. It involved the use of linear perspective and painted scenery that extended to the background, creating the illusion of spatial depth. This approach first appeared in Italian theatre in the early 17th century. Artisans such as Giacomo Torelli and Giovanni Battista Aleotti designed the first scenographic systems with illusionistic depth, giving the stage a new spatial dimension.

Theatrical machinery during the Baroque era was essential for producing extraordinary visual and dramatic effects. Giacomo Torelli, the inventor of the “chariot and pole” system (developed around 1645), revolutionized the way scenes were changed - allowing fast and synchronized scene transitions. This mechanism consisted of wheeled platforms (chariots) and poles that moved beneath the stage, enabling the entire scenography to be shifted with a single coordinated system operated from below.

Baroque theatre represents a culmination of the interplay between art, technology, and imagination. The use of perspective, the development of stage machinery, controlled lighting, and refined costume aesthetics turned the stage into a space where reality and illusion coexisted. These innovations not only defined a new era in the performing arts but also laid the groundwork for future technological developments in modern theatre [6].

During the Baroque period, scenography became more grandiose and theatrical, using powerful effects and the interplay of light and shadow to create emotional and atmospheric impact. In the 19th century, theatre moved toward realism and naturalism, with scenography aiming to represent real life and draw the spectator closer to the dramatic event. In later periods - especially during the Renaissance and Baroque - stage art became more formalized, and technology more sophisticated, often serving the goals of aesthetics and spectacle.

The transformation of theatrical space and scenography reflects a progression from ritual symbolism to optical illusion, then to realistic naturalism, and finally to technological intervention and spatial experimentation. This trajectory is a testament to the fact that theatre is an art form in constant dialogue with its time and with technology.

Technology in the 19th Century

In the 19th century, scenography underwent major developments due to technological advancements, industrialization, and the rise of realism in art and theatre. This period marked the transition from the ornate scenography of the Baroque to a more realistic and practical style, reflecting everyday life and natural environments. Realistic scenography began to imitate real spaces - rooms, streets, and interior settings with precise details. Real furniture, windows, functioning doors, and everyday objects were used on stage [7].

By the mid - 19th century, gas lighting replaced candles, allowing greater control over stage lighting and atmosphere. Toward the end of the century, the introduction of electric lighting revolutionized stage illumination, greatly enhancing the emotional and dramatic articulation of performances.

The proscenium arch⁷ - a structure framing the stage in front of the audience to give a “window - like” visual effect - became the dominant model. This frame helped create an illusion of depth and concealed backstage technology from the audience’s view. In the 19th century, the focus shifted to realism, tighter technological control, and engaging the audience in a more authentic theatrical experience. The use of panoramic paintings and dioramas⁸ (a presentation technique using painted images and controlled lighting to create illusionistic effects - developed in the early 19th century by Louis Daguerre) helped produce realistic landscapes and a sense of expansive space. Dioramas were often used to depict the passage of time, such as day - to - night transitions. In the 19th and 20th centuries, theatre underwent extraordinary transformation. Experiments with various dramatic styles - such as realism, naturalism, expressionism, and later absurdism - demanded new scenographic solutions. Scenography was no longer a mere backdrop but became a vital artistic element that interacted with both actors and the audience. During this period, figures such as Adolphe Appia and Edward Gordon Craig emerged, contributing to the understanding of scenography as an independent art form. They emphasized the importance of light, space, and movement, creating environments that emotionally resonated with the audience [8].

Case Studies and Examples

One notable example is the use of augmented reality in contemporary performances, where scenography integrates with virtual elements that interact with both actors and spectators. This revolutionary technology changes how drama is experienced and can be used to emphasize various cultural and social themes. Another example is the development of flexible theatre spaces, such as theatres - in - the - round⁹ - a form of scenography where the audience surrounds the stage. This setup creates a more intimate and interactive experience between actors and spectators, redefining traditional stage - audience relationships [9].

5. Scena alla italiana is a form of scenography and stage construction developed during the Italian Baroque period, in which the use of linear perspective and the painting of wings extending to the backdrop created the illusion of depth.

6. The “chariot and pole” system, developed by Giacomo Torelli around 1645, employed a concealed mechanism beneath the stage that enabled fast and precise scene changes by shifting scenic panels in synchrony.



Photo 3 (The Black Rider, Opera, 31.03.1990 Hamburg, Germany. Scenograph : Robert Wilson)

Technology and Contemporary Scenography

Today, scenography is a continuously evolving field, shaped by technological advancements. The use of LED lighting, digital projections, 3D animations, and real - time shape - shifting stage environments has brought about a revolution in how theatre is interpreted and perceived. Contemporary theatre often integrates digital media elements, creating a multi - dimensional experience. This technology enhances the effectiveness of message delivery and facilitates the creation of imaginary worlds that more accurately convey the complex themes of a performance [10-12].

Theatre and scenography are not merely forms of art - they also serve as mirrors of the societies and cultures in which they emerge. Scenography often reflects the cultural identity and collective experiences of a community. Through theatre, societies communicate, critique, and reflect upon themselves. In this context, scenography plays a vital role in conveying artistic and social messages, aiding in the understanding and interpretation of the text and performance. At the beginning of the 20th century, avant - garde movements challenged traditional conventions, seeking new forms of expression - often abstract and symbolic - transforming space into a critical and experimental medium.



Photo 4 (“ The Hunt ”, Almeida Theatre, London, 2019. Scenography by Es Devlin.)

7.” Proscenium arch “ is an arch - like structure that frames the stage in front of the audience, giving the performance a “ framed ” visual effect - like a window into another world.

8. “ Diorama “ is an artistic presentation technique that uses painted imagery and controlled lighting to create an illusionistic effect. It was developed in the early 19th century by Louis Daguerre.

9. “Intheround” isa form of stagedesign in which the audience is positioned all around the stage, creating a more intimate and interactive experience between actors and spectators.

Comparative Study and Analysis

Table 1 (Comparison of Different Periods)

| Period | Key Features | Technology | Audience Engagement | Example |
|--------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Antiquity | Symbolic, natural | Acoustics, natural environment | Open-air audience | Theatre of Epidaurus |
| Renaissance | Illusionistic perspective | Painted scenery | Passive mediation | Teatro Farnese |
| Baroque | Spectacular, theatrical | Stage machinery, candlelight | Emotional stimulation | Versailles Theatre |
| Modernism | Exposed stage, functionality | Electric lighting, structural design | Intellectual provocation | Adolphe Appia |
| 21st Century | Immersive, technological | Projections, LED wall | Intense, multisensory experience | Es Devlin |

The evolution of scenography directly reflects social and technological changes. There is a clear transition from static and one-dimensional spaces to dynamic and interactive environments. This shift affects not only the visual aspect but also the way actors and spectators interact [13].

Throughout the history of theatre, stage space and scenography have progressed from ritualistic and symbolic forms to sophisticated technological structures. However, in theatrical literature, there is often a marked separation between aesthetic and technical analysis, creating a gap in the deeper understanding of the role of technology and space as co-creators of the stage experience. Furthermore, technology has brought new challenges for scenographers, requiring multidisciplinary knowledge and close collaboration with experts from various technological fields.

In this context, scenography is no longer merely decoration, but a core element of theatrical communication that can transform the meaning and perception of the performance.

In modern and postmodern times, space is often non-linear, interactive, and digital - yet there is a lack of clear historical understanding of how this transformation occurred and what theatre gained or lost during this evolution [14].

Conclusions and Recommendations

The evolution of theatre and scenography is a rich and complex history that reflects the cultural, artistic, and technological developments of humanity. From their simple origins in ancient ceremonies to contemporary digital stages, these art forms have consistently held an important place in social and cultural life. The study demonstrates that scenography has evolved in harmony with historical, cultural, and technological progress, gradually adopting increasingly complex and innovative forms. Digital technologies are opening new pathways for richer and more diverse theatrical experiences. Looking ahead, theatre and scenography will face new challenges and opportunities closely tied to technological innovations and societal changes. Nevertheless, their essential purpose remains unchanged: to convey emotions, tell stories, and inspire reflection among audiences [15].

It is recommended that theatre scholars and professionals focus on the critical integration of technological innovations while pre-

serving and honoring the essential elements of theatrical communication and emotional expression. Special attention should be given to the education of scenographers, equipping them with both technical and artistic knowledge in order to meet the challenges and opportunities of the modern era. This research has the potential to contribute to the field of theatre studies, to the transformation of scenography, and to the evolving relationship between technology and performance - offering a broad perspective on its development and interaction with historical, artistic, and technological contexts.

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