



Doctoral School of Performing Arts

Doctoral Field: Theatre and Performing Arts

THESIS SUMMARY

THEATRICAL SPACE, KINETIC ART AND VISUAL ARCHITECTURE IN THEATRE

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This doctoral thesis proposes an interdisciplinary analysis of the relationship between theatrical space, kinetic art, and visual architecture in contemporary theatre, investigating the ways in which these three dimensions contribute to the configuration of the scenic experience and to the redefinition of the relationship between performance, performer, and spectator. The theoretical and practical approach is based on the premise that theatre can no longer be understood exclusively as a textual or actor-centered event, but rather as a complex system of spatial, visual, and dynamic relationships, in which scenography becomes an active agent in the construction of meaning.

The thesis aims to demonstrate that theatrical space is not merely a material support for dramatic action, but a performative entity in its own right, capable of influencing perception, emotion, and interpretation. In this sense, space is approached as a “character” with dramaturgical, symbolic, and affective functions. Through the integration of kinetic art, contemporary theatre expands its expressive vocabulary by introducing real, mechanical, or illusory movement as a fundamental aesthetic principle, while visual architecture contributes to the construction of scenic atmosphere as a mediating structure between materiality and imagination.

From a methodological perspective, the research is situated at the intersection between theoretical analysis and artistic practice. On the one hand, it draws upon concepts from theatre history, scenographic theory, performance studies, and visual aesthetics; on the other hand, the author’s direct experience in theatrical and choreographic productions constitutes the empirical basis of the case studies. The thesis employs qualitative methods such as participatory observation, comparative analysis, case study, and visual interpretation, acknowledging the inevitably subjective dimension of artistic research.

A central objective of the study is to highlight the tendency of contemporary theatre to shift from institutionalized spaces toward non-conventional, urban, or industrial environments, where the boundary between reality and fiction becomes increasingly permeable. In this context, street theatre, immersive theatre, and site-specific performance are analyzed as privileged forms of the new scenic sensibility, in which the audience is no longer a passive receiver but an active participant in the construction of meaning.



By correlating historical perspectives with experimental practices, the thesis proposes an integrative vision of theatre as an art of living space, in a continuous process of transformation. Space, movement, and visual architecture are understood not merely as technical tools of performance, but as symbolic structures that reflect the tensions, imaginaries, and cultural shifts of contemporary society.

The chapter dedicated to theatrical space analyzes the way in which it evolves from a rigid, institutionalized structure into a mobile, fluid, and adaptable form, becoming an active element of scenic discourse. Space is understood not only as the physical support of dramatic action, but as a meaning-generating environment, capable of producing symbolic, emotional, and social relationships between performer and spectator.

A decisive moment in the redefinition of theatrical space is represented by *commedia dell'arte*, a form of itinerant theatre that introduces mobility, improvisation, and direct contact with the audience as fundamental principles of performance. Travelling companies perform in squares, streets, and inner courtyards, transforming everyday space into a stage and eliminating the boundary between art and life. Space is no longer architecturally delimited, but constructed through bodily presence, gesture, and interaction. Actors use the urban environment as a natural scenography, and the architecture of the city becomes an integral part of dramaturgy.

Commedia dell'arte thus establishes a model of democratized theatre, accessible to all social categories, in which performativity becomes an act of social insertion. Archetypal characters such as *Arlecchino*, *Pantalone*, and *Il Dottore* function as immediately recognizable typologies, while improvisation allows constant adaptation to audience reactions. Scenic space is continuously negotiated and reconfigured according to context, becoming an open, unstable territory subjected to permanent transformation.

Another defining moment is represented by Elizabethan theatre, which introduces a hybrid form of space situated between interior and exterior. The architecture of theatres such as the *Globe* proposes an open stage surrounded by spectators, where actors and audience coexist in close physical and emotional proximity. This spatial configuration favors affective participation and constructs a relationship of co-presence, in which performance is produced simultaneously on aesthetic and social levels.

In Elizabethan theatre, space is no longer decorative, but dramaturgical: it structures perception, rhythm, and the intensity of theatrical experience. The absence of elaborate



scenery is compensated by the power of collective imagination, while the actor's speech activates the mental space of the spectator. An aesthetic of suggestion is thus constructed, in which minimal physical space is symbolically amplified through language and corporeality.

This legacy continues in contemporary theatre through street theatre, immersive theatre, and site-specific performance, where real space is assumed as artistic material. Streets, squares, abandoned factories, or industrial buildings become alternative stages, and space is no longer neutral, but charged with memory, identity, and social meaning. Performance inserts itself into the flow of everyday life, and the audience is often directly involved, becoming part of the scenic event.

Contemporary street theatre develops principles inherited from *commedia dell'arte*—mobility, improvisation, interaction—but amplifies them through modern technological and visual means. Urban space is treated as a living organism, in which every architectural detail can be theatrically re-signified. Performance becomes an act of symbolic reactivation of the city, and theatre regains its function as an instrument of social cohesion.

In this context, theatrical space is conceived as an arena of identity negotiation, where individual imagination and collective memory intersect. There is no longer a rigid separation between stage and auditorium, performer and spectator, reality and fiction. Space becomes a relational structure, a field of forces in which meaning is produced through presence, movement, and interaction.

The chapter ultimately demonstrates that the evolution of theatrical space reflects the profound transformations of contemporary culture: from representation to experience, from spectacle to participation, from decor to performative dispositif. Space is no longer a container of art, but its very substance, the place where theatre emerges as a living, unrepeatable event, deeply embedded in social reality.

The chapter dedicated to kinetic art places movement at the very core of theatrical experience, redefining the relationship between body, object, space, and perception. Kinetic art is approached not merely as a technical device or mechanical solution, but as a fundamental aesthetic principle, capable of transforming scenography from a static structure into a living organism. In this perspective, contemporary theatre is understood as a dynamic system in which meaning is produced not only through text or acting, but through real, mechanical, or illusory movement.



Kinetic art introduces into theatre the idea of unstable space, subject to permanent transformation. Scenography is no longer a fixed background, but a mobile entity that shifts, decomposes, recomposes, and reacts to the performer's presence. Scenic movement becomes an autonomous language, with symbolic, dramaturgical, and affective value. Through visible or hidden mechanisms, modular structures, mobile objects, and interactive installations, scenography actively participates in the construction of narrative.

A crucial reference in this direction is represented by the Bauhaus experiments, where movement is conceptualized as a relationship between body, geometry, and space. Oskar Schlemmer's *Triadic Ballet* or the stage projects of László Moholy-Nagy propose an aesthetic in which the performer becomes part of an extended mechanical system. The human body is treated as volume and kinetic form, while the stage is understood as a perceptual machine, designed to reorganize the spectator's way of seeing reality.

This vision profoundly influences modern and contemporary theatre, where kinetic scenography becomes a tool for reconfiguring the spectator's experience. Rotating platforms, moving walls, sliding structures, suspended installations, or inflatable elements transform space into a field of forces in constant metamorphosis. The spectator no longer contemplates a static image, but is immersed in an unstable universe that transforms before their eyes.

Kinetic art also produces a radical shift in the relationship between actor and object. Objects are no longer simple props, but performative partners. They impose rhythms, generate tensions, create obstacles, or open new possibilities of movement. The actor no longer dominates space, but constantly negotiates with it, being constrained or empowered by scenic mechanisms. A dramaturgy of interaction is thus constructed, in which meaning emerges from the confrontation between the living body and the artificial structure.

A central aspect of kinetic art in theatre is represented by the illusion of movement, created through optical and technological effects. Phenomena such as stroboscopy, parallax effects, holographic projections, anamorphosis, or optical flow produce perceptual instability, amplifying the symbolic and dreamlike dimension of performance. These techniques are not used merely for visual spectacle, but as meaning-making devices, reflecting inner states, psychological tensions, or existential conflicts.

The integration of technology in contemporary theatre consolidates the role of kinetic art as a medium of synthesis between art, science, and engineering. Motors, sensors,



computerized systems, digital projections, or augmented reality allow the creation of adaptive scenic spaces that respond to movement, sound, or human presence. The stage becomes an intelligent ecosystem, and performance approaches the form of a performative installation, where the boundaries between theatre, visual art, and performance art dissolve.

From a symbolic perspective, kinetic art expresses the contemporary condition of instability: the fragility of identity, the fluidity of relationships, the precariousness of existence. Mobile spaces, temporary structures, and visible mechanisms suggest the provisional nature of the modern world. Theatre no longer offers certainties, but exposes tensions, imbalances, collisions between body and system, between organic and mechanical, between human and technological.

The chapter ultimately demonstrates that kinetic art is not a decorative addition, but a core aesthetic matrix of contemporary theatre. It transforms the stage into a perceptual laboratory, in which the spectator is no longer a passive observer, but an affective participant in a multisensory experience. Through movement, instability, and interactivity, kinetic theatre constructs not only images, but existential situations, in which meaning emerges from the direct relationship between body, space, and time.

The chapter dedicated to visual architecture explores the ways in which scenic space is constituted not merely as a physical structure, but as an aesthetic device capable of generating atmosphere, meaning, and emotional experience. Visual architecture is defined as the ensemble of relationships between volume, light, materiality, color, and movement, through which the stage becomes an autonomous expressive environment, comparable to a sensitive organism.

In contemporary theatre, visual architecture is no longer subordinated to illustrative or decorative functions, but acquires a dramaturgical role. Scenic space does not simply host action, but shapes it, conditions it, and comments upon it. Set design, lighting, and spatial structure become tools for meaning-making, actively participating in the development of conflict, in the articulation of character relationships, and in the configuration of the spectator's affective states.

A central concept analyzed in this chapter is scenic atmosphere, understood as the result of the interaction between visual elements and the subjective perception of the audience. Atmosphere is not a secondary effect of performance, but an aesthetic object in itself, a form of sensory knowledge that often precedes rational understanding. Through light,



color, visual rhythm, and spatial organization, theatre creates an affective field that determines the way in which spectators receive and interpret action.

Visual architecture thus functions as an emotional medium, capable of inducing states such as melancholy, tension, euphoria, anxiety, intimacy, or estrangement. Each type of atmosphere results from a careful balance between forms, proportions, materials, and light intensity. For instance, closed and fragmented spaces dominated by shadows and heavy volumes may generate feelings of oppression or claustrophobia, while open, transparent, and mobile structures tend to suggest freedom and instability.

In this sense, visual architecture becomes a form of invisible direction, guiding the spectator's gaze and organizing the perceptual field of the stage. The lines of force of the set, the direction of movements, and the distribution of light and shadow construct an implicit visual trajectory, through which the audience is emotionally guided without being consciously aware of the mechanism producing this orientation.

Another fundamental aspect of visual architecture is the relationship between body and space. The performer is no longer separated from the set, but becomes an integral part of the visual structure. The human body is perceived as volume, as mobile architectural form, entering into dialogue with the other shapes of the stage. The actor's movement activates space, transforms it from inert structure into lived environment.

In contemporary theatre, this relationship is amplified through the use of non-conventional spaces and reconverted industrial buildings, where real architecture becomes part of the performance. Former factories, warehouses, or abandoned urban sites are artistically re-signified, and their material memory is integrated into the scenic discourse. Space is no longer built from scratch, but recovered, reinterpreted, and symbolically charged.

Visual architecture thus functions as a mediator between reality and fiction. The spectator simultaneously inhabits a concrete place and an imaginary universe, and the tension between these two levels produces a specific form of immersion. The set does not conceal reality, but exposes it, transforming it into poetic material.

The chapter ultimately demonstrates that visual architecture represents one of the most powerful expressive forms of contemporary theatre, because it operates directly on perception and affectivity. Through spatial organization, theatre does not merely transmit information, but produces experiences. Scenic space becomes a form of visual thinking, a



non-verbal language capable of articulating meanings that cannot be fully expressed through text or acting alone.

In conclusion, visual architecture transforms the stage into a poetic dispositif, in which light, volume, and movement generate a coherent sensory universe. Theatre becomes not only a place of representation, but a medium of experience, in which the spectator is invited to feel before understanding, to perceive before interpreting. Scenic space thus emerges as one of the most profound forms of artistic discourse in contemporary culture.

The fourth chapter aims to demonstrate the practical applicability of the theoretical concepts developed in the previous sections through the analysis of concrete theatrical and choreographic productions. The case studies function as empirical validation of the ways in which space, movement, and visual architecture generate coherent scenic universes, capable of sustaining dramaturgy and producing complex aesthetic experiences.

The selected performances cover a wide range of artistic forms – street theatre, indoor theatre, open-air ballet, and contemporary dance – yet they are unified by a common scenographic vision, in which scenography is conceived as a dynamic and expressive structure. The set is not designed as a realistic reproduction of space, but as a symbolic dispositif that concentrates the thematic and emotional tensions of each production.

In street theatre performances such as *Divine Comedy* or *Satyricon*, urban space is transformed into an open stage, where the city itself becomes an integral part of the spectacle. Squares, streets, and natural environments are re-signified through visual and kinetic interventions, and the audience is directly integrated into the unfolding action. Scenographic elements are often mobile, modular, and adaptable to real contexts, allowing a fluid relationship between fiction and reality.

In these productions, scenography functions as a mechanism for activating social space. The performance no longer takes place in a neutral environment, but within a territory charged with memory, history, and identity. Through artistic intervention, everyday space is temporarily suspended and transformed into a mythical or symbolic universe, in which the spectator is invited to participate not only as observer, but as embodied presence.

In the case of indoor classical theatre productions – such as *The Seagull*, *The Trial*, *The Flea in Her Ear*, or *The Thieves* – scenography is conceived as a system of relationships between volume, object, and body, capable of expressing the psychological and existential tensions of the characters. Sets are often built from mobile structures, platforms, turntables,



or transformable objects, which allow rapid spatial reconfiguration and sustain dramaturgical dynamics.

A relevant example is the use of unstable architectural structures, suggesting the fragility of identity and the precariousness of existence. Scaffolding, mobile platforms, suspended volumes, or visible mechanisms become metaphors for inner imbalance. Space is no longer safe or stable, but permanently threatens to transform, collapse, or close in upon the actor's body.

In large-scale open-air ballet productions – such as *Carmen*, *Romeo and Juliet*, or *Rigoletto* – scenography acquires a monumental dimension, being conceived as large-scale kinetic architecture. Modular structures, industrial scaffolding, platforms, and mobile elements create a contemporary amphitheatre, in which the dancer's body enters into direct dialogue with scenic mechanisms.

In these productions, the set is not merely a background, but a choreographic partner. The dancers' movement is amplified or constrained by the spatial structure, and the relationship between body and object becomes essential for the construction of meaning. The stage turns into a collective organism, in which every element – body, light, volume, sound – participates in the creation of a multisensory experience.

The case studies demonstrate that contemporary scenography no longer operates within the illusionist paradigm of realistic decor, but within the logic of the performative installation. Scenic space is conceived as an open, adaptive system, which can be explored, traversed, and reinterpreted in real time. The set becomes a form of visual thinking, a conceptual structure that articulates meanings, not merely images.

Across all these examples, a constant emerges: space is treated as dramatic material, and movement as a principle of perceptual organization. Theatre no longer constructs only stories, but builds worlds – coherent universes from visual, symbolic, and emotional perspectives, into which the spectator is invited to enter, not merely to observe.

This chapter thus confirms the central hypothesis of the thesis: contemporary theatre is fundamentally an art of living space, in which scenography, kinetic art, and visual architecture form an integrated system capable of generating meaning, emotion, and existential reflection.

This doctoral thesis has investigated the relationship between theatrical space, kinetic art, and visual architecture as fundamental structures of contemporary theatre. The theoretical



and practical approach has demonstrated that theatre can no longer be conceived as a mere scenic representation of reality, but as a complex process of experience construction, in which meaning emerges from the interaction between body, object, movement, and perception.

The historical and conceptual analysis has shown that theatrical space has evolved from stable and institutionalized forms toward fluid, mobile, and open configurations. Contemporary theatre is characterized by an aesthetics of instability, in which the set is no longer a fixed frame, but a dynamic organism capable of transformation, reaction, and active participation in the scenic event.

Kinetic art has proven to be one of the most significant paradigms of this transformation. Through the integration of real, mechanical, and illusory movement, theatre expands its expressive vocabulary and approaches the language of installation art and performance. Movement is no longer the exclusive domain of the actor, but becomes a property of the entire scenic system, which functions as a perceptual and symbolic machine.

Visual architecture completes this system through its capacity to generate atmosphere and meaning. By organizing volumes, light, and materiality, scenic space becomes an emotional environment capable of producing affective states and poetic universes. Space is no longer merely seen, but experienced bodily and emotionally by the spectator.

The case studies have demonstrated that these principles are not limited to theoretical speculation, but materialize in scenographic practices that transform theatre into an art of constructed worlds. Sets, mechanisms, mobile structures, and visual installations function not as technical solutions, but as instruments of artistic thinking, through which reality is reinterpreted and re-signified.

The thesis thus confirms the central hypothesis that contemporary theatre is shifting from the paradigm of representation toward that of experience. Performance is no longer a closed object, but a living, unrepeatable event, in which the spectator is involved sensorially, emotionally, and cognitively. Space, movement, and visual architecture cease to be invisible foundations of the scenic act and become the very substance of theatre itself.

From this perspective, theatre emerges as a laboratory of perception and imagination, a space for reflecting upon the fragility, instability, and complexity of human existence. Through the continuous transformation of forms, through the dialogue between body and mechanism, reality and fiction, theatre affirms its profound function as an art of presence, capable of producing meaning in a world defined by permanent change.