

ON THE SEARCH FOR A MORE SUSTAINABLE STAGE - MAPPING THE PERSPECTIVES OF A PERFORMANCE DESIGNER

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ABSTRACT

This article outlines the concept of performance design, dealing with the transformative work of performance designers and exploring it through contemporary concepts and artistic means. The article considers where the performance designer has an updated place in the geography of performing arts, what kind of encounters the designer experiences, and what kind of socio-cultural adaptation and learning the work may require and offer. The article discusses the topic with the photographs from the author's site-sensitive memos and proposes an alternative method of performance design.

Introduction

In my work, I am continuously reflecting on the challenges of explaining the constant change, transformation, movement, and evolution that takes place in the field of performance design. Not that the task is unpleasant; on the contrary, it is an interesting professional activity, but the very question for me is, how to unfold the paradigm shift in the field of performance design and scenography in which we are currently living and what reasons can be found for this paradigm shift? Moreover, how to link this movement to the sustainability crisis, environmental change, and future work? These questions are relevant to my daily work as an artist, performance designer, researcher, and lecturer in Performance Design.

The article discusses the topic with the photographs from my site-sensitive memos. I ask what kind of encounters the designer experiences and what kind of socio-cultural adaptation and learning the work of a designer may require and offer. Further on in the text, my proposal for an alternative method of performance design emerges by using photographs. I will explain the method in more detail at the end of the text.

What is Performance Design?

Performance design is an umbrella concept that, in its broadest sense, includes several aspects of scenic design. Although Hannah and Harslóf (2008) refer to performance design as a broader orientation of scenography, I would apply the concept to all aspects of stage design. When used as a broad umbrella concept, scenography also includes several aspects of scenic design. When I talk about performance design, I am relying on the definition that performance design is an alternative concept to scenography and has helped to create

new connections and relations with a wide range of practices. Rather than designing for performances, the performative nature of the scenic designers' creative work is the focus of the performance design. The designer's role is more extensive, embracing the skills of other artists and designers. This opens a possibility for a more interdisciplinary, active, and performative design field (Hannah & Harslóf, 2008).

Traditionally, we have been used to thinking that all forms of performance design (e.g., costume, lighting, set, sound, and video design) aim at a complete work of art with a coherent aesthetic and for example, by a complete play and the artistic collaboration lead by a director. Today there are as many alternatives to this way of working as there are performances and working groups. Working methods are changing and overlapping, co-creation and collective authorship are widespread, and there is a constant desire to negotiate the work's terms, values, sensitivity, and sustainability. Just as art and theatre itself are constantly being reborn in contemporary times, so are the different professions' perspectives on it, too.

One of the characteristics of contemporary performance design is an active relationship with the physical, event-related, and the audience. Performance design is defined as a loose and inclusive term that asserts the role of artists and designers in the conception and realization of events, as well as their awareness of how design elements can actively extend the performing body, and also perform without and despite the human body (Hannah & Harslóf, 2008). According to Hannah and Harslóf (2008), "acknowledging that places and things precede action—as action—is critical to performance design as an aesthetic practice and an event-based phenomenon" (p. 19). By harnessing the dynamic forces inherent in environments and objects, and by requiring the audience to be a participatory

agent, performance design provides a critical medium for reflection, confrontation, and reorientation of worldviews (Hannah & Harslóf, 2008).

One interpretation of the change in the work of the performance designer and scenographer is an authorial turn in these occupational identities. This has been influenced by, among other things, the scenographic turn, which can be described "as a turn away from design/scenography *for* performance towards design/scenography *as* performance," followed by "a shift in the positionality of designer/scenographers in performance making" (Richmond, 2018, p. 2). The discussion of scenography as an artistic phenomenon is currently relevant because the status and role of scenography is changing due to, among other things, the media-technological revolution; the meaning and purpose of theatre and the tools of scenography need to be reassessed (Gröndahl, 2012a). The artistry of performance designers is becoming more communal, interactive, listening, and receptive. The established ways of working and their methods are changing, linked to changes in the way we understand art and humankind, and in particular the way we understand the artwork, how we perceive it and spatiality as events (Gröndahl, 2012a). Hann (2021) states, that contemporary approaches to scenography include a more holistic understanding of how the combination of materiality, light, scent, or even temperature evoke feelings of place.

According to Hann (2021), the interface between scenography and art history provides an appropriate context from which to remap and rethink the boundary barriers and anti-theatrical biases that frame scenographic cultures. I think that this comes close to the sociocultural perspective. It can be seen as a social, cultural, ethical, historical, and institutional phenomenon, a part of a wider ecology of performance design. Designers and artists are here the agents both producing and

interpreting it, which requires an ethos of sustainability to flourish.

The thickening of the term ‘scenography’ suggests new ways for the field to manifest roles and responsibilities, and to show and do things (Irwin, 2017). Particularly in the transforming and expanding field of scenography, the notion of agency and the affective relation of space, spectator and the social context makes meaning of the materiality of performances (Irwin, 2017). Scenographic materials can also play a central role in audience experience. Additionally, scenography can explore and engage the agentive capacity and vibrancy of materials (Irwin, 2017; McKinney, 2015).

When offering three argumentations concerning the expansions of scenography, Hann (2021) first points out that scenography is never a single “thing” but a combination of distinct stage crafts (such as lighting, sound, costume, and set design). It often involves the work of numerous designers, technicians, directors, and performers. Second, Hann (2021) reminds us that over the past decade, scholars of scenography have transgressed the definitions of what scenography is and have, to a higher extent, focused on what set design does: how it affects channels and shapes stages. Hann (2021) suggests that they have challenged the deterministic assumption that stages precede scenography or, more directly, that there are no stages without scenography. Third, according to Hann (2021), scenography does not have strict definitions or expectations about its relationship to theatre-making, although scenography is doubtless integral to the art of crafting theatre stages and making scene changes.

Hann (2021) speaks of the concept of ‘scenographics’, more specifically multisensory and multimedia assemblages that promote, enact, or reveal feelings of place: either on stage or in other locations. Hann (2021) proposes that

scenographics refers to a methodology for investigating the place-oriented techniques and political narratives that “culturally position bodies and peoples

within a spatial imaginary of world” (pp. xvii–xviii). According to Hann (2021), the study of scenographics is the study of how imaginaries of the world are encountered through material cultures. Hann (2021) also asks, what if scenography is an art of crafting borders. What are the agents, techniques, and practices of feeling borders, and how do stages function as borders and what does this have to do with art history (Hann, 2021)? Hann (2021) is looking to “gain insight into the willingness of scenography to reach beyond the regulated spaces of theatre and open out to other horizons inclusive of art history and beyond” (p. xix). I consider this an example of the potential of the sociocultural learning that performance design can offer both for the artists and designers themselves and to the audience.

On Research and Methods

In this article, my research question is what kind of contemporary perspectives on scenography and performance design exist and how they can be explored more sustainably. This article provides a background for the current state of the field and the trends that are affecting it. My research approach for this inquiry is artistic—practical. The starting point for my research is the perspective of an artist-educator-researcher. I will make visible a site-specific approach, which will lead me to propose a more ecological way of working.

In this article, I discuss one perspective on contemporary performance design and approach the theme visually with my snapshots from my daily memos. In these photographs, a sense of scenography and a scenic situation accidentally opens in the middle of

everyday life. Snapshots taken with a mobile phone are material(s) which I use to explore the potential of a found space and hidden stages in random, everyday settings. In the context of this article, the snapshots offer glimpses of the performativity of everyday life, and they contain the idea of our environment as a potential stage. Images can provide inspiration and impulses for the performance designer’s art and work. By photographing these snapshots, I practice my environmental sensitivity as a performance designer and artist. I have been making site-specific, site-sensitive, and site-generic performances collectively since 2010. Those performances are multi-sensorial and sensitizing, often taking the form of a walking performance and taking place in public spaces.

This article is a part of my doctoral studies and my research on sustainability, change, and transformation in performance design, as well as the work and education of performance designers, especially from the perspective of scenographers and lighting designers. The doctoral research process aims to create knowledge about contemporary performance design, professional and artistic processes, design practices, and production modes. The study also aims to develop university pedagogy in the arts, and additionally open interdisciplinary perspectives.

My artistic—practical research is situated in the field of art-based action research. My intention in my research is to combine performing arts, performance design, visual arts, and pedagogy. In my research, I ask what kind of change the performance designer encounters in the artistic work. I want to develop ways of understanding the present moment of performance design and the movement and change that takes place within it.

According to Jokela and Huhmarniemi (2020) art-based action research refers to the application of artistic work to the collection or analysis of research



Figure 1

data, often in such a way that the method enables community members to participate in the research process. The research process is seen as a sequence of different stages of design, action, observation, and reflection, leading to improved practice. Art-based action research responds to the need for change in the arts field and aims to develop more effective practical working and educational methods or to respond to societal challenges identified through research (Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2020). The promotion of sustainable development through research is usually closely linked to an art-based action research strategy (Jokela & Huhmarniemi 2018). According to Jokela and Huhmarniemi (2018) the need for knowledge in arts and art education is transformational.

On the Scope of and Trends in Scenography

All scenic designers (costume, lighting, set, sound, and video designers) traditionally work and express themselves aesthetically, spatially, and dramaturgically in a space-time-continuum, in the context of collective art forms of performing arts, in working groups, participating in collective artworks and co-creation processes. Artistic work in performance design is highly relational, material, and communicative and involves affectivity and temporality. The issue of materiality seems to be particularly prominent at a time of environmental concern. In the context of increasing ecological sustainability

and sufficiency, new materialist considerations are also a focus of interest for designers. Moreover, ecological performance design, eco-scenography (Beer, 2015), has become a persistent phenomenon that more and more artists and designers want to reflect on and experiment with as a part of their work. Another area of interest in our time is often the rethinking and re-framing of the modes of spectating and the role of the audience (Oddey, 2007). There are identifiable, currently popular orientations, and trends, in performance design. According to McKinney (2015), scenographic trends in contemporary performance include multimedia, site-specificity, and immersive theatre. I would extend the list of trends further with the concepts of expanded scenography and eco-scenography.



Figure 2

The Trend of Multimedia

Let us approach multimedia in theatre through the concept of intermediality. Intermediality is understood as the interplay or interaction between different spaces, media and realities, “a space where the boundaries soften” (Chapple & Kattenbelt, 2006, p. 12). It is one way of experiencing the reality around us (Chapple & Kattenbelt, 2006). Our culture, and with it our various art forms, are mediated and digitalized, rich in images, digital materials, layers, and volumes. They are constantly formed, shaped, and defined by the interaction of different media. In performance design, for example, image, sound, and light can exist in various digital forms and can be transformed and distributed across different media. The relationship

between time and space and the aesthetic means is constantly evolving.

Intermediality is not a new phenomenon, as the relationship between different media and art forms has been studied throughout the 20th century (Chapple & Kattenbelt, 2006). Intermediality leads to multimodality (also called multimodality) and transmediality (exchange between media). These concepts offer different perspectives on media phenomena in the context of performance and performance design. Intermediality refers to the relationship between media, multimodality refers to an event where different media work together and transmediality refers to the exchange of media from one medium to another (Kattenbelt, 2008).

Theatre is a multimodal and multilayered artform and can effortlessly combine different sign systems and media. In performance design, for example, digital technology is on the other hand an interface that allows for inter-artistic exchange, but on the other hand, this exchange is not limited to the digital, as theatrical means are at the same time both archaic and digitally mediated. (Kattenbelt, 2008). Intermediality in the performing arts is rooted in the historical avant-garde and can take place also in live experience with no technology. Intermediality involves changes in both theatre practices and performance concepts (Chapple & Kattenbelt, 2006). Intermediality is often present, for example, in the means of post-dramatic theatre. Media and media technologies and their use



Figure 3

in performance design have become everyday phenomena. In post-dramatic theatre visual dramaturgy is often emphasized and the performance design element's subordination to the text fades (Lehmann, 1999/2006). According to Palmer (2023) "in post-dramatic theatre, light is not bound to the potential of restrictions and requirement of the naturalistic stage" (p. 36). Also, the absence of light has become one of the key expressive elements in shaping the audience experience (Palmer, 2023). Palmer (2023) continues, that "the collapse of the traditional hierarchies and an explicit acknowledgement of the potential power of the light, in tandem with other materials of the stage offer new aesthetic possibilities in theatre-making" (p. 36).

Intermedial performance design uses the technology and aesthetics of other media as part of its performance tools. The impact of intermediality in performance design has increased with the digital explosion. Materials are easier to grab and recycle from one medium to another and the technology to produce and deliver them is more accessible. However, it should be remembered that the use of film as a material, for example, has been present in theatrical performances since the 1920s. I am left wondering about the relationship between intermediality and sustainability in the theatre field. It is interesting to consider the implications of intermediality and its endless possibilities and speed, for example, for the uniqueness and specificity of expression in the field of performance design.

The Trend of Site-Specificity

Site-specific performances usually take place outside the actual theatre space, using the environment, places in nature, public spaces and buildings, as well as historical sites as their stages. The aim is to give the performances a spatially definable semantic framework and to use the qualities and meanings of the performance space. The theatrical form emphasizes site-specific material and events that reveal the complex relationship between ourselves and our environment. According to Balme, (2008), a site-specific performance is rooted in its place and cannot be transferred to other stages. Site-generic performances, on the other hand, require a specific category of space, but are not tied to one place.



Figure 4

There are several various forms and ways of naming them under the umbrella of site-specificity. The phrase site-specific theatre began to be applied in the mid-1980s “to forms of theatre that, at least in their physical arrangement, bore some resemblance to the ‘found environments’ or ‘transformed spaces’” and “the term has become ubiquitous, generally supplanting the term ‘environmental’” (Aronson, 2018, p. 173.) According to McKinney (2009), “site-specific performance evokes images and events that call on and reveal the spectator’s complex relationship to environments” (p. 197). Site-specific performances, like many other forms of contemporary performance, are linked in interesting ways to the theatrical, scenic and cultural space. Lehmann (1999/2006) writes about the activation of public spaces:

When a factory floor, an electric power station or a junkyard is being performed in, a new ‘aesthetic gaze’ is cast onto them. The space presents itself. It becomes a co-player without having a definite significance. It is not dressed up but made visible. The spectators, too, however, are co-players in such a situation. What is namely staged through site-specific theatre is also a level of *commonality* between performers and spectators. All of them are *guests of the same place*: they are all strangers in the world of a factory, of an electric power station or an assembly hangar. (p. 152)

According to Pearson (2010) site-specific performance can also have “broadly applicable approaches in pedagogy”, for example

in the form of “research with interdisciplinary aspects into both site and performance” (p. 188). He also mentions a kind of empty field pedagogy through applied dramaturgy, where “the intention is to identify principles, organizing principles, however schematic: approaches to conception, design, rehearsal, and production in relation to a particular situation, that are then applicable in other arenas of performance, presentation and representation... within theatre and elsewhere” (p. 188). Pearson also discusses the implications of social, cultural, political, and historical contexts and “location, site, architecture and scenography—and their effect upon techniques of exposition” (p. 189). Wilkie (2008) says, that site-specificity “permits entry into a debate around *theatreness*, raising

questions of what theatre has been and might be in the future” (p. 102). Site-specific performance “involves performance assuming a more responsive and dialectical relationship to the environments” (McKinnic, 2012, p. 23) and “holds possibilities for responding to and interrogating a range of cultural spatial concerns, and for investigating the spatial dimension of contemporary identities (personal, communal, national and international)” (Wilkie, 2008, p. 89).

Although theatre has always been performed in public places and places in nature, site-specific performance and its performance design are a special field and genre that requires specific expertise. Site-specific performance is affected not only by the historical developments in the performing arts and performance design, but also by many twists and turns in the concepts of space and place, and their theories and philosophies. In the context of performance design, we often come across the thinking and terminology of, for example, Bachelard (1958/1994), Chaudhuri (1995), Foucault and Miskowiec (1986), Ingold (2000/2011), Kwon (2002), Lefebvre (1991), Massey (2005) and Soja (1996), which enrich and diversify the concepts of space and place. In the words of Kwon (2002) “in advanced art practices of the past thirty years the operative definition of the site has been transformed from a physical location—grounded, fixed, actual—to a discursive vector—ungrounded, fluid, virtual” (pp. 29–30). Krauss’s (2000) and Bishop’s (2005) reflections on installation art are often brought from the field of visual arts into the discussion of performance design, scenography, and immersive aesthetic environments. Site-specificity and different site-related terms derived from it offer the performance designer a diverse field of theatre-making and require sustainability and exchange, action and practice between the arts and other disciplines. The pedagogy involved could be more researched and documented.

The Trend of Immersive Theatre

Immersive theatre questions and engages the relationship to the audience, it operates with sensual and multisensory live and lived performance experience and is connected to the relationality of art. According to Machon (2013) immersive is in theatre discourse “attached to diverse events that assimilate a variety of art forms and seek to exploit all that is experiential in performance, placing the audience at the heart of the work” (p. 22). Machon (2013) recalls the interdisciplinarity of immersive theatre: “An immersive form has evolved from the innovators of the performance practice across generations. A range of practice has actively sought to create total, communal experiences for an audience” (p. 23). According to Machon (2013), “a vital component of immersive theatre is the fact that it revels in the liveness and consequent live(d)ness of the performance moment” (p. 43). Machon (2013) continues, that the “sensual worlds created exploit the power of live performance,” and the “imaginative journey through the event” (p. 43) takes place via fusions of performance design, physical performers and interactive audience participants.

To heighten the sensual and the perceived aspects and to create more embodied experiences in immersive performances, different haptic, holographic, sonic, portable, wireless, virtual, and intimately manipulated technologies can be used (Machon, 2013). An important note from Machon (2013) is, that the “immersive form requires care in its execution” (p. 42). This is an essential area of participation for scenic designers in immersive performances. I think the premise that performance design in an immersive theatre experience can not only be special for the audience physically moving around in the space. Immersion is also at its best psychologically, socially, and communally.

Planning and designing for audience participation and creating spatial dramaturgy in immersive performances also form a challenging and exciting terrain for the performance designer. Oddey (2007) writes that the twenty-first-century spectator and viewer are often encouraged to become a part of the artwork and challenge the act of spectating. Shearing (2016) underlines, that “immersion need not be considered a goal or destination, but as a process that might materialize in the relational encounters between participant and scenographic environment” (p. 142). Shearing (2016) is interested in “understanding the nature of this encounter as a triangulation of body, mind and space in events that invite a specific type of engagement that is neither interactive nor distinctly participatory” (p. 142).

The Trends of Expanded Scenography and Eco-Scenography

According to McKinney and Palmer (2016) expanded scenography has its origins in the reorganization of theatrical scenography through the early 20th century and in post-dramatic and site-specific performance practices that have revealed new possibilities of scenography as a cultural form. McKinney and Palmer (2016) state: “Expanded scenography does not represent a complete break with theatre practice, but it does represent a new way of thinking about the spatial, material and design-based aspects of performance” (p. 4). The re-structuring of scenography involves at least three clear historical perspectives: the first is the shift, through the early part of the 20th century, that scenography can also make statements about reality, the second is the rise of post-dramatic theatre and the re-configuring of traditional hierarchies of Western theatre, and the third is “the proliferation of new spatial forms for theatre and performance” (McKinney & Palmer, 2016, p. 4). This leads us

to the eventfulness of performing arts. According to Wiens (2019), scenographic practices have migrated from the theatre into neighboring genres and creative disciplines and can be observed in various contexts and in different cultural fields. In the spirit of Wiens (2019), performance design can be observed both in and as performance, and it must be regarded as an autonomous actor as well as a co-player in different performative processes. In the context of expanded scenography, there are, among other things, processes that focus on socially engaged, applied, and sited scenography (Wilson, 2022). Bleeker (2016), has articulated a post-anthropocentric approach and posthumanist modes of thinking about theatre and performance design as well as the embodiment of such thinking.

According to Beer (2023), eco-scenographic practice means being concerned with the wider effects of performance design, to consider how it affects and relates to the broader ecosystem (beyond the theatre), incorporating principles of ecology to create recyclable, biodegradable, restorative and/or regenerative performance spaces. Being ‘ecological’ means integrating an awareness that every choice is intertwined with social, environmental, economic, and political consequences with long-term effects. The choices can achieve positive social, political, and environmental outcomes, inspiring new modes of artistic practice and engagement. Beer (2023) states, that eco-scenography uses ecological thinking to explore new aesthetics and artistic paradigms inspired in nature and it is also interested in scenographic

practice as a form of activism for positive social and environmental change. According to Beer (2023) the eco-scenographer can easily be an advocate by challenging and improving performance practices. The environmental crisis is forcing artmaking and its pedagogy to change, where we must strive to build more livable futures and learn to “stay with the trouble” (Haraway, 2016) on a damaged planet.

I would argue that performance design will not evolve if it does not respond to the needs of the performing arts and the arts field and if it cannot adapt to and participate in cultural and social practices. At the same time, I also consider performance design to be an art form within an art and cultural form (theatre and performing arts), which can, both through performing

Figure 5





Figure 6

arts and as an art form itself, influence society, culture, and thinking. Another acute issue is how the sector responds to current debates, for example about sustainability. It is also worth considering what socio-cultural meanings and what kind of eco-social civilization are attached to performance design through the context of theatre and the performing arts. According to Gröndahl (2012a), scenography can be seen as a kind of continuous negotiation between spatial possibilities, actions, and unrealized goals.

Pedagogical Reflections

Gröndahl (2020) has dealt with the development of Finnish scenography education from the early 1970s to the 2010s. She discusses education

through three turning points in time, focusing on “the replacement of the craftsmanship tradition with modernist design education; the emergency of scenography as autonomous art, and the dispersion of a unified professional identity at the beginning of the 2000s” (p.107). Gröndahl (2020) writes:

Despite the specialization of training, the job descriptions of stage designers are still broad in practice. However, it is no longer possible to speak of a coherent profession but of individual agents who move from one task or medium of expression to another according to the situation, sometimes on their initiative, sometimes of necessity. Most people seem to experience multidisciplinary and professional boundaries as

artistically enriching. However, the demand for constant flexibility and agile renewal can also become heavy. Skills and knowledge risk becoming superficial if an artist does not accumulate long-term experience. (p. 138, translated by the author)

Gröndahl (2012b) also states that “contemporary scenographic strategies are based on communication practices in which contents are not carried by a solid text but emerge in a continuous process and collective discourse” (p. 12). Gröndahl (2012a) writes:

The study of scenography can also open up understanding towards an interdisciplinary debate about space and place, which has been stimulated by the globalization of cultures and the changing



Figure 7

experiences of proximity and distance. In particular, I emphasize the event-related nature of stage design, which opens up four perspectives: art experience and viewing, performing and understanding space as events. (p. 120, translated by the author)

Gröndahl (2012a) has also highlighted the interplay between the tacit knowledge of the scenographer and the processes of creation and reception it involves.

When reviewing, supervising, and grading the theses and final productions of performance design students at the Theatre Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki, I have noticed that the themes of the written parts strongly reflect different perspectives of diversity, sustainability, doing

things differently and in alternative ways. Alternative approaches to design are sought, for example, to pre-planning and hierarchical, vision-centered models of making alongside expressive, art-centered, and art-philosophical perspectives. From the designers' perspective, the theses have addressed issues such as animal ethics, other species, interspecies, transhumanism, empathy, ethical responsibility, not knowing, weak agency, error, failure, the pleasure of experiencing, enjoying work, employment, safer spaces, social fears, shame, and emotional labor.

While this current movement of questioning, re-questioning, and slowing down is taking place in students' realities, there is also a lot of so-called new work heroism and managerialism to be encountered in

working life. I find myself thinking about the fluttering border zone between design and art; do we aim for efficiency and effectiveness or slow discovery and chance-enabled encounters? It is interesting that in some cases, there is a conscious effort to explore the weak agency, and in others, the agency is about to be lost in the wheels of managerism. When art is made in productions, there are almost inevitably performance goals involved. What if we were more interested in what slowing down means in terms of design? What would slower performance design, slower scenography, or slower lighting design look like? And would it, by default, be more ecological or low-emission (Kilpeläinen, 2023)? The photos in this article are taken with my mobile phone during the last five years. They may bring the viewer



Figure 8

ideas of a performance designer's independent, site-oriented artistic activity, which may also bear a strong relation to the time and spatial arts. Slower or not, the method structured through photography can serve as an inspiration for more sustainable performance design: imaginative, performative moments and gestures, as well as possible stages, can be mapped using everyday tools and accessible means alongside observation of one's own environment.

Poetic Everyday Moments and Hidden Stages

The visual aspect of my article has emerged through scenographic and performative observation of the environment. My snapshot photographs

(see figures 1–11), the views that I have framed, they embody poetic scenographic moments, a performative potential that I have encountered in my everyday life. The images in my series often show a sense of incompleteness, or anticipation, something provisional. The reason for taking the snapshots is either a stage-like view and setting, an ongoing situation, or the questions or narratives they evoke. The moment and the snapshot taken challenge us to reflect on the agency and materiality that they manifest and their relationship to the many simultaneous, overlapping realities.

Dramaturgical questions about the situation and the photo can be asked, as a pedagogical tool, for example, where are we? What place it is? What is there, and what has just happened? You can also ask, who was the last being to

leave the space? Who is the next being to enter the space, and is there someone in the space at this moment? You can also describe the space and its details and ask questions about its nature. How would you describe the space to someone who has not experienced it? Is it possible to visit the place? What about the agency in space, who is active there? Whose involvement is visible there? Pearson (2010) has described and examined a cumulative series of conceptual and applied practices in making site-specific performance. To paraphrase him (2010), you can also ask: "Does the history or function of the site suggest further narratives that can be woven into, or referenced in, the dramaturgy?" (p. 179).

You can experiment with the idea of a found scene or a hidden stage by shooting your snapshots of spaces and places



Figure 9

that you think have spatial and performance potential, something that evokes stage tension and a desire to imagine events and storylines. This makes me ponder which elements in the photos create a scenic moment. Do some of them depict site-specific stages?

Conclusions

In this article, I have considered contemporary perspectives on scenography and performance design as a part of my art-based action research doctoral thesis. I have mentioned the scenographic turns and traced transformations in performance design, in the artistic intent, and the work of the performance designer. I interpret that the trends affecting performance design today emphasize the expanded scope

of authorship, the applied nature of the field, and professional skills. The contemporary nature of performance design demands from artists a sense of flexibility, resilience, and an understanding of sustainability. With this article, I have only begun my questioning. Next, I would like to move on to consider different post-approaches and “intra-actions” in performance design which reflect on how a designer could be open to constant reconfiguration. The expanded field of design, socially engaged, applied, and sited scenography, invites me to explore this further. By post-approaches I mean different intersections of posthuman theories and phenomena. Intra-action is a Baradian new materialist term, which understands agency as a dynamic of forces, constantly exchanging, refracting, and influencing things (Barad, 2007).

Through the visual material (see figures 1–11), I have presented my observations of the constantly changing everyday scenography, performance / theatre stages hiding in the environment, in landscapes and found spaces. Such a way of working with observation lends itself to site-specific work and shows the places, spaces, situations, and boundaries captured in photos, being transposed into another context, and shown / framed in a new light. When moving from this point towards site-specific performance, it could be possible to further superimpose these findings with performative and expressive work and develop them into found stages and framings for artworks or gestures of site-specific contemporary performance design. This method is an example of applying the work of a performance designer to

the changing and diverse needs of the performing arts field.

In my photos (figures 1–11), I explore the living landscape through the lens of a performance designer. Nature, places, and urban spaces are constantly associated with the endless possibilities of life, encounters, movement, and happenings. And so is the site-specific scenography they offer, too. One day, a renovation will begin, something will be demolished, something will be built, and conditions will constantly change. As a passage appears somewhere, elsewhere a new door is opened, and another one is suddenly blocked. The day is different from the night, the weather swings and turns, and the various agents are constantly coming and going. The layers of time are visible. The environment lives and breathes, and so does art, too. And in performance design, a stage can open up anywhere. Let us nurture the diverse potential of this encounter.

This approach to performance design can develop flexible, imaginative, and more sustainable ways of working in artistic practice, as well as foster the ability to see the stage as a fluid possibility, not just bound by structures. In ecology, we talk about biodiversity, the variation and diversity of life. It is additionally important for the future of the ecology of performance design, that this diversity is preserved. This will ensure not only the internal development of the field of performance design but also the potential for expanding new creative forms and cross-pollinations. I argue that the performance designer is an active agent who should be aware of and develop socio-cultural action in the field. Thinking differently and being inventive also supports sustainability.



Figure 10



Figure 11

Figures



Figure 1. Helsinki 2022 (up left), Kajaani 2023 (up right), Helsinki 2023 (down left), Helsinki 2023 (down right). Photos: Raisa Kilpeläinen.



Figure 2. Helsinki 2022 (up left), Helsinki 2023 (up right), Helsinki 2023 (down left), Tallinna 2022 (down right). Photos: Raisa Kilpeläinen.



Figure 3. Novosibirsk 2019 (left), Helsinki 2022 (right). Photos: Raisa Kilpeläinen.



Figure 4. Prague 2023. Photos: Raisa Kilpeläinen.



Figure 5. Novosibirsk 2019 (left), Kajaani 2021 (right). Photos: Raisa Kilpeläinen.



Figure 6. Novosibirsk 2019 (left). Sotkamo 2021 (right). Photos: Raisa Kilpeläinen.



Figure 7. Tallinna 2022 (up left), Helsinki 2020 (up right), Helsinki 2023 (down left), Lohja 2021 (down right). Photos: Raisa Kilpeläinen.



Figure 8. Helsinki 2023. Photos: Raisa Kilpeläinen.



Figure 9. Kajaani 2019 (up left), Kajaani 2023 (up right), Kajaani 2019 (down left), Tallinna 2022 (down right). Photos: Raisa Kilpeläinen.



Figure 10. Kajaani 2023 (up left and right), Helsinki 2023 (down left and right). Photos: Raisa Kilpeläinen.



Figure 11. Helsinki 2023. Photos: Raisa Kilpeläinen.

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