Unimagined Spatial Performativity in three Scenographic Assemblages

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Abstract

My research presents a philosophical retrospective report and analysis of accidental aesthetic encounters with unimagined scenographic performativity. The aim is to point at the aesthetic potential of the ephemeral in the construction-rehearsal processes of scenography and to what I present as evanescent spatialities.

Conceptualizing the unimagined spatial performativity aims to aesthetically appreciate the most ordinary, incidental scenographic assemblages that display their brief performativity away from the gaze of a conventional public. Evanescent spatialities are not necessarily or primarily designed by human agents, nor are they conditioned to “exist” by the presence of a human performer or human audiences; rather, they occur autonomously and spontaneously and may be discovered or provoked by the act of playing.

I took a feminist post-human approach to understanding that scenographies work as human and nonhuman assemblages and that bodies in space are always performing their own agenda.

My research exposes an intimate and author-ized visual archive that makes my photographic and video work an expansion of my practice. I envision that scenographers will continue to expand the discipline by exploring the world beyond anthropocentrism and the capitalism of the human-made.

My study performs my conviction that a scenographer can also act as a philosopher and as a political activist.

Keywords expanded scenography, evanescent spatialities, feminism, posthumanism, more-than-human, material thinking..
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Preface

The present dissertation puts together more than ten years of research actions. First, I would like to introduce it as a philosophical retrospective observation, report, and analysis of accidental aesthetic encounters with scenography, but then it seems to be clearer to explain that my investigation is based on three scenographic works, that served as experimental examples of unimagined scenographic performativity. My research path has been long and, at some point, rejected. But I got the encouragement of my supervisor and advisor to keep on working on it even through periods of severe stress and depression.

As an outcome of this artistic and academic journey, I would like to call attention to the construction of a digital collection of hundreds of photographs and videos that are the visual evidence of the performance of evanescent spatialities I was able to “capture”, and then expose the organic (almost tropical) weaving of my reflections and thoughts.

This investigation is the outcome of practice-based research, supported by my knowledge and embodied experience. It is also the combination of joyful procedures that include extensive reading, the exposure of my own thinking as a practice of singularity instead of originality, the privilege of truly experimenting with performance as research and the fortune of being able to play with a stage as a spatial laboratory. I was also able to call for the generous collaboration of assistants and colleagues that contributed to the process of finding and capturing “the ephemeral”. And finally, I was able to learn how to use academic and artistic tools to support the construction of a subjective narrative, which dares to weave intertextual dialogues between philosophers and researchers in order to build a personal, philosophical and political stance.

This artistic work was also completed by serendipity, chance, and good luck but above all, by fully trusting my intuition which will remain at the core of my future design work.

My research belongs to the fields of space design, those which can be thought, envisioned or felt with a more humble and receptive approach, to the creation of atmospheres beyond dramatic and theatrical precedents, to scenographic new materialisms by understanding that space is alive and communicates in its own language, to the study of nonhuman bodies in performance and more-than-human studies as it proposes an approach to the fullness and vibrancy of space instead of “the empty void premises”, to visual ethnography with the construction of an intimate and authorized visual archive that gives my photographic and video work a chance to be an extension of my design work and be experienced in a different way by other viewers via media, to expanding scenography as a re-consideration of the current term that observes that scenography is already “expanded” but poses a perspective that finds scenographic assemblages and the artistic
actions of scenographers in a state of permanent expansion, that which connects it to other fields that also explore the world beyond anthropocentrism and the human-made. In this sense, my research also relates to the zen paths of meditative design by asking architects and designers to think-feel-travel-move into space with a “more than human” sensibility before invading or commanding the “purpose” of spaces. Finally, my study performs my conviction that a scenographer can act as an artist-philosopher and as a political activist as well.
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**Abstract**
0.0 Introduction

In the next pages, I will offer a subjective approach to scenography, after ten years of looking back at three scenographic assemblages that represent a good example of my research practice: *Opera Prima en Movimiento* (2011), *Don Giovanni o el disoluto absuelto* (2013), and *La Huida de Quetzalcóatl* (2017).

I see scenography as an environment where human and nonhuman bodies interact in manners that allow discoveries, accidents, and surprises. I have simplified my personal definition of scenography as the discipline that designs spaces for action. Space precedes us in any attempt to “design”. So it is possible to “do nothing” to a space for action to happen. Through our human eyes, we have learned to recognize different type of scenarios: live arts, politics, war, nature, poverty, excess or the real landscape on Mars and the frightening vastness of outer space. I consider it an honest mistake to suggest that the discipline of scenography emerged from the limited practice of [human] theatre. I approach scenography as a spatial design discipline that is continuously transcending conventional paradigms and artistic boundaries, so my study is closer to what is currently recognized as expanded scenography.

To start locating my research on the map of the notations of scenography and expanded scenography, I will refer to what I consider to be the start of a healthy discussion of the discipline. In 2002, British designer, scenographer, director and professor, Pamela Howard, published the first edition of her book *What is Scenography?* In a section called “World View” she asked 44 designers to define “scenography” in a few words. Reading with curiosity, I found that 18 of them related the “new” discipline, put forth by Howard, to the stage, drama, or theatre, 11 of them referred to it as a visual art, an intersection of the visual arts and design and only 16 of them used the concept of space in their definition. By paying attention to this matter, I would like to point out that many scenic designers seemed to be bound to the theatre stage understanding it as “space”, but not fully aware that space is much more than a stage location [Back in 2002, I included myself in this group].

For the second edition in 2009, Howard asked the same question to 37 different designers, of whom 14 were designers she had previously asked and who reconsidered the concepts they offered previously.

Since Howard’s first attempt at defining scenography from a theatrical point of departure, it is possible to access many occidental publications that show that scenography and scenography expanded still behave as elusive terms. [e.g. Howard (2002) -(2009) -(2019); Lotker and Baugh...
Although I do not propose to deny Professor Howard’s conceptual contributions to understanding “scenography” as a new discipline, I consider it important to challenge the ideas that attempt to define scenography as a “holistic method of visual theatre making” (Howard, 2009: xx).

From my perspective, scenographers are designers that can direct their own artistic inquiries using their personal freedom to observe, imagine, investigate, design and construct. In my view, what is now called expanded scenography is continuously expanding and when approached and discussed without the expectations of a well-known methodology, reveals itself as a process and a discipline with many potential directions. In this sense, I propose to understand scenography as an assemblage of human and nonhuman bodies that have agency, efficacy, and sufficient coherence to also act autonomously and alter the course of events.

To explain my departure point, I appeal to artistic environmentalist Mirko Nikolić, who has investigated how the materialisation and distribution of agency is present in new materialisms through two important concepts: assemblage and apparatus. The ethico-political stakes of theory are tangible here, for these are concepts concerning agency, power, and knowledge.

According to Nikolić, these two terms are sometimes understood as referring to material arrangements, but in performative ontologies of new materialism they are material-discursive dynamics, modalities of groupings of agencies, and of composition of power, which generate different histories, states of affairs and future possibilities. On one hand, Nikolić explains how Foucault used the word dispositif (which is usually translated as ‘apparatus’ in English) to indicate the processual and physical nature of the organisation of power and how Karen Barad transposed this concept into a posthuman/ist space-time-mattering dynamic. On the other hand, he points out that the term assemblage, comes from a different genealogy, and its presence in new materialist vocabulary can be traced to Deleuze and Guattari’s theorisation of agencement, where assemblage is understood as a material performance of composing agencies together (Nikolić 2018). Until now, it seems that the key aspect of an assemblage is its open-endedness, and that the interaction of its elements generate something ‘other’ than themselves, and each element is also something ‘other’ beyond the assemblage. Thus, “we can never fully know what an assemblage or a multiplicity can do, as its agencies are involved in creating patterns of unintentional coordination” (see the reference to Tsing, 2015 in Nikolić 2018).

My need to appreciate scenography as a human and nonhuman assemblage is inspired not only by the notion of agency, power, and knowledge explained by Nikolić, but by the notion of scenography defined by Sodja Lotker and Richard Gough (2013) where scenography is “a body, a discipline, a method, a foundation on its own right... a discipline that has its own logic and its own distinctive rules” (2013: 3). Jane Bennet underlines how important it is to detect, see, hear, smell, taste and feel a fuller range of nonhuman powers circulating around or within our human bodies. “These material powers, which can aid or destroy, enrich or disable, ennoble or degrade us, can call for our attentiveness, or even respect” (see Latour 2004 in Bennet 2010: ix).
I ask the reader to think of this last quotation as a magnifying glass, necessary to comprehending the conceptual departure of many of my research actions. I have conducted this investigation convinced that many of my fellow designers are still unaware of an alternative ethical approach to nonhuman bodies and their coexistence with humanity. I have proceeded to experiment with my own attentiveness to unimagined spatial performances and have developed an almost religious faith that puts respect of the encountered environment above a narcissistic pose of “artistic creation”. Bennet’s quote from Latour\(^1\) gives me some philosophical support, and the feeling of having a “shared” knowledge to reflect on what I do as a scenographer and why I do it.

My investigation shows that scenography may perform as an autonomous human and nonhuman assemblage, capable of becoming something else and incapable of performative exhaustion. I also argue that scenographic assemblages may emerge from a simple act of careful observation. This idea opens the possibility of encountering scenographic assemblages without “building” them and helps scenographers and scholars who are keen to practice a gentler way of living in contact with all the manifestations of materiality, find a new field for investigation just by the contemplative act of looking at the world meticulously. This kind of belief has been practiced for centuries in Oriental disciplines such as Shintoism or Zen. So far, I have not chosen to delve deeper into these paths as much as to participate in the open[wide] modes of understanding the materialization of scenography. As proposed by Lotker and Gough, I also consider scenographies as places, sites, and locations where bodies and environments collide; territories to be occupied, acted in and acted through, but more than anything, “territories where we have to take responsibility” (Ibid.: 6).

The aim of this thesis is to look at scenographic assemblages as lively entities that can exist/manifest in their own right. My viewpoint is grounded upon a retrospective analysis of my own work and exposed by the means of a subjective narrative. I focus on the spatial “revelations” that arose while working on three different scenographic projects, which occurred between 2011-2017. I describe how I observed, discovered, played, provoked, and documented the performance of what I call the unimagined. I analyse the situations where chance, accidents, limitations, and/or errors collided in shaping new environments for my study. I registered those performative transformations as spatial possibilities that were not imagined by the artist herself but embraced as opportunities to meet the unforeseen. My impulse could be defined as an Alice-Down-the-Rabbit-Hole mode of research.

Throughout my journey in Scenography's Wonderland, I comprehended that space is the primordial body that houses other bodies and confirmed my belief that space communicates with us, in a natural-cosmic way, through our human (physical and cultural) perceptions.

In Chapter 1, I propose that there is a possibility of establishing an alternative dialogue with space before, during and after we play-work with it, as “playing” with space became a central practice in the research, as I explain in Chapters 2 and 3. In subchapters 2.5 and 2.6, I suggest that thinking of space as an organic body with an unlimited capacity of becoming something else,

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1 Bruno Latour explains “actant” as a term from semiotics covering both humans and nonhumans. It is any entity that modifies another entity in a trial of actors. It can only be said that their competence is deduced from their performances and their action, in turn, is always recorded by an experimental. (2004: 337).
a body that actually “breathes” like a living creature, may increase our sensibility, our capacity to see better and be aware of its immense potential. These are some of the premises I open up, as alternative points of departure for appreciating the phenomenal exchange that takes place between human and nonhuman bodies. I also connect with Australian philosopher, Elizabeth Grosz, who wonders if architecture can be thought of as a set of and site for becomings of all kinds (2001:70).

Along this dissertation, I display and analyse evanescent spatialities, a term that I introduce now for the first time and will be using my study. The term emerged from observing the performance of scenographic assemblages during periods of their construction as well as during technical rehearsals; events that are commonly un-attended by the public, as they are often kept closed by the producers. I have chosen the term evanescent as an adjective to describe “what tends to vanish like vapor” (Nisus Thesaurus) or that which is “soon passing out of sight, memory or existence” (Oxford Dictionary 2010). Evanescent must be understood as fleeting, passing, brief, temporary, momentary, transitory, short lived, ephemeral, or transient. The “evanescent spatialities” of my study manifested by accident or were provoked by the ludic act of playing; the brief performances did not have a specific purpose or meaning, happened by chance, and surprised the human perceiver [me] by their unimagined aesthetic power. The scenographer [me], her assistants and few members of the technical staff were the only [human] spectators of their sighting. The evanescent performativity of space was captured by the senses in my body, my memory and by the eye of a camera which enabled their appearance to remain for my retrospective analysis in the form of digital images of photographs and videos. In my study, I unveil the unimagined and unrepeatable distributions of bodies [human and nonhuman] in the space of a stage that included the inherent dynamics of being and becoming. I refer to these spectacles as “unimagined” since they were not previously built in my imagination or by my design practice but found on the stage by chance. I fell in love with their volatility, and I decided to keep them as visual memories but also as new resources for my future inventions.

From a new materialist or post humanist perspective, I argue that the unimagined spatialities found in the three projects I investigate acted as ephemeral ecologies of human and nonhuman bodies, which were never foreseen by the designer or “seen” by a regular audience. My purpose is to share the outcomes of my experiments and inform other design researchers, architects, and scenographers about the vibrant vitality of scenographic assemblages once they are not exclusively appreciated as a vehicle for dramatic representations. I uncover the fact that unimagined scenographies can be discovered by a trained perception or found by chance or contingency.

From a historical point of view, it is suitable to mention that scenographers Adolph Appia and Edward Gordon Craig are highly considered for experimenting with the expressive potential of architectonic space on the stage. Their scenographic work has been the subject of study of many scholars infatuated by their revolutionary theories. Craig is known for experimenting with mobile three-dimensional units, each one to be considered “an architectonic construction with a life of its own” (Hannah 2019: 123). His practical settings were formed from simplified three-dimensional elements which he called “practicables”. As a kit of parts, the objects could be moved around to create “iconic” spaces. Craig provided general atmospheres and sculpted forms,
“bestowing on space a liquid action: a mobile spatial scenography... where no one element was the central focus” (Ibid.: 127).

Another interesting fact to bring about Craig’s artistic work was his intuitive and passionate relation to the “unseen”. He already knew that there was much more on the stage than the human presence: “So in the science of life, in the crowded street or marketplace or theatre, or wherever life is, there are partial tones, there are unseen presences. Side by side with the human crowd is a crowd of unseen forms, Principalities and Powers and Possibilities [...] These are unseen but not unfelt” (Craig 1911: 264–265). Craig was determined to share his scenographic analysis on how to do a Shakespeare play and left very well thought out recommendations. He argued that the person who wants to do Shakespeare’s plays, must invest every particle of them with a sense of the spiritual; and to do so he/she must entirely avoid that which is material, merely rational, or which exposes only its material shell, for the beholder would then come up against something impenetrable and have to return to that swinging rhythm which flows not only in the words of Shakespeare but in his very breath, “in the sweet aroma which lingers around his plays”. But to speak more practically, the designer would have to go through each portion of the play, and from each act, each scene, each thought, action, or sound, extract some spirit, the spirit which is there. The designer should repeatedly bring upon the stage some reminder of the presence of these spirits, so that “on the arrival of Banquo’s ghost at the feast the spectators should not commence to giggle, but should be so keenly expectant, so attuned to the moment of its coming that they should be conscious of its presence even before they saw it there”. It would be the natural climax; and from that point until the end of the play, the designer should remove “spirit by spirit from the faces, from the dresses, from the scenes, until nothing lay upon the stage but the body of Macbeth, a handful of ashes left after the passage of a devouring fire” [...] and before the public is aware of it, a spirit-world would once more become a possibility, “our minds would again open to receive the revelation of the unseen; and we should feel the truth of Hamlet’s words: There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamed of in your philosophy” (See his ideas in his words in his book On the Art of Theatre 1911: 279–280).

According to Hannah, both Craig and Appia acknowledged that the environments that they were able to create were a “living thing” and therefore “a dynamic performative entity that had to be treated with finesse, carefully coaxing it into action as one would a performer”. What I share with both artists is that they used the stage as an animated laboratory for the embodied expression of their ideas and researched in real space and real time. However, it is relevant to point out that even though these scenic artists replaced the pictorial scene of the traditional theatre with the architectonic scene, they were not imagining the architectonic space was to work independently from [human] performers. (See McKinney and Buttersworth, 2009: 20). Craig saw the [human] performer as one element among many, while Appia saw the live [human] performer as “the measure of all things” (Hannah 2019: 125).

As I mentioned before, I experimented with unimagined behaviour in the scenographic assemblages using chance, serendipity, and strategies to provoke the unexpected. I define a scenographic assemblage as a unique configuration of human and nonhuman bodies disposed to create a scene, a site, or an atmosphere. I propose that scenographic assemblages may be discovered by careful observation and might be appraised as spatial “happenings”. Professor
Michael Kirby defined “happenings” in 1965, as a sort of non-matrixed [without a mold or a frame] performance where the execution of a non-matrixed performer is a simple and undemanding act to make an idea concrete. (Kirby, 1965: 17). According To Kirby, to perform or participate in a happening, it is most important to allow for the unexpected, so chance becomes a co-creator, (Ibid.: 51) and expect the medium to do things that can be far from the intent (Ibid.: 186). In happenings, as in the performativity of scenographic assemblages, it is possible to detect contributions of each body, the accidents of weather, the slips in timing, etc. which no one can anticipate beforehand. Sometimes they are marvellous, sometimes not. In his study, Kirby claims that the methodical use of chance and serendipity had already begun with Dada in 1916 (Ibid.: 35), and according to him, it is at this moment in the history of art, that the distinction between performing and not performing began to break down and the “found environment” was discovered and used (Ibid.: 29). The unimagined emergence of these spatial “happenings”, and their aesthetic potential are the core of my study.

But then, and maybe from a humbler beginning, and to understand my observations on scenographic assemblages... do we really comprehend what space is?

I dedicate subchapter 0.6 to navigate through several philosophical perspectives in which I could recognize some of my own thoughts and learn others that nurtured my curiosity. As an outcome of my investigation, I have reconsidered my approach to design by considering space as a living autonomous entity and each singular space as a unique, unrepeatable system of possibilities. This attitude may contribute to a post-anthropocentric and posthuman line of action that may inform new work produced by students and space artists.

My research uses a subjective narrative by calling attention to my “human lived experience and the physical, political and historical context of that experience” (Ellis and Flaherty 1992: 1). I refer to the embodiment of the lived experience through my eyes, my skin, my heart, my stomach, and the geopolitical fact that I was born a female Mexican mestiza. Being born a woman in a traditionally “macho” country has been a permanent disadvantage. Even well-educated men in Mexico are not able to recognize how difficult it is for a Mexican woman to succeed in the social, cultural, and professional national and international world. Being Mexican, has also implied dealing with individuals who still consider my country as a “Third World country”, as a nation that is primitive, lazy, or corrupt. I must continuously challenge a normalized prejudice that identifies me as an exotic thinker that comes from the Global south. Being mestiza is also something in my nature that means a lot in the making of artistic pieces. Mexico, as much as other countries colonized by Europe, is a country where everything has become a cultural mixture. It is very complicated to talk about pure race, being white or brown or black or being a physical fusion of all of the above. Not even the destructive power and torments of the Catholic Church, were able to erase the fundamental myths and customs of the original cultures. The Mexican indigenous past was never effectively erased as much as minimized, cancelled, or despised. In Chapter 3, I focus specifically on how I encountered that past in my artistic work and felt the need to address it from a Mexican mestiza scenographer point of view.

During the process of my retrospective analysis, and as an attempt to engage myself politically in the current discussions about post-colonialism, I started identifying with a crossbreed, hybrid, mestiza entity that could be referred to by the term cyborg, as articulated by feminist Donna
Haraway (2016). It was exciting for me to nourish myself with the ideas of such an audacious feminist thinker. According to Haraway “A cyborg is a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (Haraway 2016: 5). I find that I reached [somehow] this hybridity during my research process with the extended eye of my video camera. “The cyborg is a matter of lived experience that changes what counts as woman’s experience of the late twentieth century” (Ibid.: 6) I support the idea that many creative processes are directly engaged with by women, [and maybe by women only]. “The cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity [...]and she is suspicious of the production of universal, totalizing theories” (Ibid.: 67). From my philosophical position and following in the footsteps of the cyborg theory, to be committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity is a compromise that cannot be avoided when analysing a “world” that has been built mostly by men without honouring the unique and wise perspectives of female thinkers. I want to contribute to the inclusion of feminist approaches to the posthuman debate. I do it by imposing a feminist and postcolonial approach that aims to alter the traditional practice of scenic design and architecture.

According to communication scholars Carolyn Ellis and Michael Flaherty (1992), subjectivity can be perceived as both unpleasant and dangerous; unpleasant because emotion seems to be inappropriate for scientific thought; dangerous because the workings of subjectivity seem to greatly contradict the rational [male]-actor-worldview. In my dissertation, I have taken the risk of sharing how I deal with the world and recount my improvisations, changes, contradictions, ambiguities, and vulnerabilities. In the same vein, scholar Bronwyn Davies inspired me to refer to the experience of being female and hold a position that challenges the hegemonic humanist discourses that dictate that contradictory-knowing is flawed-knowing. Women can re-inscribe, discover new story lines, invert, invent and break the bounds of the old structures and old discourses using their desires and feelings as a legitimate part of reason (Ellis and Flaherty 1992: 59)

It is relevant to mention that my research work is far from making any claims of completeness and my investigation needs to take into consideration tasks whose complexities have by far surpassed my efforts.

0.1 Practice-based and performative research

To locate my investigation as practice-based and performative research, I will refer to the definitions provided by Mika Hannula, Juha Suoranta and Tere Vadén (2005, 2014) who have described artistic research as “a tapestry-like weave: an interconnection between the making, the known, the observed, the created, the imagined, the deliberated, the edited. A combination of knowledge that do not strive to describe or re-present reality but that creates a new reality. The starting point is often, the subjectivity of the researcher, willing to experiment and discover a new artistic practice” (2005: 162). I will also quote Finnish art philosopher, Juha Varto (2014) in the foreword of Artistic Research Methodology: Narrative, Power and the Public where he develops two kinds of knowledge, “one of which looks into the world and the other that looks into the mirror”. He proposes that the knowledge that looks into itself has been replaced “by the ability to
engage in a debate without constantly relating things to some previous one [...] moving back to an atmosphere of ideation, creative activity, and democratic insight” (Ibid.: ix).

To better explain the soul of my dissertation, I incorporated the three characteristic attributes proposed by Henk Borgdorff, which contribute to the “metaphysics” of artistic research: (1) that artistic research concerns and affects the foundation of our perception, our understanding and our relationship to the world and other people. [I have embodied this singular experience since I started my project] (2) that artistic research is “material thinking”: the articulation of non-propositional knowledge and experience, embodied in artworks and creative processes, in my case, “material thinking” is shown as a production of visual materials that I share in this publication and (3) that artistic research is not about theory but about thought. It is not primarily directing as “knowing that or knowing how” but directed at a not-knowing, or a not-yet knowing [emphasis by the thesis author]. It creates room for what is unthought, for that which is unexpected and the basic idea that “all things could be different” (Borgdorff 2012: 124). This third attribute of artistic research is present in the title of my dissertation when I call for the unimagined as a source and as praise for what discovery means for the construction of new knowledge.

As I gathered the information that could help me explain the vibrancy of the unexpected performativity of the three scenographic assemblages, the three projects/productions that formulate the main research material for this thesis, I also relied on some of the new paradigms of performative research as revised by Barbara Bolt (2008) where the performative act does not describe something but rather does something in the world. I also created the opportunity to make scenographic elements play under a new set of rules, subverting the original dramatic purposes of the device, and producing an alternative and unforeseen performativity.

For thinking in action, I used my scenographic practice to start investigating the circumstances of unexpected discoveries and used the stage as a spatial laboratory for a more controlled experimentation. As most practitioners of scenography know, technical rehearsals are conventional time lapses arranged for the repetition of scenic movements, lights, and sound try-outs. They are events that usually happen in private and are invisible for outsiders. Most of the evanescent spatialities of my study manifested during technical rehearsals. To provoke their emergence, I managed to perform alternative protocols of scenic movements that enabled me to seize sequences of unimagined spatial behaviour. The singularity of my experimentation arose in and through re-iteration. I explain the first experiment for an alternative movement protocol in Chapter 2, which is dedicated to the theatre production of Don Giovanni or the dissolute acquitted (2012) and how I re-iterated the use of a non-dramatic protocol of scenic movements, as a last experiment, in the technical rehearsals of The Flight of Quetzalcóatl described in Chapter 3.

I will summarize that my performative research alternated between observation, thinking, reflecting, imagining, experiencing, playing, documenting, reading, writing, making photos and videos, interpreting images, re-playing and editing videos, ending with the production of more than 5000 digital photographs. It has been a combination of all the above, alongside 10 years of artistic retrospective and study.

It is a fact, that a mindful observation took me to think about the autonomy of space and to see new places and events without the suprematism of human agency. Playing on the stage as a
laboratory took me to expect much more of the unimagined, and to make photos and videos that would document scenographic assemblages without “drama”. Reading took me to learn and reflect, and to feel less lonely when thinking and making. Thinking in retrospective made me experience a new way to live a fresh dialogue with scenographic spaces. Making photos and videos took me to imagining endless points of departure for future artistic creations and to keep on playing. Re-playing and projecting videos to fellow researchers and designers have allowed me to observe my findings and revisit them once more.

0.2 Visual Ethnography as a source of knowledge, material evidence and artistic outcome

As a central part of my analysis — and with the impossibility of bringing back what does not exist anymore — I used visual ethnography to produce a personal archive of digital photographs and videos that operate as a source of knowledge, material evidence, and as an artistic outcome in their own right. My knowledge is grounded in my practical, personal participatory experience in the field of scenography and the visual ethnography becomes an alternative text of my personal experience.

Visual ethnography is a research method that is closely related to anthropology and central to knowing the world from the standpoint of its social relations. It is a qualitative research method predicated on the diversity of cultures and their unique perspectives. Ethnography involves hands-on, on-the-scene learning. This is one of the reasons why photography, video and hypermedia have already been incorporated into the work of ethnographers as cultural texts, sites of cultural production, social interaction, and individual experience. (Pink 2007: 1).

For my investigation, visual ethnography has served as a methodology for visual analysis since the expressivity and ambiguity of visual images have become central to my retrospective investigation. To explain the power of visual ethnography, documentary maker David MacDougall proposed “to rethink certain categories of knowledge in the light of understandings that may be accessible only by non-verbal means and a shift from word-and sentence-based thought to image-and-sequence based thought” (MacDougall 1997 in Pink 2007:6). Design anthropologist Sarah Pink urges us to engage with the visual “not simply as a mode of recording data or illustrating text, but as a medium through which new knowledge and critiques may be created” (Chaplin 1994 in Pink 2007: 13).

Through my experience, I have found it is a common practice for scenographers to use drawings, photography, film, and video to re-present the performative qualities of their scenographic designs. In my case, visual documentation has allowed me to build a personal historical archive, and a professional portfolio. It also allowed me to identify certain themes that were fundamental to my research, such as performativity, spatiality, potentiality, serendipity, sensuousness, playfulness, and the evanescence of the unimagined. To support my dissertation, I include the visual evidence of the scenographic findings in three scenic projects that are presented as my case studies.

It is relevant to express that what started as the personal documentation of my design work, became a collaborative process that included the voluntary work of other production members
who contributed with photographs or videos where they observed that the spatiality of the scenographic assemblage appeared to behave in a non-conventional way. I am not the only person responsible for producing the digital images in my research and each one of the visual materials has been credited properly.

At the beginning of my study, my goal was to simply to show some evidence of the continuous performativity of scenography before and after the conventional event called “performance”, but later it became a more thoughtful observation of the vibrancy and potential of the assemblage itself. In this sense, I claim there is a continuous past-present-future performativity in visual documentation (photographs, videos, and film) which has become the only media to investigate the processes of scenography (seen and unseen). I have used my own visual ethnography to engage with my reader and bring awareness to the aesthetic value of the “discarded”, “invisible”, and conventionally “ignored” scenographic performativity. I re-present the performativity of the evanescent spatialities found in my work hoping to find a sensuous-reader that can use their imagination to make scenographic assemblages perform again. The term sensuous-reader describes “an inquisitive person who places the sensory experience at the forefront of his/her analysis of subjects and objects” (Paul Stoller 1997). I expect that exposure of these images will create a process of mental re-construction in the mind of present and future readers and perform in a new here and now. The retrospective study of digital documentation might illuminate new practices and new discourses on scenography.

My photographs are both objective and subjective and might supply an accurate, loving description of the appearance of a non-imagined work of art. I share them without attempting to impose a unique interpretation. French Philosopher Roland Barthes claimed that as an observer-photographer, it was possible to combine “the voice of banality (to say what everybody is able to see and know) and the voice of singularity (to replenish such banality with an emotion that belongs only to the observer” (Barthes 1980: 76) and this I aim to deliver. What matters the most about my visual collection, is the evanescence of the unimagined, so it is not necessary to squeeze more content out of the work than is already there.

In the presentation of my three case studies, I share my observations as someone who has experienced the past event in the flesh. During the process of my collection, I acted as an agent provocateur of the evanescent spatialities and as a cyborg who tried to save them from oblivion.

0.3 Playing with nonhuman performers on stage: historical, philosophical, and contemporary background

Through my readings and participation in different groups of academic analysis of scenography, I have noticed that a standard criterion seems to prevail, one that gives value to a scenographic assemblage according to its yielding to the actions of human performers. With this research, I want to express my disagreement with what I consider to be a limited point of view. Through my scenographic practice, I have been able to interact with different kinds of performers. There are plenty of nonhuman actors on stage that create a spectacle of their own involving space, light, shapes, lines, volumes, sound, wind, rain, shadows, or motion. Historically, scenography scholars McKinney and Buttersworth (2009) have pointed out that, since the Russian artistic revolution
of 1917, scenography has been considered as an “acting machine” producing reciprocal relationships between the [human] performers and the environment. Erwin Piscator was also using technological means to establish a new form of theatre in the 1920’s, one which communicated through collages of projected images, recorded sound, and live action. They also recall that Filippo Marinetti’s concept of a “synthetic theatre” was centred on abstraction, improvisation, and the use of elements such as gestures, words, sounds and lights (Ibid.: 137-140). Performance scholar Rachel Hann (2019) uses Baz Kershaw’s approach to consider how scenography is enacted as a crafted ecology of affective materials, atmospheres, and orientations. Hann brings to our attention a conception of scenography as an oscillation between human and non-human agents. She explains how scenography can be considered a real artistic performer through “its affective interventions as a material assemblage of social construct” (Ibid: 20- 21).

As I am more interested in the autonomy of the nonhuman performers in scenographic assemblages, I found that American professor Michael Kirby (1965) emphasized the possibilities that arise for performance when it is freed from the requirements of representing anything, when the actions of the “performers” are allowed just to be themselves. In my view, nonhuman performers play according to their own rules, especially when their actions are not fully preterminate by known factors. According to Dutch historian, Johan Huizinga (1992), play is a well-defined quality of action which is different from “ordinary” life and is a significant form of activity (Ibid.: 4). He asserted that “the act of playing” creates a separate space where actions unfold according to a different logic and without demands or constrains. He observed that play is not to be considered foolish or the antithesis of wisdom and that play lies in a very deep layer of our mental being as a form of thought (Ibid.: 6). Huizinga asserts that in nearly all the higher forms of play, the elements of repetition and alternation are like a fabric. “All play moves within a playground marked off beforehand either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course” (Ibid.: 28). Huizinga warns us that “play casts a spell over us becoming enchanting, captivating” (Ibid.:10) and that it may rise to heights of “beauty and sublimity” (Ibid.: 8). He even suggests that “play is the preparation and introduction to love” (Ibid.: 43). It is then relevant to mention that even though the concept of “play” is integrated into the traditional practice of theatre and playing is the nature of its performativity, I decided to “play” revealing the autonomous performance of the nonhuman bodies on stage to engage in a more “democratic” relation with space and the nonhuman performers. Performance researcher Richard Schechner (2006) has already observed that play creates its own multiple realities— with porous boundaries--- and it is full of creative worldmaking. According to Schechner, the act of playing often serves multiple, contradictory purposes simultaneously, he also suggests that “play is performance when it is done openly, and performative when it is more private, even secret” (Ibid.: 92).

In my case studies, the conventional chances to “play” with the performativity of the scenographic assemblages on the stage were strictly reduced to the schedules of technical rehearsals, and happened in a private mode, without the gaze of a regular audience. It was during technical rehearsals of Don Giovanni when surprised and exited by an unimagined performativity of the scenographic assemblage, I managed to get permission to extend the “playing” mode. Informed by Schechner’s ideas, I managed to record how these scenographic assemblages performed freely and independently from any dramatic meanings. During the experience of
playing with the nonhuman performers, I let myself *go with the flow* which, described by Huizinga, is a feeling close to being in a trance. “Flow occurs when the player becomes one with the playing” (Ibid.: 97) adding a new lived experience to my artistic practice.

To depart from the idea that scenography behaves as an assemblage, I refer to American philosopher Jane Bennet (2010), who argues that to identify any human-nonhuman assemblage as a locus of agency is to unsettle the belief that humans exist outside the order of material nature: (Ibid.: 36). This kind of reasoning shakes the anthropocentric understanding of theatre and architecture, and problematizes the idea that scenography acquires its value only in relation to human performers or spectators. Bennett argues that “an *actant* never acts alone and that its efficacy always depends on the collaboration, cooperation or interactive interference of many bodies and forces” (Ibid.: 21). An assemblage, according to her thinking, “is a living, throbbing confederation that has an uneven topography, where power is not distributed equally across its surface, and it is not governed by any central head” (Ibid.: 23-24).

Bennet suggests devising procedures, technologies, and regimes of perception that enable us to consult nonhumans more closely, or listen and respond more carefully to their outbreasts, objections, testimonies, and propositions. I feel inspired by Bennet’s observations when she suggests that “Maybe is worth running the risks associated with superstition, the divinization of nature or romanticism, because it works against the anthropocentrism” (Ibid.: 120).

On the historical track, it needs to be said that there are thousands of scenes in the history of the performing arts that have been brilliantly performed by the scenographic assemblages of non-human performers alone. The spectacular congregations of weather, space, gravity, time, light, materialities and technologies highlight the limitations in human-centred theories of action. I aim to promote a continuous experimentation of rebellious design strategies to make scenographic assemblages act as “misbehaving bodies”, those which can exceed what was originally envisioned. The Futurist theatre precedes the first concepts of installation art and assemblages. I have always admired The Synthetic Futurist Theatre: A Manifesto (*Le Sintesi*) written By Filippo Marinetti, Emilio Settimeli, and Bruno Corra in 1915, as a vibrant reaction against a theatre that was considered “monotonous and depressing” (Kirby 1971:43). In Kirby’s perspective, the futurists felt that imitation was superficial and that they were in touch with reality of a more meaningful kind (Ibid.: 44). Its most obvious characteristic was brevity, it was a distillation, condensation or compression of traditional drama, a diversity of “present for the moment” (Ibid.: 42). The *sintesi* moved away from information and logic and toward direct sensory appeal. According to the futurists there was no need to develop a single style of performance. The *sintesi* manifesto spoke of their discoveries in a variety of areas: “in the subconscious, in undefined forces, in pure abstraction, in pure cerebralism, in pure fantasy, in breaking records and physical madness” (Ibid.: 44).

It is logical for me to associate my experiments with the futurist enthusiasm, with the discovery of undefined forces, fantasy, and abstraction. My scenographic findings could be futurist *sintesi* associated with speed and motion, without human bodies on stage, but more like Enrico Prampolini’s experiments as I have produced “electromechanical architecture” without any meaning. My work can also be associated with Duchamp’s idea of the “ready-made” as the scenographic assemblages I originally designed had a dramatic theatrical purpose but were
allowed to go beyond its common performativity. Just like Prampolini’s, my spatial experiments did not respond to any representational goal, but they did not become installations because they happened on the stage as laboratory and were not presented in a museographic space or fashion. They happened as in site performances that lasted only a few seconds. It was a sort of private spectacle based on materiality performing without any symbolism.

Going back to the futurist’s ideas, Prampolini’s major emphasis was on scenery that would move. In the 1915 manifesto he envisioned an “uncoloured electromechanical architecture” that would be illuminated by moving and changing coloured lights. The “dynamic stage architecture” was described as “unleashing metallic arms, knocking over plastic frameworks, amidst and essentially new” (Ibid.: 77). For Craig, according to Kirby, the kinetic stage made it possible for impersonal movements to become the essence of the performance: “Even now as we wait to watch, in the very centre of the void a single atom seems to stir... it spreads”. Shapes begin to rise: “a form simple and austere ascends with prolonged patience like the awakening of a thought in a dream...”. The movement of the shapes becomes a performance without [human] actors (Ibid.: 79).

One of the most prophetic of all futurists performances was Giacomo Balla’s staging of Stravinsky’s Feu d’Artifice (1917), where he created a performance without actors in which the dynamics of light were of primary importance. Balla built a “keyboard of switches” in the prompter’s box so that he could watch and listen to the performance while he played the lights. The performance lasted five minutes. It was not merely the stage that was lit, the auditorium itself was lightened and darkened during the piece, relating the spectators to the [human] actorless presentation on stage. Sound, light and colour were orchestrated into a single, entirely nonrepresentational work (Ibid.: 83–85).

In my study, the reader will be exposed to a disclosure of playful materials and physical forces between nonhuman bodies detected by observation and documented with the use of digital technology.

I conducted a series of random scenographic movements, that seemed to behave as autonomous entities before human actors used the stage. These scenographic events happened away from the sight of a regular audience and independently from the presence of human bodies. This experience defies the prevailing idea that a scenographic assemblage is only completed if there is a live [human] actor on the stage.

It is also central for me to note that the evanescent spatialities documented throughout my study happened on the stage as a real place in the world and not as a fictional site. I recorded them on video for their subsequent study, hoping to locate them under modern and postmodern photographic paradigms. My photos are to be reviewed both as a visual documentation of real events and as artistic pieces composed by digital technology. I consider my artistic outcomes as a hybrid expression of the ephemeral and its aesthetics.

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2 Kirby quotes Craig’s article called “Motion: Being the preface to the portfolio of etchings by Gordon Craig”, published in The Mask in 1908.
To continue with a personal and philosophical approach, there are some fragments from the Manifesto of the Futurist Synthetic Theatre translated by R. W. Flint and quoted by Kirby that I embrace as a contemporary female scenographer:

“...we [I] condemn the whole contemporary theatre because it is too prolix, analytic, pedantically psychological, explanatory, diluted, finicking, static, as full of prohibitions as a police station, as cut up into cells as a monastery, as moss grown as an old, abandoned house” ... (Ibid.: 196–197)  

... “we [I] are convinced that mechanically, by force of brevity, we can achieve an entirely new theatre perfectly in tune with our swift and laconic Futurist sensibility. Our acts can also be moments [atti—attimi] only a few seconds long. With this essential and synthetic brevity, the theatre can bear and even overcome competition from the cinema” (Ibid.: 197).

...“with our synthetist movement in the theatre, we [I] want to destroy the technique that, from the Greeks until now, instead of simplifying itself, has become more and more dogmatic, stupid, logical, meticulous, pedantic, strangling... THEREFORE: It is stupid to want to explain with logical minuteness everything taking place on the stage, when even in life, one never grasps an event entirely, in all its causes and consequences, because reality throbs around us, bombards us with squalls of fragments of interconnected events, mortised and tenoned together, confused, mixed up, chaotic” (Ibid.: 199).

The personification of space in the role of actor, as a dynamic and interacting element between the scenic environment and the spectator, constitutes one of the most important quests in the evolution of art and of theatrical technique since the problem of scenic unity is definitively solved (Ibid.: 230). I think that Enrico Prampolini figured out the revolution of appreciating the nonhuman on stage in his futurist manifestos, much more than the actual experiments of Appia and Craig. “Let us be artists too, and no longer merely executors” (Ibid.: 204).

On the contemporary track, and as a contemporary example of expanded scenography, it is necessary to refer to the work of German director Heiner Goebbels (2017) and some of the parameters of what he has called a “Theatre of Absence”. In many of his scenic works he has managed to disappear the [human] actor/performer from the centre of attention, creating a polyphony of elements with independent “voices”, and managed the division of the spectator's attention to a “collective protagonist”. He has been able to call attention to the creation of spaces in-between, spaces of discovery, spaces in which emotion, imagination and reflection can take place as an abandonment of dramatic expressivity. Goebbels has been able to avoid the things we expect, the things we have seen, the things we have heard, the things that are usually done on stage (Ibid.: 3–5).

As a result of ten years of retrospective reflection on my work, I think that a scenographic assemblage can be understood as a living body; one that breathes, whispers, shouts or remains silent. A living nonhuman body that plays its own game, with its own voice, and its own logic, even if it goes unnoticed. Every scenographer needs to create favourable conditions to play and experiment with scenographic devices. Playing with big elements of scenery requires experience and professional authority. Playing with the elements on stage cannot be done without the expertise, tolerance, and patience of an attuned group of collaborators.

For the benefit of my investigation, I created several opportunities to play with the ecology of scenography where nonhuman elements became the main performers. I can assert that
nonhuman players on stage have a quality of acting out, of becoming another, of displaying a
normally hidden part of themselves without worrying about the consequences.

0.4 Transdisciplinary reading and writing

To find a scholarly frame for my investigation, I looked for academic and scientific support to find
a definition of space that could explain my findings. Adding to this, I decided to intertwine my
writing with philosophical and political arguments that included a posthuman turn. My aim is to
provoke connections between concepts previously “known” and explore new ideas about the
nature of space. The reader will find many citations from philosophical texts written by male
(mostly European) thinkers interwoven with alternative perspectives on feminism, new
materialisms, speculative realism and post-humanism. This is why it is relevant to bring up how
Nicolas De Cusa, during the Middle Ages, was aware of the indetermination of space, or how René
Descartes discovered that space was matter and not a void. I also mention Joseph Raphson’s
mathematical approach that finds space to be incomprehensible to us, as well as the immense
contribution of Albert Einstein’s concept of space as “a big soup of virtual particles”.

The reader will find references to Elizabeth Ströker’s theory about diverse spaces (1987); Jane
Bennet’s thoughts on vibrant matter (2010); Diana Cool and Samantha Frost’s new materialism
(2010); and citations of Henry Levebre, Gilles Deleuze and Bruno Latour’s approaches to the
agency of space and nonhuman bodies, as explained also by Michel Callon and John Law in the
actor-network theory (1996). I have also included reflections on the creation of atmospheres as

I was fully inspired by the perverse and partial ideas presented by Donna Haraway (1985),
(1987), (2016), Barbara Bolt’s engagement with feminists practices (2008), Judith Butler (1990),
Cool and Samantha Frost (2010), Kathleen Stewart (2007), Erin Manning (2015), and Rosi
Braidotti (2022), whose reflections have helped me to explain my own perception, experience and
relation to space.

I have used intertextuality3 as an intentional literary device to create an interrelationship
between quotes and citations and problematize the reader’s prior understanding of space and the
field of expanding scenography. I navigated using my own wits and ingenuity, my own
confidence and curiosity, just following the impulse of a non-innocent explorer.

0.5 Personal background and geo-political context: locating my embodied
knowledge

In this subchapter, I present my personal bio and my geo-political context to locate my experience
and my knowledge. I think that the production of human knowledge is always located in a human

3 Understood as the interdependence of the chosen texts in relation to one another, and as the connections
between different works of literature and art and the meanings that are created by them. I created a text that is a
web of allusions to other texts, that helped me explain my own thinking.
body at a certain time and a certain place, and the ability to locate embodied knowledge is primordial to start decolonizing it.

The embodiment of knowledge is not a conceptual abstraction but the incarnation of a subjective and intimate lived experience. I find it politically relevant to say I am a woman that has lived culturally and sexually a woman’s life, and that I belong to a territory that nowadays is defined as the Global South. Therefore, I have decided to present a brief biography as geo-political support for my “situated knowledge”. Haraway refers to feminist ‘objectivity’ as one that is always partial and located. My biography might seem “superfluous” if knowledge is supposed to come from Higher-and-unquestionable-super-powerful-forces. I will stick to the Harawayan proposal about partiality in the production of knowledge and reveal that I do not intend to be modest about my personal journey in learning and knowing.

I graduated as an architect at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) in 1990 and got an M.F.A in scenic design from the Yale School of Drama. I have designed more than 120 scenic productions and have been awarded internationally with the Gold Medal for Costume Design at the World Stage Design 2005 and as Outstanding Scenographer at the WSD 2009. My work has been exhibited at the Mexican Pavilions presented at the Prague Quadrennials of 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 and I have been invited to participate as a jury member in several international events like the PQ 2007, WSD 2013 and PQ 2019 to name a few.

During my undergraduate studies at the Faculty of Architecture of the UNAM, all the arts embedded in theatre caught my attention as attractive phenomena. As a student, I wanted to graduate with a thesis project that could provide a space laboratory for the students at the school, a space for the material experimentation with space. Back in 1989, there were no “virtual experiences” as we find them now. I wanted to build a real sensuous laboratory, where basic architectonic spatialities could be inhabited. Unfortunately, I was not able to find a thesis supervisor who would be willing to support me in the realization of the project but found the advice of an endearing teacher who made me see that the laboratory I was looking for already existed in the black box of a stage. It is relevant to mention that my earliest design methods were conventional and were based on what I learned at the Faculty of Architecture at the National Autonomous University of Mexico between 1984 and 1990 and at the graduate program of scenic design at the Yale School of Drama between 1990 and 1993. These traditional and unquestioned design methodologies usually consider space to be a volumetric void, and that human rationality brought order and harmony to the world by the thoughtful “making” of space. I was taught that all the intellectual work of an architect was of fundamental cultural value and that architecture was the mother of all arts. They told me that architects were talented individuals responsible for creating well-being and beauty and that success was measured by the number of buildings you erected in a city or even worldwide. At the Drama School, I was taught to respect the hierarchies of theatre production and learned about the potentiality of empty space as understood by legendary British director Peter Brook as well as other famous designers. My artistic approach to set design had always grown from the desires and personal visions of the director and I had to make sure that the design always worked as an attuned vehicle-container for the actions demanded by the dramatic text.
However, and with the passing of years, I started to observe that these artistic procedures were only superficial and found them irrelevant in every way. I started to rebel against most of the basic traditional concepts by reflecting on my own professional experience. I felt I had found a particular fascination for the ephemeral and a more contemplative curiosity to approaching the potential of the evanescent spatialities embedded in scenographic assemblages.

It is relevant to emphasize that the use of the stage as a laboratory of ephemeral architecture and the encounters and experiments I am about to describe is not presented as an original artistic action, because, as I explained before, it is possible to relate my outcomes to the radical aspirations of Futurist architects and avant-garde scenographers. My experimentartion is centred on abstraction, serendipity, improvisation, and chance and could also be related to that of the French OuLiPo Movement and its libertarian creation of poetry, as I used a simple mathematical model to produce hundreds of scenographic combinations, all “autonomous and alogical”.

As established in the previous section, the centre of my dissertation is not to claim originality in the methodology of my investigation but to shift our attention from what is conventionally available for public viewing to what is usually ignored, discarded, or marginalized.

In addition to my personal background, but also to politicize my dissertation, I want to address some of the aspects of the geolocation of my person, my studies, and my artistic work. 

I was born in Mexico City in 1965, in a country that belongs to the region of North America but is seldom recognized as such. Mexico is a multicultural and multi-ethnic country with 32 states, with a population that speaks Spanish and other 68 original languages. Being born a woman in Mexico presents many socio-cultural difficulties which can start early in the family household, continue during school years, and pervade along the development of a professional career. Women in my country live under the menace that 11 feminicides happen every day and criminal justice is hardly obtained.

After graduating as an architect, to become a professional scenic designer I had to travel abroad. I was financed by student scholarships and a little part of the income of my [middle class] family. My first scenic design teachers were British, and my first scenic design project was finished during a summer course in the Welsh countryside. After that first course, I managed to live in the anglophone part of North America and got a master’s degree at Yale University. I was the first Mexican accepted in the design program at the Yale School of Drama. The first months at the school, I was advised to visit a minority recruitment counsellor, so I could talk about the social and academic treatment that I was receiving as a “Latina” student. After three interviews [where I referred to my student experience as normal and exciting], the counsellor suggested to stop our encounters since she thought there was not going to be a problem at all and I “did not look Mexican”.

Being Mexican means being a citizen of racialized and colonized country. This geopolitical status prevailed while working as a designer in the U.S. where I was mostly hired to design “Latino” plays.

During an almost 30-yearlong design career, I still feel there is some resentment against women that became decision makers in the world of the scenic arts, and against those women that emerge from other territories in “developing” countries. I have seen many colleagues in European academia still encouraging foreign students to be “properly” educated in the manners of the West.
I am reminded of what feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti remarks when she analyses that “differences in material locations express different life experiences and also multiple ways of knowing” (Braidotti 2022: 3).

0.6 What is space?

One of the main concerns of my dissertation is reflecting about the nature of space. An entity that is usually taken for granted and commonly thought of as a “void”, space has also been defined by some architects as “negative” compared to the solid materiality that is referred to as “positive” space.  

After my own experience in professional practice and the intertextual reading of various theories produced by philosophers, designers, and scholars, I have concluded that space is a “living” entity with an incalculable potential for play; “a vibrant matter with agency and performativity of its own” (Bennet 2010). I have used my investigation to offer some arguments to support my point of view and even if I have not proved it beyond a reasonable doubt, my reflection cannot be cancelled.

When Lotker and Gough (2013) observe the agency of scenography, they explain that there is no such thing as an empty space. “Every space is an environment, is already resonant; it has its character, a psychology and a memory [...] every space is marked, every space is charged –the space performs even before the [human] actor walks across it” (Ibid.: 4). Space is not a void. Space is never empty; it has never been empty and will never be. (Lotker and Gough 2013:4; Raya 2015; Hann, 2019: 86). Space is a nonhuman body in continuous transformation.

Looking for basic theories to understand space and spatiality, I found those published by Alexander Koyré in 1957 which derived from a lecture he gave at John Hopkins University in 1953. I learned that it was Nicholas de Cusa, a great philosopher of the Middle Ages, who first denied the finitude of the world and its enclosure by the walls of the heavenly spheres. De Cusa’s conception of the universe was not infinite but indeterminate, and it was not terminated but indeterminate (Koyré 1957:8). Then, it was French scientist René Descartes who offered the first rational interpretation of the universe, and space became strictly mathematical; a world of Euclidean geometry. He believed that there was nothing else in the world, but matter and motion and that matter was identical to space. He was convinced that there was nothing that could be considered a void. “The void is not only physically impossible, but also essentially impossible” (Ibid.: 103). According to Descartes, space is not a place where there is no substance; “it is a body, such as matter, indefinitely extended, farther than all that can be conceived by man” (Ibid.: 118). Descartes concluded that the space that is called the void is the same corporeal substance as that one called matter (Ibid.: 147).

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4 You can take a course about “negative space” at the following online platform. https://www.masterclass.com/articles/positive-and-negative-space#7LxgijHJ7jiVO8EmuK2TNy
5 It is possible to compare this observation to Luciano Damiani’s definition of scenography, found In the World View section of the first Edition of What is scenography? written by Pamela Howard in 2002, where he asserts that scenography comes to life only when the human body penetrates the space. It is central to my dissertation to question this anthropocentric view.
Koyré recalls that, at the end of the 17th Century, British mathematician Joseph Raphson, defined space as “the innermost extended entity (whatever it be) that it is the first by nature and the very last to be obtained by continuous division and separation”. Raphson considered and reflected upon different concepts and concluded that “space is infinite, space is pure act, space is all containing and all penetrating, space is nearer to us than we are to ourselves, space is the all-embracing, space is incomprehensible to us, space is most perfect in its kind and things can neither be, nor be conceived without it” (Ibid.: 193-196).

In 1905, and confirming the idea that space is somewhat incomprehensible to us, Koyré holds that Albert Einstein published the definitive scientific evidence that proved that matter was formed by atoms and space became a big soup of virtual particles that wink in and out of existence in tiny fractions of a second (http://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/speed-light-can-vary-180953949/#Ew4fIKxSggywrpY.99). Now, in the 21st century, scientists Gerd Leuchs and Luis Sánchez-Soto, from the Max Planck Institute for the Physics of Light, claim that “objects and environments are no longer immutable material situated in perpetual time, but are understood as events, active and mobile through elemental variations and a dense layering of realities and virtualities”. In the same line of thought, new materialists Diana Cool and Samantha Frost (2010) believe that contemporary concepts around matter have become even more elusive and complex because now “they raise the same ethical and political concerns about what is considered living matter” (Ibid.: 5).

Through my research, I reached a point where I confirmed that the concept of the “empty space” was quite problematic. As much as Peter Brook’s famous contribution may be interpreted as an effort “to make any space a performance space and move out from traditional proscenium venues of the 19th century” (Hannah 2019:5), during the process of this dissertation, I came to understanding the practice of scenography as an ethical act and to think that it is most relevant for a scenographer to consider space as a living entity. I feel uneasy with the idea that the power already embedded in any found space, is in the need to be “discovered” and “tamed” by human agency. At this point in my studies, I read the conceptual claim of a stage as an “empty-neutral-void” as a normalized act of invasion and colonization. I hope for future architects and environmental designers to have a more critical approach to the anthropocentric and patriarchal ways of the modern [Occidental] era. I think there is no need to “master” space as an aspiration, as much as there is a philosophical need to understand it better.

Through this dissertation I was able to nurture my ethical and political stance by looking into three French philosophers with different approaches to the agency of space and nonhuman bodies. Henry Lefebvre considered that space is a living organism with an immense potential for play. “Objects touch one another, feel, smell, and hear one another. Every spatial plane constitutes a mirror and produces a mirage effect; that within each body the rest of the world is reflected, and referred to, in an ever-renewed to-and-fro of reciprocal reflections, an interplay of shifting colours, lights and forms” (1991: 183). Lefebvre also suggested that:

“Space can no longer be looked upon as an “object” compared with subjects. Nor it can be treated as a resultant effect of a past, a history or society. Its role is less neutral, more and more active, both as instrument and as goal, as means and as end” (Ibid.: 411).
“There must be a different mode of production of space, governed by different conceptual determinations. We need to oppose the abstraction of the dominant space with a renewed revolutionary outburst at a higher level of consciousness and action accompanied by great inventiveness and creativity” (Ibid.: 419).

On a similar philosophical track, Gilles Deleuze had a remarkable ability to enliven even the most barren and neglected spaces. He thought not only that every kind of space teems with life, but that space itself is alive. (Clark and Doel 2004: 106). Deleuze was a radical thinker; “of difference rather than identity; seriality rather than hierarchy and becoming rather than being” (Ibid.: 105). It seems that Deleuze was devoted to the immanence and singularity of creative encounters with the potential of the unforeseen.

According to performance researcher Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca (2012), there are many Deleuzes to look at. For my purpose, it is relevant to reference him for “his materialist-processual thought, for thinking through the embodied durational art of performance”. Deleuze called my attention as “a philosopher of immanence, where life is conceived as ceaseless creativity and change, as the production of difference or novelty, as the proliferation of encounters between different forces of affect, as a multiplicity of presents” (Ibid.: 2-3). Cull helped me follow the Deleuze that reconsiders presence as “a mutual transformative encounter between the different, rather than as an instance of recognition, identification, communication, communion or coincidence between a subject and an object” (Ibid:5). She also observes that Deleuze “frames the concept of the “subject” as an oppressive force operating at the level of the body as well as at the level of the social, and as an organizing force that invites us to operate as if we were really separate from (an in some cases superior to) the other bodies populating the world” (Ibid.: 7). Cull advises that Deleuze’s definition of thought as creation “allows us to suggest that everything thinks—including the nonhuman aspects of performance—because everything is immanent to the creativity of life, an expression of how life thinks itself in and as a creation of different “things” (Ibid.: 4-5).

In Cull’s analysis, “Deleuze’s immanence concerns the participation, multiplication, and extension of the human body—understood as that which is produced by relations of force and encounters with the affects of other bodies. It is not a matter of losing sight of the human as it disappears in “a world of intensity flows” as a question of gaining a sense of humanness as an open quality: as an alterable and perpetually altering set of powers to act and be acted upon by other nonhuman bodies” (Ibid.: 10).

In my own analysis, I feel inspired to think about the nature of space when both Deleuze and Guattari describe that “a body is not defined by the form that determines it, nor as a determinate substance or subject, nor by the organs it possesses or the functions it fulfils. But as the total sum of the material elements belonging to it under given relations of movement and rest (longitude); and the total sum of the intensive affects it is capable of at a given degree of potential” (latitude) (1987: 260). When they suggest that we are longitude and latitude it means that we are “a set of speeds and slownesses between unformed particles, a set of nonsubjectified affects. We do have the individuality of a day, a season, a year, a life (regardless of its duration)—a climate, a wind, a fog, a swarm, a pack (regardless of its regularity)” (Ibid: 262). This could mean that the property of a space being unique relays in the becoming of an assemblage that is defined by speeds and affects, independently of forms and subjects. Theirs is a provocation for humans to cease to be
subjects in order to become events “in assemblages that are inseparable from an hour, a season, an atmosphere, an air, a life” (Ibid: 262).

Deleuze and Guattari argue that the climate, the wind, a season, or an hour are not of another nature than the things, animals, or people that populate them, follow them, sleep, and awaken within them. They claim that these lines should be read without a pause:

“The animal-stalks-at-five-o’clock. Five o’clock is this animal! This animal is this place! The thin dog is running in the road, this dog is the road cries Virginia Woolf. That is how we need to feel. Spatiotemporal relations, determinations, are not predicates of the thing but dimensions of multiplicities” (Ibid: 263).

The third French philosopher who is widely recognized for the part he has played alongside Michel Callon and John Law in the initiation and spread of the actor-network theory (ANT 1996) is Bruno Latour. In this theory, Latour attributes “social agency” to actants that can be human or nonhuman. Actant is a term covering both humans and nonhumans; it defines any entity that modifies another entity in a trial of actors. He argues that their competence is deduced from their performances; and the action, in turn, is always recorded by an experimental protocol (Latour 2004: 337).

This “democratization” of who can act, away from the anthropocentrism of the social sciences, raised an awareness of “the agency of things” (Laurier 2004: 203). It was also nourishing to learn that Latour (2013) analysed the terms “Modernization” or “Moderns” as opposed to ecology, to bring a new discussion of Society and Nature, humans, and nonhumans. He observed that the modern ideal was one who was heading from past to future. Due to this notion, it was possible to qualify as “irrational” everything that had to be torn away, and as “rational” everything towards which it was necessary to move to progress. Latour pointed out that holding the ideals of Modernism has become harder because of the increased intermixing of humans and nonhumans.

“It is now before Gaia that we are summoned to appear: the odd, double composite figure made up of science and mythology use by certain specialists to designate the Earth that surround us and that we surround, the truly global Globe that threaten us even as we threaten it” (Ibid.: 8-9).

In Laurier’s considerations, Latour offers a preliminary step for a peace-making process (Ibid.: 13-14). He sets forth a diplomatic scene that would reunite the “Moderns” with the “others”. But it is the Moderns, in “Occidentals”, in “Europeans” that are to be inquired, especially since anthropology took them for granted as a contrast “between the other cultures” and the process of modernization.

Even if the Moderns have claimed to practice self-awareness, self-analysis, critique, lucidity and extended the odd idea that the “other cultures” would be the ones that are opaque and in great need of ethnography, it is not so. In concordance with Latour, I find there are some other ways to see and feel the space of the world we live in. It was to combat this opacity that Latour wanted to develop a different kind of protocol for inquiry of other modes of being, one that was concerned with ecology, climate change and therefore with the cosmic spatiality of our planet.

In my own analysis, Latour proposes a more-than-human approach when he observes that “We need to consider any point of action as being a mediation, that is to say, as an event. The event
cannot be defined in terms of inputs and outputs or causes or consequences. The idea of mediation or event enables us to retain the only two characteristics of action that are useful: the emergence of novelty and the impossibility of out-of-nothing creation. It is necessary to move away from the Western anthropological schema that always forces the recognition of a subject and an object, a competence and a performance, a potentiality, and an actuality” (Latour 1996: 237).

Latour observes that the common everyday usage of the term "action" cannot serve anymore, as it presupposes a point of origin and a transport of force, both of which are completely improbable. “Not action, nor the actor, nor interaction, nor the individual, nor the symbol, nor the system, nor society, nor their numerous combinations can be re-arranged. Ceasing to be modernist, takes responsibility for the ‘social’ life of things” (Ibid: 238).

While considering Latour’s essay On Interobjectivity, I was pleased to find two examples of ANT that clarified his alternative thinking on actants:

“If you talk with a puppeteer, you will find that he/she is perpetually surprised by his/her puppets. He/she makes the puppet do things that cannot be reduced to his/her action, and which he/she does not have the skill to do, even potentially. Is this feti shism? No, it is simply a recognition of the fact that we are exceeded by what we create (the emphasis is mine). To act is to mediate another’s action” (Ibid.: 237).

“As a common shepherd all I have to do is delegate to a wooden fence the task of containing my flock; then I can just go to sleep with my dog beside me. Who is acting while I am asleep? Me, the carpenters, and the fence. Am I expressed in this fence as if I had actualized outside of myself a competence that I possessed in potential form? Not in the slightest. The fence doesn’t look at all like me. It is not an extension of my arms or of my dog. It is completely beyond me. It is an actant in its own right” (Ibid.: 239).

Also central to the creative thinking of my dissertation is the work of Elisabeth Ströker (1987), a German philosopher, who first published her Investigations to the Philosophy of Space in 1965. In her theory, she argues that what is given to date as a “theory of space” turns out to be a sublimated sediment of historically acquired concepts’ (Ströker 1987: 1). Ströker observed that there have been numerous efforts under various methodological aspects to master the complex and multi-layered problem of space. These efforts offer a justification to speak of “spaces”. The space of intuition and the space of mathematics cannot be arranged next to each other and are not conceivable as parts of a unitary space since the latter does not seem to be available for investigation and thought. If the talk about spaces is valid, then we should ask about the differences and commonalities of their structure (Ibid.: 3).

According to Ströker, space is not a mere medium of measurement but an expressive fullness. Ströker proposed using the term attuned space for the one that “surrounds me”, one that is “about me” and can only be comprehensible as a possible space for intersubjectivity (Ibid.: 46). While at first the attuned space seems limited to spatial surroundings, it appears to be capable of numerous extensions. We speak of the space of our future and our past, of our wishes and hopes. Spaces
constitute significant wholes with appropriate feeling and mood accents; they are understood and differentiated spatially, even if “in reality” they are not spatial in kind (Ibid.: 21).

The understanding of **attuned space** is a way of being moved and affected. “It is a space of labour, of leisure, of festivities, of devotion—a space that is loved, feared, avoided” (Ibid.: 19). This space exercises an “effectivity”; it addresses, it imparts; it is not primarily an object for a subject who performs acts of spatial understanding. **Attuned space**, “has a propriate mode of coexistence with our lived egos” (Ibid.: 19).

Also relevant to my investigation are her observations about the qualities of what she calls a **space of action**, (ontologically relative to a temporary project, to a specific situation). According to Ströker, the **space of action** has a dynamic texture and is in constant transformation. The **space of action** is a manifold of places (Ibid.: 53). “It is the region of possible shifts” (Ibid.: 57).

Through many years of philosophical and scientific discussion, space has been addressed as a complicated thing to define and comprehend. Even if it is true that space performs clearly when it is being perceived, lived, and experienced; it is also true that it performs even when it is not perceived, lived, or experienced by others. The agency of space precedes perception.

Through my academic research and participation in groups that analyze the performance of scenographic assemblages, I have noticed that criteria that praise the artistic value of scenography according to its relation to human performers or spectators had prevailed for a long time.

According to Barbara Bolt, the avant-garde, and more recent feminist, queer and post-colonial practices, have engaged in prying open the gaps and fissures produced through re-iteration, in an effort to disrupt and to get outside or beyond the norm (2008). “Mastering the space” is an idea that is commonly taught at theatre design schools as one of the main professional skills of a scenographer (see Howard 2019). I argue that it is wiser to observe and negotiate with space than to aspire to master [colonize] it. I recommend taking a post-human approach to understanding scenography and considering that bodies in space are always performing their own agenda. This recommendation challenges the idea that the performance of a scenographic assemblage needs to be “completed” by human spectatorship. Human and nonhuman bodies interact while immersed in another body, the endless body of space. Negotiating with space recognizes its intrinsic vitality and encourages a more intelligent engagement with it.

I used to think I was able to “create” space. I have changed my mind. I provoke spaces; I love them; organize them; sharpen their potential. My expand-ing practice as scenographer has induced me into “an aesthetic-affective openness, a political curiosity for the contributions of nonhuman actants” and a “patient attentiveness to nonhuman forces” (Bennett 2010, x-xiv). I hope that scholars and researchers may refresh their views about scenography if they recognize that the practice of scenography precedes and exceeds its origins rooted in the aesthetic actions of Greek theatre and moves away from the dramaturgy anchored in the term **skeno-graphia** into wider and wordless interventions that take existing space agency as an equal partner of becoming

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6 In accordance with Chantelle Gray: “Love is a solidarity understood as obligations and responsibilities of people and things (quoting Jane Bennett). It is a powerful inspiring force based on desires, affections, and feelings for a shared world.
(a scene). Scenography may be appreciated better under terms that move away from the hierarchies of “subordination” applied to artistic or social activities. I think that the practice of scenography is a journey. A journey of encountering evanescent spatialities and bodies, light, sound, actions, time, participants, and human and nonhuman spectators. Scenographic assemblages have been normalized in our everyday experience in schools, restaurants, hospitals, and offices. It is a fantasy we live in. These are scenographies that represent a world order. I believe that space has always acted as an agent with its own propensities and tendencies.

New ideas are present in Maaïke Bleeker’s and David Shearing’s chapters edited by Joslin McKinney and Scott Palmer (2017) in Scenography Expanded: An Introduction to Contemporary Performance Design (Ibid.:125-154). In my vision, there are plenty of nonhuman performers capable of creating autonomous spectacles beyond the conventions of a stage, such as space, light, organic shapes, lines, material volumes, sound, wind, rain, shadows, insects, birds, water, clouds, or sea motions. These nonhuman bodies and their cosmic scale are far more surprising or powerful than our very limited [human] bodies. I strongly disagree with the idea that nonhuman bodies that perform on stage are to be diminished as “liveless” if they are not used on behalf of human performers.

My intention here is to provoke my reader to question/ponder/think/consider:

What would happen to the practice of scenography if designers were trained early on to think that space is “alive” and has its own “consciousness”? Would it be more interesting to pay attention to what space is trying to express on its own?

Tonino Griffero (2014) supports the idea that “the way in which the world is for us, the way we experience it, is not objectively but atmospherically” (Hauskeller 1995 in Griffero 2014: 6). Griffero refers to atmospheres as events that escape the analytical and “immobilizing” perceptions of science, while around us, the world resonates with a thousand melodies, exhales a thousand perfumes, is animated with a thousand movements, that make our being palpitate (Minkowsky 1936 in 6). Griffero claims that an atmosphere is hard to define because it is a spatialized feeling, a “something-more” in an affective and corporeal sense. An atmospheric perception is not perfected by knowledge or semiotically founded references, but rather by a way that is tied to the felt body as revealed in a phenomenological sphere (Ibid.: 37). He also explains that the atmospheric perception “is direct and deambulatory, kinaesthetic, polymodal and affectively engaging. It is felt by paying attention to bodily drives such as anguish, pain, hunger, thirst, pleasure, and affective involvement. In this way, it is possible to develop a sensibility or presentiment, an intuitive perception of situations” (Fuchs 2003 in Griffero: 17). “We can grasp the resonance of things as the extra-intellectual comprehension of the expression of our surroundings extended also to “inanimate” objects, such as mountains, clouds, machines” (Arnheim 1966 in Griffero:18).

In his book, Atmospheres: Aesthetics of Emotional Spaces, Griffero suggests that an atmosphere is a vibration in which the perceiver and the perceived meet and even merge. It is a something more, a je-ne-sais-quoi perceived by the felt body in each space, but never fully attributable to the objectual set of that space (Ibid.: 6). In his appreciation, the vagueness in the definition of atmospheres is welcomed by a renewed ontological approach, one that considers that the more they are evanescent, the more positively active they are (Ibid.: 6).
Taking a similar perspective, German philosopher Gernot Böhme (2017) writes that the term atmosphere constitutes the shared reality of the perceiver and the perceived. “To perceive atmospheres means to open oneself emotionally and the discovery of one’s whole body as a medium of being a body of flesh and blood” (Böhme 2017: 121). It is not just something one feels but something that can be generated deliberatively by specific material constellations. Böhme suggests that the task of endowing things, environments, or bodies with properties that make something “emanate” from them, is divided into many professional fields that include design, scenography, advertising, music, cosmetics, interior architecture, and the whole sphere of visual arts (Ibid.: 25).

To conclude the exposition of my thoughts about the mysterious vitality of space, and in accordance with Griffero’s and Böhme’s concepts, I would like to emphasize that I approached the revision of each scenographic assemblage in my study as a vibrant nonhuman entity with a temporal identity and that I was able to observe and enhance their vital activity. Next, I will continue to explain my engagement with unimagined spatial performativity.

**0.7 A practitioner of expand-ing scenography**

I find it relevant to address that most definitions of the art of conventional scenography appear to be the result of the analysis of individual practices of famous scenographers or specific theatrical experiments. Some of the most prominent scholars of scenography define it as a practice that derives from the conditions and the history of the theatre, such as Hann (2019: 47), Howard (2002), or Aronson (2018: 1-10); to name a few, and their studies usually refer to the origins of Greek Tragedy and its theatrical inventions. I would like to challenge this embedded notion of [Occidental] origin and ask the reader to imagine the practice of scenography springing from other practices (social, religious, ethnic) other architectures (natural, animal, cellular, cosmic), and other cultural contexts (native, casual, accidental, mestizo). I would also like to provoke the imagining of alternative scenographies by looking carefully into the agency of vibrant materialities and the vitality of temporal assemblages of human and nonhuman bodies.

According to Arnold Aronson, in the foreword to *Scenography Expanded: An introduction to contemporary performance design*, “expanded scenography sits well within what many fields and disciplines refer to as posthuman” ((McKinney and Palmer 2017: xvi). Hannah and Harsløf (2018) also observe that the practice of performance design asserts the role of artists/designers in the conception and realization of events, as well as their awareness of how design elements actively extend the bodies of the performers “even in spite of the human body” (Ibid:12).

My priority is not to lead the vision of scenography “in the right direction” or disregard the studies that will keep it bound to the making of theatre. I aim to contribute to the discussion where its practice is isolated from dramatic purposes and call attention to different ways of organizing space as a sensual provocation of its spectators’ perceptions, either human or nonhuman, present or absent and to reveal the evidence, found in the study in my own scenographic work, of a performativity that performs before and after what we identify as the “formal” performance.
Theoretically and philosophically, I have taken some distance from the scenography scholars who bind it exclusively to the history of theatre and have moved closer to the writings of those thinkers that reflect on vibrant materialities and nonhuman performance such as Barad (2003); Bennet (2010); Haraway (2016); Latour (1993, 1999); the agency of assemblages (Deleuze and Guattari 1987); Manning (2013); the practice of contemplative and meditative design in Trungpa (2008); Hakubai (2018); Akama, Light and K amihira (2020), and the analysis of atmospheric architectures and emotional spaces done by Griffero (2014) and Böhme (2017). Inspired by these ideas and during the process of my retrospective analysis, I found it inevitable to think further about the relationship we humans, have with all the entities that we consider inanimate.

Some scholars share worries about the danger of the category of scenography “expanding so far that it collapses all together” (McKinney and Palmer 2017: 3). Hann also shares an underlying concern that “with the expansion of scenography beyond theatre the particularities of scenography may become obscure or lost” (Hann 2019: 5). Scenography seems to be a constantly re-emerging, self-shaping discipline that grows and performs in its own right and can be estimated beyond the conventional and formal production of theatre and performance arts. I argue that scenography should be understood as a spatial event, which can happen independently from human actions and that can be appraised for the benefit of every person interested in designing and producing spatial atmospheres. I propose to view scenography as a mode of temporal exchange, founded on spatial and material relations between bodies and environments that might perform even in front of nonhuman spectators. Scenography can be appreciated as an autonomous, self-contained artwork. It can also be studied as an ecology that can exist without human performers or human spectators.

I argue that every(any) space can be approached as a scenographic assemblage and there is no need for a human spectator to understand what that spatiality means. Planets, stars, atomic particles play their parts even if there is not a discursive meaning or purpose. As a result of my studies, I see space as an entity that can be appreciated as an autonomous performer in its own right. At this point of my professional career, I know that scenography “happens”. The term “set” does not fully stress the qualities that are intrinsic to evanescent spatialities. Hann outlines how Deleuze approaches an assemblage as a coalition of components that are qualified by a shared association which is ad hoc or informal. Following Deleuze, I find it possible to argue that in scenography “you find states of things, various combinations of bodies, utterances, modes of expression and whole regimes of signs” (Deleuze 2006 in Hann 2019: 15).

I understand that there is a distrust of an artistic expression which is short-lived by intention. I am interested in/excited by/things that you cannot use or sell or label even, that could live outside the neoliberal capitalistic agenda. It is a rebellious approach to any construction of knowledge that pretends to be unquestionable. As much as installation art is difficult to historicize, expanding scenographic design is difficult to trace and define. I aim to teach young designers to develop a talent for engagement with space beyond the surfaces of human design; to help them develop a sense of mindfulness that will change the practice of spatial design and make it resistant to commodification. It takes time to see (experience) the fleeting nature of time and space. For a designer, space should not be purely a geometrical experience but a once in a [human] lifetime molecular event.
My work for this dissertation is about paying attention to a situation that gave me a mobile, vital, display of artistic potentiality. The “private” unsought performances I documented lasted only few hours, just a limited frame of time to produce photos and videos, which constitute the formal artistic outcome of my intimate and personal perceptions of space. My scenographic work was originally designed as an artistic environment for human performers under conventional forms of entertainment but became an opportunity to locate my retrospective analysis under a political post-human agenda that affects my performance as a feminist and as teacher. It encourages me to teach design that problematizes the Anthropocene. I am also opposing the view that holds that the artistic value of scenography is directly related to its relationship with a public and challenging the idea that it is the participation of an audience that brings the ultimate value to the performativity of a scenographic assemblage. Through my study, I emphasize the analysis of expand-ing scenography beyond the limitations of theatre studies and insist on the notion of the expand-ing practice of scenographers as the renewal of their philosophical and political force. I believe in creating works of art that stand outside the commodity system, and it has been truly complicated to stand outside the academic guidelines for a doctoral dissertation. Proposing academic work that cannot be easily commodified is another political gesture, one that has cost me many years of an intimate and personal debate.

My retrospective analysis also constitutes a public complaint, against the human-centred commercial-money-making ideas of artistic spectacles, and the impulse to capitalize everything we see or discover. The collection of the random, accidental evanescent spatialities captured for the sake of my investigation about the vitality of space break some of the rules of theatre design decorum.

According to Hann, to study scenography in the early 21st century is to study a practice that is always implicated within a transgression of borders, whether disciplinary, linguistic, geographic, or practical. (Ibid.: 2). Scenography “happens” if we consider new materialist notions of atmosphere and assemblage. It was easy for me to stand in agreement with some definitions of her manifesto. I provide a list of Hann’s reflections that I identify as shared knowledge and sum up in my personal approach to the expanded discipline:

“Scenography is potentially everywhere” (Ibid.: 4). Yes, it is a manifestation of the world, of the elements of nature, it could be a restaurant or a landscape, as defined by Lotker and Gough (2013).

“Scenography is ambitious”. (Kirby 1984: 2 cited in Hann 2019:44). I understand this as its vibrant potentiality. It can transform into something extraordinary.

“Scenography is experiential” (Ibid.: 44). It is lived and alive.

“Scenography has a limited profile within the Anglophone Academy due to a historical lack of interdisciplinary scholarship” (Ibid.: 45). I agree.

“Scenography has no owners. It is inclusive and vital” (Ibid.: 52). This claim makes me think that no one is the father or the mother of the discipline, because no one [definitively not the Greeks] invented it. Scenography has operated in the world [in a planetary sense] and therefore, has always been present in our human sight.

Scenography is not the objects on the stage of the theatre, but how assemblages of materiality are sequenced and encountered as staging (Ibid.: 76). It is my claim in this study that scenographic
assemblages are stages [inside or outside a theatre]. These stages flow, they change. We encounter them briefly in time, they pass... they are evanescent.

Finally, both McKinney and Palmer also suggest that “scenographies and scenographers can speak their own language and advocate non-representational and non-referential performativities” (McKinney and Palmer 2017: 5-6). I fully share this idea with them.

0.8 Under the light of a posthuman feminist approach

There are a wide variety of recent and current critical, theoretical, and philosophical approaches to the humanities and social sciences engaged in decentring the human in favour of the nonhuman. The nonhuman turn derives from theoretical movements that argue against the human exceptionalism that separates the human from the nonhuman.

As I mentioned before, my feminist way of thinking came to identify with Donna Haraway’s cyberorg’s commitment to partiality in “knowing” and with her speculations on the idea that all drawings in “universal” knowledge are theorized as power moves and not as moves towards truth. Haraway points out that the problem of science “objectivity” has been solved by “always ready absent referents, deferred signs, split subjects, and the endless play of signifiers” (1987: 576). From her perspective, and from mine, “science is rhetoric and a series of efforts to persuade relevant social actors that one’s manufactured knowledge is a route to a desired form of power” (Ibid: 577).

During my study of unimagined spatiality performing in three scenographic assemblages, I made an ethical commitment to mobile positioning, partial connections and to a passionate detachment since subjectivity is as multidimensional as vision is. Haraway stands for the located view from a body (in this case, mine), “always complex, contradictory, structuring and structured body, versus the view from above or from nowhere” (Ibid: 589). “The knowing self is never finished, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and therefore able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another” (Ibid: 586).

This is how I embraced a practice of located objectivity that privileges contestation, deconstruction, passionate construction, webbed connections, and hope for transformations of ways of seeing. I understood that to have a cyberorg’s “partial vision”, I required an open relation to technological instruments, my own political positioning, and the responsibility for enabling my own practiced views. “How to see? Where to see from? What to see for? Whom to see with? Who gets blinded? Who wears blinders?” According to Haraway, how to see is the science question in feminism (Ibid: 587)

Another essential action for understanding space from a position of situated knowledge requires that the object of study be pictured as an actor and agent and not as a resource. For my investigation, the body of space is understood as a witty agent.

While investigating more-than-human physical phenomena, I was attracted to the work of Feminist theorist Karen Barad, which stands for a post humanist account that calls into question the givenness of the differential categories of “human” and “nonhuman”, examining the practices through which these differential boundaries are stabilized and destabilized (2003: 808). Barad
claims that ALL bodies, not merely human bodies, come to matter through the world’s iterative intra-activity and that bodies are not objects with inherent boundaries and properties but beings in their differential becoming (Ibid.: 818). Barad explains performativity as a “materialist, naturalist, and post humanist elaboration that allows matter its due as an active participant in the world’s becoming” (Ibid: 803). Performativity is a contestation of the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real. The reading of spectators of the agency of a scenographic assemblage does not complete what is already whole. It is not the thinking of the human spectator that creates a location or “meaning” in the world for a scenographic assemblage. This is why I take the posthuman approach to observe and perform, recognizing (celebrating) the agency of space as a nonhuman entity.

Barad proposes a posthumanist performative approach to understand technoscientific and other practices that specifically acknowledge and take account of matter's dynamism. “The move toward performative alternatives to representationalism shifts the focus from questions of correspondence between descriptions and reality to matters of practices, doings, and actions” (2007: 135).

According to Barad, posthumanism is about taking issue with human exceptionalism while being accountable for the role we play in the differential constitution and differential positioning of the human among other creatures (both living and non-living). Following Barad’s perspective regarding the world, I think that space is neither fixed and given, nor the mere end result of different processes. Space is produced and productive, generated, and generative. Space is agentive, not a fixed essence.

In Barad’s analysis, things do not have inherently determinate boundaries or properties and words do not have inherently determinate meanings. She argues that the primary ontological unit is not “independent objects with inherent boundaries and properties” but rather phenomena. In her agential realist elaboration, phenomena do not merely mark the epistemological inseparability of observer and observed; rather, phenomena are the ontological entanglement of intra acting agencies. The world is to be understood as a dynamic process of intra-activity and materialization. “This ongoing flow of agency through which part of the world makes itself differentially intelligible to another part of the world does not take place in space and time but happens in the making of spacetime itself. It is through specific intra-actions that phenomena come to matter-in both senses of the word.” (Ibid.: 139-140).

In summary, Barad proposes that the primary ontological units are not "things" but phenomena -dynamic topological reconfigurings/entanglements/relationalities/(re)articulations of the world. And the primary semantic units are not "words" but material-discursive practices. “This dynamism is agency. Agency is not an attribute but the on-going reconfigurings of the world. The universe is agential intra-activity in its becoming” (Ibid.: 141).

In The Nonhuman Turn, Richard Grusin (2015) traces a variety of intellectual developments such as the actor-network theory, particularly Bruno Latour’s project to articulate nonhuman agency and the politics of things, the assemblage theory of Gilles Deleuze, Manuel De Landa, Latour and others, the new materialism in feminism and philosophy, the varieties of speculative realism including object-oriented philosophy, neovitalism, panpsychism, and systems theory, in
their social, technical and ecological manifestations. These analytical formations diverge and disagree in many of their assumptions, but I have followed some of these reflections to bring attention to certain discoveries of my investigation.

In Grusin’s edition, American Philosopher, Steven Shaviro, for example, shares his ideas about Panpsychism and how this thesis maintains that “mind is a fundamental property of matter itself, meaning that thinking happens everywhere” (Shaviro 2015: 20). Panpsychism recognizes that relationality is not just a human predicament, but the condition of all entities in the universe (Ibid.: 40). To pay attention to this theory is an extension of sympathy, to know that other entities think, and that their thinking is inaccessible to us (Ibid.: 41)

As the core of my dissertation emerges from my own intuition, I have also been affected by the ideas of Canadian philosopher Erin Manning in “Artfulness” where she claims that intuition activates the proposition at the heart of the as-yet-unthought and that art is a manner of becoming (2015: 45). “Intuition is an attunement, an affective tonality, a sensation of what already has come to be [...] Intuition activates the smallest vibrational intervals—human and nonhuman—that lurk at the interstices of experience” (Ibid.: 48) She also highlights that “to enjoy the processual force of time, to reflect on the change, it is necessary to take time, discovering the resonances” (Ibid.: 58). This is how the artwork becomes capable of attuning to the force of its own potential in a way that exceeds its initial proposition. “When the work stands up, it creates its own momentum, its own block of sensation, its own field of forces [...] the work evolves into a becoming that could have not been mapped in advance. The relational field activated by the work’s outdoing of itself touches an ecology that does not place the human at the centre of experience” (Ibid.: 59-60). I agree when she claims that “the recognition of the artwork outdoing itself offers new forms of encounter. Art also does its work without human intervention, activating fields of relation that are environmental or ecological in scales of intermingling that may include the human but do not depend on it” (Ibid.: 72). For Manning, artfulness is always more than human.

As I have mentioned before, Jane Bennet has been a major source for expanding and expressing my experience and my own thinking. In her article “Systems and things” (Bennet 2015: 223-224) she points out that the recent turn toward nonhumans takes place within a complex swarm of other intellectual, affective, scientific, and political-economic trends and it can be understood as an attempt to depict a world populated by lively and essentially interactive materialities that make “calls” upon us and demand our attention. For Bennet, the most important driving force behind the nonhuman turn is how it might help us live more sustainably, with less violence toward a variety of bodies. This call makes sense to me as a scenographer expanding her practice.

In Braidotti’s feminist analysis, the power of “Man” as a hegemonic civilizational model was instrumental to the project of western Modernity and the colonial ideology of European expansion. She observes that “Europe is not only a geo-political location, but a superior universal consciousness that posits the power of reason as its distinctive characteristic and humanistic universalism as its particularity” (Braidotti 2022: 19).

I agree with Braidotti when she argues that a posthuman turn [away from white men and patriarchy] is needed as a corrective and alternative to the intersecting critiques of power. Her call is for the equal participation of all in the discussion about what we are capable of becoming. She remarks on how a posthuman ethos respects our species and cultures, while differentiating
and recognizing the worth of the human community. She also argues that rejecting human exceptionalism is “a way of embracing the immanence of a life that we do not own” (Ibid.: 67).

According to Braidotti, posthuman feminism is an intergenerational and transversal exercise in constructing a discursive community that cares for the state of the world and wants to intervene productively in it. I am attracted to engage with her reflections, believing that it is necessary to find a relational way of thinking by transcending categories, disciplines, and geographies. She also stands for the desegregation of the domains of knowledge production, “by creating connections and cultivating resonances among positions that may at first sight appear incompatible” (Ibid.:9).

From Braidotti’s perspective, new materialism is a new plane of encounter between several scholarly and activist communities coming from different theoretical traditions. This takes her ideas from the primacy granted to the body, to the politics of location, through the reappraisal of materialism and Indigenous thought to a more expanded definition of materialism that includes nonhuman elements as well as technology. She claims that “materialism is about being embodied and embedded. It is a philosophy of immanence as well as of realism, that assumes that matter is vital, intelligent, and self-organizing. Matter cannot be reduced to a social construction but should be understood to exist independently of human representation and should include a structural relationship to nonhuman entities” (Ibid.: 110).

Braidotti’s posthuman feminist perspective has helped me to geo-locate my human corporality and to attempt a daring connection with the marginalized materialism of Indigenous thought. I would like to address that I was born in a country that is shared by millions of Indigenous peoples.

According to well-known historical facts, Indigenous peoples of the Americas are the inhabitants of the American continent before the arrival of the European settlers in the 15th century and the actual ethnic groups who are descendants of those peoples.

Long before the arrival of the European colonizers, the American continent was culturally rich and diverse. The Mesoamerican societies established in Mexico were organized around impressive ceremonial centres, which were in turn constructed to reflect the cosmos through architecture, location relating to celestial bodies, and artworks. Mesoamericans saw these urban centres as axis mundi, places where divine powers reach the earth, and are diffused from there.

Looking for a point of connection between the spatial performativity of my study and “other” beliefs that are open to “more than human” performativity, I will refer briefly to one concept that appears in the best documented philosophical tradition of the Pre-Columbian and early colonial era, which is that of the Aztecs, who established a large and sophisticated empire in central Mexico. It was impressive to find that at the heart of Nahua philosophy stands the thesis that there exists a single, dynamic, vivifying, eternally self-generating and self-regenerating sacred power or force known as teotl. It was thought that Teotl continually generates and regenerates as well as permeates, encompasses, and shapes the cosmos as part of its endless process of self-generation-and–regeneration. According to this sense of reality, that which humans commonly understand as nature (heavens, earth, rain, humans, trees, rocks, animals, etc.) is generated by Teotl. Yet, the concept of Teotl is more than the unified totality of things; Teotl is identical with everything and everything is identical with Teotl. “Since identical with Teotl, the cosmos and its contents ultimately transcend such dichotomies as personal vs. impersonal, animate vs. inanimate, etc. As the single, all-encompassing life force of the universe, Teotl vivifies the cosmos and its contents.
Lastly, Teotl is both metaphysically immanent and transcendent. It is immanent in that it penetrates deeply into every detail of the universe and exists within the myriad of created things; it is transcendent in that it is not exhausted by any single, existing thing. Process, movement, becoming, and transmutation are essential attributes of Teotl. Teotl is properly understood as ever-flowing and ever-changing energy-in-motion\(^7\). So, I have questioned myself, isn’t this concept similar to what I find appealing in some the occidental philosophical appreciations of space?

Feminist scholar Bronwyn Davies (1992) has also inspired me to refer to the experience of being female and to hold a position that challenges the hegemonic humanist discourses that dictate that contradictory knowing is flawed knowing. I will hold on to my “contradictory” feminist objectivity and challenge those who might call it irrational, lacking in direction, intuitive, incomprehensible, or wrong. It is possible to act in contradictory ways without the coherence of oneself being called into question (see Ellis and Flaherty 1992:55-56). I am convinced that “women can re-inscribe, discover new story lines, invent, invent and break the bounds of the old structures and old discourses and that the embodiment of emotions, desire, and feelings “is a legitimate part of reason” (Ibid.: 58-59). In questioning the global practices and narratives of the human and relating my findings to the concept of Teotl as ever-flowing and ever-changing energy-in-motion, I will hold on to Barad’s concepts of intra-activity and my own “magical-sacred” experiences with space, alongside the experiments I conducted during the production of The Flight of Quetzalcóatl, the last scenographic assemblage I have analysed for my dissertation.

I will not delve deeper into this feminist debate in order to maintain the focus on the central theme of my dissertation. I will proceed to describe, in three different chapters, the spatial experiments carried onto three specific scenographic projects produced in Mexico City: Opera Prima in Motion (2011), Don Giovanni or the dissolute acquitted (2012) and The Flight of Quetzalcóatl (2017).

### 0.9 A methodological guide for my reader

First, I would like to express that I look forward to being read by fellow designers, architects, researchers, and students with no particular distinction between practitioners or scholars. Here, I take the reader briefly through the methodology used in Chapters 1-3, where each of the three experimental projects with their specific themes and questions are introduced, discussed, and analysed.

#### 1.0 Opera Prima in Motion. [Opera prima en Movimiento] (OPM) TV Reality show. Classical Ballet Competition. National Centre for the Arts and Palace of Fine Arts. Mexico City. 2011\(^8\)

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\(^7\) [https://iep.utm.edu/aztec-philosophy/](https://iep.utm.edu/aztec-philosophy/)

In this chapter, I make my first reflexive-retrospective approach to the unimagined performativity of the evanescent spatialities experimented with and documented during the process of construction, load in, rehearsals and public performance of the TV show *Opera Prima en Movimiento*. I analyse the documental value and potential of producing visual documentation of the scenographic assemblage’s performativity before the public performance, during the public performance and after the public (live) performance (seen and unseen by the public).

The aim of this chapter is to point at the aesthetic and research potential of the ephemeral and the evanescent in the construction processes of scenography and what I present as *evanescent spatialities*. Evanescent Spatialities are to be understood as temporal ecologies of human and non-human bodies that interact in a particular place in a particular moment in time. I have decided to consider these accidental assemblages as ecologies as I recognize a vital vibrancy in their agency, and an intrinsic capability of becoming something else. Evanescent spatialities are not necessarily or primarily designed by human agents, nor are they conditioned to “exist” by the presence of a human performer or human audience in a traditional sense; rather, they occur autonomously and spontaneously and may be discovered accidentally or provoked by the act of “playing”.

I will describe and explore the affects caused by unimagined interactions of bodies (human and nonhuman) through photographic documentation of scenographic assemblages that would otherwise be “invisible” or disregarded. For anthropologist Kathleen Stewart, ordinary affects are the varied surging capacities to affect and to be affected that give everyday life the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergencies. “They are things that happen in impulses, sensations, expectations, daydreams, in strategies and their failures, in forms of persuasion, contagion, in modes of attention, attachment and agency, and in social worlds of all kinds that catch people up in something that feels like *something*” (2007: 2). I call attention to the unimagined performativity of scenography that can only be revealed and shared by the visuals of digital documentation. I am convinced that through documenting and re-presenting (through photos and videos) the whole performativity of scenographic assemblages, before, during, and after the formal performance, we will encounter a new field for the discovery and study of the liveliness of space.

To start, I propose shifting our attention from what is traditionally available for public viewing to what is usually, discarded or marginalized during the rehearsal process of scenography and unveiling its aesthetic potential. Secondly, I discuss the continuous performativity (metamorphosis) of the processes of scenography (seen and unseen, private or public). Thirdly, I investigate the impact of photographs, videos, and films as open-ended practices and as dynamic reconfigurings of scenographic space. Finally, I embrace the most ordinary, non-dramatic spatial assemblages that happened during the process of staging the formal stage design as an inspiration for new strategies for appraising the whole of a scenographic performance.
In Chapter 2.0, I expose the visual records of my lived experience as scenic, costume and lighting designer for the world premiere of Saramago’s play in 2012. I narrate the moment when I witnessed an unimagined spatial performance that manifested purely by chance and appeared to play autonomously. The first sight of the scenographic assemblage going beyond its conventional duties was experienced when the technical staff was rehearsing the timing and rhythm of scenery movement and changes. The scenery movements were detached from their dramatic purpose and revealed an unexpected performance. A beautiful silent choreography of shadows played quietly in front of our eyes. I used my video camera to document the entertaining accident. Excited and surprised by the potentiality of the performance of the evanescent spatialities, I asked for permission from the production manager and negotiated extra time with the technical crew to re-produce, repeat the circumstances of the astonishing event. I designed an alternative protocol of movements and light cues, strictly based on those planned for the theatrical performance, and invited photographer and collaborator Andrea Lopez to help me make a collection of videos. Dozens of new spaces performed as if an enormous sleeping creature was waking up. I named the new protocol Austera Matemática Teatral (Austere Theatrical Math) as it became a sort of paradoxical OuLiPo [Ouvr de littérature potentielle] strategy. This experimental way of creating texts was imagined by a group of writers and mathematicians formed in France in 1960 by poet Raymond Queneau and mathematician François Le Lionnais. While documenting my experiment, I discovered that even if the OuLiPo structure is supposed to reject spontaneous chance and emphasize the systematic means of making texts [in this case, movements], this “new order” also allowed new accidents.

My paradoxical experimentation allowed unimagined spatialities to present an intimate logic that can be observed in 12 videos of 8 minutes each.

At the core of this chapter, I show the visual ethnography of my research to firmly propose that the scenographic assemblage performed as an organic non-human body and as an autonomous source of unimagined scenic actions. I insist on arguing that scenography is not “completed” by the presence of human performers but by the agency that emerges from an assemblage of [human and non-human] bodies that create a whole system, a system not lacking anything else.

The architectural pieces I designed for the stage were originally built for a conventional dramatic performance, but the performativity I explored and provoked emerged and bloomed in a mechanical spatial laboratory conventionally known as a stage. It is possible to associate my findings with the Futurists theories on the interpenetration of objects and space, except that I do not classify bodies as objects. The use of the stage was both conventional and non-conventional at the same time.
At the end of Chapter 2, I reflect on how I have taught myself to observe, feel, follow my intuition, and then use it to serve a research project. I wish to inspire the readers of my retrospective to examine their own perceptions of and reactions to unimagined and evanescent spatial events.


In this last chapter, I explain how I got to expand my practice as a scenographer-thinker and conduct the whole scenic production of a theatre play as a practice of thinking and doing. I was able to experiment once more with the performativity of the scenographic assemblage and able to build a new collection of photographs documenting the evanescent spatialities found by chance. I explore the continuation of my spatial experiments and observations and reveal how I was affected by unimagined metaphysical concerns which made me perform some guided rituals to create a “sacred” space for the performance.

As the lead conductor of the scenic investigation, I wanted to influence the spectator to reflect on original American cultures and their philosophies before colonialism destroyed them. I wanted to reinforce the audience’s sense of dignity, one that is continuously under attack by occidental rationalism. I ventured for a high-risk eclectic approach to the play supported by León-Portilla himself. La Huida de Quetzalcóatl became a shared artistic experience between 160 collaborators and 10,000 spectators.

To continue with my investigation and parallel to the formal production of the play, I asked my collaborators Aris Pretelin, José Álvarez and Andrea López, to participate in the collection of the visual ethnography of the process by photographing any unexpected performativity of the scenographic elements as soon as they were loaded in the theatre. I asked them to be aware of the evanescent spatialities that were going to manifest on and off stage that could be easily discarded as “irrelevant”. I aimed to repeat the research process I conducted during the technical rehearsals for Don Giovanni or the Dissolute Acquitted and planned to play with the scenographic assemblage once every element was in place.

As expected, dozens of evanescent spatialities expressed the not-yet-imagined potentiality of my design. The collection of these produced new visual materials that immediately enriched my research and my personal archive.

This project brought new reflections and relevant discoveries. First, I conducted the staging of the whole mise-en-scène, expanding my artistic capacities and defying the limited role of stage designers that work under directorial supervision. Second, I also defied the conventional directorial role, by organizing a ritualized practice: one that I felt was needed as we were working with the embodiment of ancient and powerful gods, gods that were supposed to be forgotten but still are present in our inherited bone structure. Our stage was transformed by dancing prayers, and we took our spiritual offerings seriously, asking for permission to gods Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca to perform their legend. Third, in parallel to my duties as “director,” I repeated the methods I used before to search for the unimagined. And as a result, I generated a new set of photos and videos of the evanescent spatialities that surpassed, spectacularly, my own final design. The formal performance of the scenic investigation was recorded on high-quality video by
the TV channel of the National University and can be re-played online, anytime, anywhere. The documentation of the evanescent remains in my personal archive.

Sometimes it takes a small provocation to set a new direction for a well-known practice. Finalizing a retrospective analysis of my own work took a lot of precious time. It took me ten years to find the words and the images to explain my scenographic inquiries. The theoretical knowledge gained from intertextual reading and writing, in combination with a retrospective observation of the visual ethnography of my own work, formed an extremely creative process. My own digital records offered me a meeting place for aesthetic debate and ethical reflection. They can be read as “subjective” texts that showed the performativity of other than human bodies.

In my study, photography and video allowed me to re-present the unimagined performativity of three scenographic assemblages in a detailed and experimental manner. These media enabled me to re-play spatial events at different velocities, capturing them at various angles and taking close-ups of mysterious relations. I also argue that the visual ethnography, produced, collected, and curated during my investigation re-presents my embodied knowledge, my aesthetic singularity, my professional experience, and my emotions and feelings. I became the designer-performer-photographer-videographer-spectator of my own work, producing more than 5000 visual records of unimagined scenographics. I simply used a technological tool that provided me with the revelatory powers to share a fascination with an evanescent event that disappeared in the past but is somehow re-presented by the availability of digital images in the present. Appreciating the performativity of evanescent spatialities again and again enabled me to scrutinize the original event and meditate about what I was looking at.

Finally, Chapter 4.0 summarizes my efforts to examine space as a living entity in order to challenge the prevailing approaches to scenic design or teaching scenic design. I present a personal manifesto that performs as presenting pragmatic conclusions as well as reaffirming my aim to continue designing scenographic assemblages that are not imagined/intended to perform as a stable architectonic phenomenon.
Chapter 1: Opera prima in Motion [OPM] (2011)


In 2011, I was invited to design a ballet dance television project called Opera Prima in Motion [OPM] sponsored by the National Council for the Arts and supported by the Mexican Government. OPM was a reality show that aspired to give an institutional impulse to the performance of young classical ballet dancers.

OPM used the main theatre at the National Centre for the Arts (CNA) in Mexico City as a TV studio; some of the performances took place in front of a live audience whose presence was recorded during the week and presented as a “live” broadcast during the weekend. The whole season consisted of eight pre-recorded shows, four Live Ballet Galas, and a Live Grand Finale at the Palace of Fine Arts. Each Ballet Gala contained five to twelve fragments, less than four minutes long, of 13 different classical ballets. The program was announced on Wednesdays by the members of the jury; the dancers and the production crew had only two days to rehearse the ballet fragments and prepare the scenery and lighting on stage for the recording of the “live” show on Fridays.

The whole theatre building was turned into a TV set; my task as set designer was to design a scenic device that would allow three-minute dance scenes with fast and simple scenic changes. I collaborated closely with lighting designers Angel Ancona and Gabriel Torres and video artists Allan Kerriou and Nicolás Chirokoff to create scenographic variables available on demand. Assisting in the set design for each presentation were Lariza Reyes, Paulina Campos, and Eduardo Reyes, as well as two assistants from the executive production team: Danahe Krinis and Martín Andrade. The general producer and TV director had the last word on the final scenic elements and lighting cues. This chapter explains my intuitive need to collect the evanescence of the process, and the visual outcomes and reflections of that task.

1.1 Designing a set of unlimited settings: A dance stage, a theatre auditorium, and a TV studio

To do my task as a [conventional] scenographer, I designed a nineteenth-century flat scenery that consisted of four white portals, eleven fragmented silhouettes representing bucolic motifs that brought a symbolic accent for each of the ballets, such as a rabbit and a rooster for *Giselle*, a flower and a moon for *Romeo and Juliet*, a snowflake and a mouse for *The Nutcracker*, a flame for *The Firebird*, a windmill for *Don Quixote*, a ship for *Le Corsaire*, two swans for *The Swan lake*, a beast for *Notre dame de Paris*, and a back curtain that worked as a projection screen; the floor was a conventional dance linoleum. The wooden silhouettes were painted on both sides, and so could be flipped to be black or white. Additionally, they were divided into two segments by a modular cut so that innumerable combinations of them could form new, hybrid silhouettes. My scenic design allowed the performance of any of the ballet fragments to occur at any time during the videorecording of the shows.

![Figure 1. OPM: Photo of the white model. ©Mónica Raya](image-url)
Figure 2. OPM: Elevation plan for stage portals. ©Mónica Raya

Figure 3. OPM: Elevation plan including all the flying silhouettes. ©Mónica Raya
Figure 4. OPM: Construction Plan for ‘Giant Mouse’ and ‘Moon’. ©Mónica Raya

Figure 5. OPM: Construction Plan for ‘Ship’ and ‘Flame’. ©Mónica Raya
Figure 6. OPM: Construction Plan for ‘Rabbit’, ‘Snowflake’ and ‘Flower’. © Mónica Raya

Figure 7. OPM: Construction Plan for ‘Rooster’ and ‘Swan’. © Mónica Raya
Figure 8. OPM: Construction Plan for ‘Beast’ and ‘Windmill’. ©Mónica Raya

Figure 9. OPM: Construction Plan for ‘Judges catwalk’. ©Mónica Raya
Focusing on the performativity of my scenographic design for *Opera Prima in Motion* (2011), I want to inform my reader about the contents of this chapter considering my investigation. First, I was able to investigate the relevance of a visual ethnography of scenography and its processes, by producing, encouraging, recollecting a good number of photographs and videos. Then I reflected about the continuous performativity of scenographic assemblages (seen and unseen, private or public) that takes place away from the gaze of a conventional audience. I also expose the “always present” temporality of digital media and how it may inform future spectatorship of scenography. Thirdly, I make a remark on the artistic importance of expanding my practice as scenographer becoming the photographer or videographer herself, and what it means for critics or researchers of the piece. As a conclusion, I propose we shift our attention from what is available for public viewing to what is conventionally ignored, discarded, or marginalized, and embrace the digital collection of the evanescent spatialities as sources of aesthetic inspiration for scenographic design.

I aim to share a private, intimate, subjective experience of scenographic assemblages, to question the role of both the spectator and the scenographer in the construction of scenography. I consider the act of recording, finding, and selecting the conventionally discarded spontaneous actions taken during technical rehearsals and production instalments as an essential portion of the study of scenographic performativity. Presentation of the digital records may become a new spectacle [in its own right] and encourage new insights into scenography as an artistic discipline.

It is necessary to take some distance from the premises of installation art since my design work was produced for a theatre performance as scenography and not as an art piece commissioned by an art gallery or an art museum. The term “Installation art” is widely used and encompasses a wide spectrum of artistic practices such as Fluxus, Earth Art, Minimalism, Video art, Performance art, Conceptual art, and Process art. According to art historian Julie Reiss, the essence of installation art is spectator participation, but the definition of participation varies greatly from one artist to another, and even from one work to another from the same artist (Reiss 1999: xiv). In the analysis of my own scenographic work, I participated as a meditative observer, simply enjoying the flux of movement and lights changing. I do not necessarily think that I completed the piece, much on the contrary the piece could have played without anyone noticing it. The interaction of a human mind did not complete the evanescent spatialities of the discarded assemblages.

There are several characteristics scenography shares with Installation art:

- limited temporality in the material world
- in site performance
- they include participant interactivity (human performance, designers, and technical staff)
- spectators (if any)
- an exhibit fabricated in relation to the specific characteristics of space.
- assemblage
- three-dimensionality
- both get to be dismantled.
It is the last point on the list that calls for my attention in the study of dismantled assemblages. According to Reiss, there are four main sources for dismantled Installation art that can be used by the historian. One is the published criticism of the work which function as eyewitness reports. In my case, the first written report on the extra-ordinary behaviour of the evanescent spatialities is presented in the form of this dissertation. Reiss also observes that “the report of only one individual does not diminish its importance, as a first-person experience” (Ibid.: xvii). While doing the research, it never came into my mind to conduct interviews with my colleagues to share their memories or perspectives in a verbal form as much as they were asked to document their own encounters with the evanescent spatialities by shooting informal photos throughout the process. Reiss suggests that a major source to approaching a dismantled art piece is photography of the installation, whether it be for a museum catalogue or an informal shot. I have definitively agreed with this procedure as I have produced a good number of visual materials.

Reiss holds that for approaching the history of Installation art, documentation is all that is possible. Even though a photograph cannot be used to formally analyse the piece based on it alone, it can be an extremely useful tool if viewed critically (Ibid.: xvii). Her approach connects totally with the critical study of expanded scenography. What I find relevant for my thesis is that Reiss also notices that the way an installation has been photographed says a great deal about the piece and its context. This way of thinking relates to my own observations about the authorship of the photographs. The eye of the photographer informs through a particular perspective about the spatial situations captured in the image and projects the artistic intentions of the image maker.

Finally, Reiss proposes that the fourth way to approach Installation art is through the context in which it was exhibited, “since it is and have always been a public art form” (Ibid.: xvii). On this point, I take some distance from any Installation art piece since the scenographic assemblages of my study performed under “private” conditions. Although not unheard of, it is atypical for an installation to be fully created in the privacy of an artist’s studio (unless you remember Kurt Schwitter’s three Merzbau done on private premises). Finally, if the reader thinks that my scenographic work could be considered as an ouvre of Installation art, I will describe it as a “private” architecture intertwined with the flexible spatiality of a stage, that never had a chance to be advertised as a “regular” show. The spatial performativity that secretly enchanted me played within an institutional space but was relegated to invisibility if I had not reacted, fascinated by it, and created a situation where it was possible to document the evanescence of its nature.

The experience at the core of my observations is a subjective bodily experience, and it is basically mine; an amorous experience that changed my perception of architectural space as a human female, as scenographer, as an art participant and as spectator.

1.2 Visual ethnography before-during-after the formal performance

Curious about the performativity of all the scenographic elements designed for OPM, I decided to apply the methodology of visual ethnography and incorporate permanent visual documentation into my design journey. I invited my set design assistants and one member of the production crew to collaborate with me and use the digital camera on their smartphones to take photos of any
assemblage of human and nonhuman bodies that they thought was interesting, attractive, or beautiful.

The visual records were to be taken during construction, installation, and technical rehearsals, as an alternative to the fully professional video recording of the show. In addition to my request, I took many photographs myself, and I also invited professional photographer Andrea López to shoot what a regular public would never see: close-ups, lighting explorations, and special or unusual angles. The dozens of photographs and short videos taken during the installation of each show, thus during those processes of scenography that are usually hidden from the audience, became evidence of the unlimited scenic possibilities, many of which were not previously imagined by the designer or were simply ignored by the producers.

These unexpected interactions between scenographic elements on the stage, both human and nonhuman, helped me realize that the latter are far more than “inanimate” or mere “objects”; rather, they are vibrant bodies, albeit non-human, with agency, lives of their own, and with an intrinsic ability to create diverse spatialities. The short-lived performances of these serendipitous assemblages, documented by chance and archived with pleasure, showed their vitality, and revealed their potential to serve the scenographer as a research tool for designing more vibrant atmospheres in the future.

The following selection of photographs constitutes a small sample of the evanescent spatialities that were visually recorded for my investigation. Disregarding any chronological order, I have selected the images for their unimagined aesthetics, ingenious simplicity, vibrant colors, and/or for their spatial complexity. I expect some of them will stimulate the reader by providing aesthetic pleasure or curiosity and confirm the autonomous agency of the nonhuman bodies on the stage, disrespectfully considered “inanimate”, and therefore in need of human intervention.

Most of these images also reveal alternative possibilities for the scenic spectacle – unimagined design solutions, viewing angles, and moments of interaction between human and nonhuman bodies on stage that could have enriched the whole show.

I have used the captions accompanying each image to remark upon some technical issues but also to comment and reflect on the contents. The photographs are also “evidence” of the evanescent spatialities, and I am hoping to relate my thoughts about the images to the reader.
Figure 10. OPM: Naked stage with Ship silhouette. This photograph shows one of the first trials of the performativity of the flat silhouettes. The black legs are not on the ground level. The image shows non-designed lights and shadows. The evanescent spatiality of the image shows an unimagined assemblage of human and nonhuman bodies getting to know each other. Photo © Paulina Campos.

Figure 11. OPM: Ship Silhouette and projections. In this image, the Ship’s silhouette carries a projection on its surface, and the back screen shows an abstract back projection. The materiality of the wooden silhouette interacts with the “immateriality” of light. This interaction only lasted few seconds; I have the only record of its evanescence. Photo © Paulina Campos.
Figure 12. OPM: Unimagined Assemblage. There was no stage management responsible for this image. The photograph shows the interaction between the bodies of the human dancers, the back and frontal light and the silhouettes of the stage elements. It is also possible to make out the duplicated shadows of two stagehands invading the space without intention. I still feel a sort of fascination with this accidental scenographic assemblage performing as an evanescent spatiality. Photo by ©Lariza Reyes.

Figure 13. OPM: The Backstage Perspective. Many interesting assemblages of human and nonhuman bodies were recorded from the back of the stage. Unfortunately, this perspective is seldom appreciated by the directors or the producers and very rarely by a regular audience. However, these views would have taken a maximum use of the space and shown an alternative way of approaching the dancers’ experience. Photo by ©Lariza Reyes.
Figure 14. OPM: Behind the Screen. This image shows the shadows of the technical crew working behind the backscreen. The actions of the invisible human performers fixing the projector in the back, show a second space and a non-rehearsed choreography, one that could have been carefully staged by an attentive director and added to the show on television. I argue that the study of the evanescent spatialities that perform before the regular audience enters the venue is an informative and inspirational mise-en-scène tool that could take scenography to unforeseen levels of action. Photo by Mónica Raya.

Figure 15. OPM: Study of Depth. Taken from behind the Jury’s desk, this photograph reveals the layers of the scenographic space and its depth, and therefore additional possibilities for different scenic actions. My claim is that with the help of the visual records of the scenographer, that can also be appreciated as “visual notes,” the shootings of the TV show could have anticipated better angles for a much more interesting “making of” the contest. Photo by Mónica Raya.
Figure 16. OPM: Spatial Dimensionality. This photograph captures the scenic elements hanging from the ceiling of the auditorium. It was my intention that the TV cameras would capture these angles and offer alternative images to use in the editing room. I wanted to show the vibrancy of the architectural spatiality. Unfortunately, the potential use of the scenic elements was reduced to the usual frontal shots of the stage. Photo by ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 17. OPM: Angles and Color. The collage of these images allowed me to reflect on color and lights, and how I would have used them if I had been the lighting designer. Most of these trials were discarded by the producers but saved by the scenographer in a digital format. Photos ©Mónica Raya.
Figure 18. OPM: Saturation. This photograph shows the action of the lighting designer simply playing with the light projectors and the solid materiality of the scenic elements added to the production of multiple shadows. I see this image as a tool for documenting the unimagined. I wish this nondramatic performance of nonhuman bodies could have contributed to charge the space of the stage with a life of its own. The collection of the evanescent spatialities that appear and disappear during rehearsals may help designers notice the unexpected vitality of given spaces. Sometimes I feel the space is talking to me, saying “look at me!... Look what I can become!” Photo ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 19–20. OPM Unimagined Reflections. I took these photographs of the OPM scenery at the Palace of Fine Arts during the lighting rehearsal for the Live Grand Finale. The image of the proscenium is doubled by the mirror effect produced by the shiny surface of the jury’s table. The silhouettes of the seats also take part in the composition. These mysterious scenarios existed for only a few seconds before they were erased by the lighting designer. To document the reflection on the table was my privilege. Photos ©Mónica Raya.
Figure 21–22. OPM: Invisible Reflections. These images were to be appreciated only from the jury’s table. At that time, the only spectator was the scenographer herself, and now the image can be shared with the reader. Photos ©Mónica Raya
Figure 23–24. OPM: In between scenes. These photographs show the ballet dancers from an unusual stage angle, but one that could have been taken advantage of, with the crane holding the TV camera. The human dancers were preparing for the performance; the lighting designer was also rehearsing his lighting cues. These moments preceded the formal performance but could have been re-staged for the show, if I had previously spotted them and used them as feedback for the producers. They showed the ephemeral reality of the reality show. Photos ©Andrea López.

Figure 25. OPM: TV camera meets Ship and human dancer. Three bodies appear in the center of the image; two of them are nonhuman: the TV camera on a crane and the scenic silhouette of the Ship. When I saw this image in retrospect, I wished I had imagined a more audacious use of the technological devices that would have allowed the directors and producers to consider the presence of the body of the camera for many of the dancing scenes in the program. Photo Mónica Raya.
The visual ethnography of scenography is the sole narrative construct of time which can preserve some of the reality of the scenographic encounter. This is how fieldwork connects an important personal experience with a general field of knowledge. It is possible to suggest that the bodies of scenographers are continuous with the spaces they constitute.

This first chapter helped me to establish that scenography is not the representation of a closed-off fictional cosmos. It is not about the exclusion of the real but about its inclusion. A scenographic assemblage may act with its own corporeal logic, under unpredictable dynamics and impulses. It is possible to design scenography with a non-directorial approach. It is possible to discover scenographies without a human discourse.

1.3 Scenographer-photographer-videographer: the making of an “author-ized” archive

While imagining the artistic potential of the evanescent spatialities caught by our cameras, it was intriguing to find that researchers McKinney and Butterworth suggest that photographs of scenography in productions are “selective and inadequate, particularly when photographers make their own aesthetic judgment in framing and selecting images” (McKinney and Butterworth 2009:7). They also find video recordings of performances problematic, as it is not possible to replicate “the perceptual discourse of the spectator’s eye” (2009:8). I argue that it is never possible to define the perspective coming from “the spectator’s eye”, as each spectator provides a different angle of perception according to her personal experience, cultural background, knowledge, etc. and, in particular, in cases where the spectators might not be human. The live performance can make a totally different impact on the same spectator once she sees it from different angles or through different frames. The expression “the eye of the spectator” becomes an abstraction, and the illusion of producing a unique form of experiencing a live performance may also become philosophically problematic. I believe that the performance of scenography is “complete” even without any human observer at all.

To open this discussion, I would like to pose the next question:

If scenographers become photographers or videographers of her scenography, is it possible to validate their aesthetic framing as an “authored re-presentation” of their work?

If the scenographer were to be the person that makes the final selection of the official photos of the show, the scenographer would be expanding her/his visual collaboration and creating new frames for her/his work and the artistic production. When scenographers have control of the visuals recording their work, they expands their artistic authority and offer researchers and students an accurate record of the performativity of their spatial devices; perhaps their choices reflect only in the extension of a portfolio that may get them future jobs, perhaps their selection is merely a medium to share their professional experience with students, or perhaps scenographers bet on the visual singularity of the documentation selected and their curatorial approach may allow them to participate in international events and win a design contest.

Looking at my visual archive in retrospective, I think it is possible to validate the digital representation of scenography particularly if the scenographer is co-responsible for the aesthetic characteristics of the visual documentation. Videos can re-present the singular vision of the
scenographer and give the spectator a unique point of view, without claiming to be the only valid one. This means that the aesthetic judgement of the visual documentation will not diverge from the designer’s intention, and scenographers themselves could authorize the limits of what the viewer can see. Photographs and video-recorded images are re-framed representations of lived events and may even extend the vision of the live spectators after the event is over. This argument would relate to Arnold Aronson’s idea that postmodern scenic design is an aesthetic blend “within a momentary image within a single frame” (2005:26), and therefore “framing” through the eye of a camera can also be a designing task for the scenographer.

My point here is that the scenographer’s work will extend its performativity, and they will also be making authored decisions about the future re-presentation of their work. In this sense, the scenographer’s work would not end with the formal performance of a certain production but extend in an artistic continuity that may produce new artistic outcomes and have an impact in different artistic media. Digital technology can “recover” events from the past and bring them to the present in a virtual format embedded on a “forever alive” mode. Scenographic assemblages might never perform “live” again but can keep on performing as a “lived” experience through a digital re-presentation.

To prove the performativity of digital presentations, it needs to be said that most of international architecture can only be appreciated through digital renders, altered photographs, and promotional videos. Most architectural projects are presented to clients through performative media that present spatialities that may happen in the future. As scenography can be considered as an outcome of ephemeral architecture, it is pertinent to say that in order to study scenography, it is necessary to document it and record it to represent it and review its performativity either in the present or in the past. Photographs and videos about scenographic assemblages offer a visual documentation that is open to analysis. As Roland Barthes has maintained, “photography reproduces to infinity what has occurred only once: photography repeats what could never be repeated existentially” (1980: 4). In the same train of thought, Walter Benjamin reflected on the re-presentation of a work of art and observed that nothing affected the “original” like the invention of photography and film:

“Photography can bring out those aspects of the original that are unattainable to the naked eye yet accessible to the lens, which chooses its angle at will. Photographic processes such as enlargement, close-up or slow motion can capture images which escape natural vision. Technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself. Above all, a reproduction enables the original to meet the beholder” (1968: 221).

To keep on stimulating the agency of the performative, I claim that the visual documentation of the evanescent spatialities of scenography encourage a new perceptual interactivity. Benjamin noticed that “the camera does not need to respect the performance as an integral whole”, and that “it continually changes its position with respect to the performance” (Ibid.: 228). These new moving angles and visual approaches should be regarded as an equally meaningful element of research and representation.

As a reflection emerged from this part of my research, the visual ethnography of the evanescent spatialities has become a source of new knowledge and an opportunity for expanding my professional practice. I have collaborated with professional photographer, Andrea López, for more
than 10 years. She has helped me to make a visual record of my scenographic work and become an alternative interpreter of it; I have incorporated the eye of another fellow artist to represent my work. In selecting and editing my photographic records together, we have been formatting and imagining new presentations for new spectators. We have already made a self-publication of our collaboration that attempts to contact future visual readers and sensuous spectators and that looks for a professional edition in the future. The sum of our re-presentational tactics articulates new presentations of my scenographic work. I have expanded my practice as a scenographer to becoming photographer-videographer-director-editor-curator. The new visual dramaturgy, with close-ups and different angles, offers a subjective representation of what happened on the stage, without reproducing the formal experience of the “original” performance.

Scenography is redirected and offers a new compositional frame, and the new framing becomes a new scenographic act. It turns into a visual record that is coauthored, one that could only be appreciated by a sensuous reader.

Composing new spatialities within a new frame is an artistic method I want to explore to build new visual scenographies without building material scenographies. I argue that there are no “inadequate” media to record, save and study scenography, if the scenographer becomes a participant super-visor. This super-vision means that scenographers direct the photographic sessions in order to capture the space as they see it. I believe that if the scenographers expand their designing actions in digital media, scenography will find increasing opportunities for the exhibition of its records as autonomous works of art. By observing the interaction of nonhuman bodies through the lens of a camera and investigating their potential through digital technology it is possible to find a new way of imagining scenographic spaces.

The difference between the live, original performance of a scenographic assemblage and the digital record of its performativity is that the first will never be properly re-produced. The once-on-site scenographic assemblage has been destroyed and its performativity only remains as a lived memory or maybe as a written review produced at the time of its public performance. The second mode, the digital archive, allows further study and might be available long after the performance is finished if the digital formats allow its continuous rescue from nonexistence. I think there is a new path for studying scenographic performativity if the scenographer becomes aware of the nonhuman vibrancy of the spatial materiality on the stage, a post-human approach offers the way to challenge the conventional modus operandi of scenography.

1.4 Redefining the relationship with the spectator

After I have established the aesthetic potential of the evanescent spatialities that perform on stage and in photographic and video-reproductions outside of the time limits of the original performance, I would like to return to the question of who the spectator is, and what is their relationship to the performativity of scenographic assemblages.

To start, it is worth noting that the formal Opera Prima in Movement season was performed in front of four different groups of spectators:
1. The first human group was formed by designers, production, and crew members, who experienced the whole process of scenography, from conception to realization, and who were the only human witnesses of the evanescent and discarded spatialities. It is very relevant to point out that only a few of my collaborators were asked to record the vibrancy of the ephemeral scenographic assemblages, and that not all the participants of the montage noticed them. My point here is to find a way to develop an extra sense of awareness in the group of designers and makers, that will encourage them to consciously appreciate the aesthetics of a continuous flux of spatialities that appear and disappear because of the interaction between human and nonhuman bodies.

2. The second group of spectators was a formal live human audience that included friends and family of the dancers, who were bodily present in the theatre for the transmission of each show and were purposely exposed to the performance of the scenographic elements approved by the directors and the producers of the television show.

3. The third group was an unknown human audience that followed the event, every week “live” on their television screens.

4. The last group that could be considered is a future audience (could be a single spectator) using the internet to experience the past event, via digital video documentation, in the “forever” present of the information online. The whole contest can be watched by using the links to the OPM television show, where scenography performs in a conventional way, according to the agreements made by the team of designers and the producers back in 2011.¹¹

The next series of photographs are screen shots from the videos that were officially recorded by the producers during the live transmissions. These images are part of my personal archive and my professional portfolio.

¹¹ The links that take you to the fragment of a ballet piece, selected by the jury for each dancer, and that show the formal scenographic design imagined for each presentation of the television program are available for the reader to watch in Appendix 1.
**Figure 26. OPM:** Spatial perspectives on TV. Screen shots from the videos available on You Tube. Gala 1. © Photos Lariza Reyes /Aris Pretelin.

**Figure 27. OPM:** Spatial perspectives on TV. Screen shots from the videos available on You Tube. Gala 4. © Photos Lariza Reyes /Aris Pretelin.
At this point, I return to the core questions introduced earlier:
Is a scenographic performance “complete” only if a group of human spectators is present in the same space at the same time?
Can scenography perform “privately” only for the scenographer?
Can scenography perform for nonhuman spectators?
I argue that it is possible to challenge what scenography scholars McKinney and Butterworth suggest when they bring back the dominant idea about the audience being “a vital component in the completion of scenography” 2009:7). In my investigation, the documentation of the evanescent spatialities showed their aesthetic vibrancy away from the presence of a formal human audience. They could have gone unnoticed, if there had not been a team of experimental observers that captured them through the eye of a camera. The result of my experiments suggests that scenographic assemblages and their evanescent spatialities do not need the presence of a human spectator to perform, happen, be validated, or “completed”. These fugacious spatialities just
happen briefly, and we might miss them, but they do not need a human presence to perform their unrepeatable aesthetics and to show their inherent potential.

In traditional humanist accounts, intelligibility requires an intellective agent and intellection is framed as a specifically human capacity. But in Barad’s agential realist account, intelligibility is an ontological performance of the world in its ongoing articulation. It is not a human-dependent characteristic but a feature of the world in its differential becoming. The world articulates itself differently. Furthermore, knowing does not require intellection in the humanist sense, either. Rather, knowing is a matter of differential responsiveness (as performatively articulated and accountable) to what matters.

Following Barad’s proposals on agential realism, knowing is not about seeing from above or outside or even seeing from a prosthetically enhanced human body (me and my camera). Knowing is a matter of intra-acting. Knowing entails specific practices through which the world is differentially articulated and accounted for. I observe that in the material performance of scenographic assemblages, nonhuman bodies engage in the practices of knowing. Knowing entails differential responsiveness and accountability as part of a network of performances. Knowing is not a bounded or closed practice but an ongoing performance of the world. A discursive practice of scenography is not a speech act, a linguistic representation, or even a linguistic performance. It is not only a human-based practice. Humans are neither pure cause nor pure effect but part of the world in its open-ended becoming.

Barad argues that there are no words or things with determinate boundaries and properties “whirling aimlessly in the void, bereft of agency, historicity, or meaning, which are only to be bestowed from the outside, as when the agency of Man pronounces the name that attaches to specific beings in the making of word-thing pairs” (2007: 149-150). Things don't preexist; they are agentially enacted and become determinately bounded within phenomena. This is the reason why space is to not be understood as a property of matter but in more dynamic and productive terms of intra-activity.

Based on my professional practice, most scenic designers have a very personal interaction with the nonhuman bodies that perform on stage, such as the sets, lights, sounds or textiles, etc. as that knowledge comes with the professional practice. I argue that nonhuman scenographic assemblages do not need a single human spectator to perform unimagined spectacles. In the case of OPM, the only human spectators that were eager to appreciate the unexpected performativity of scenographic assemblages were the scenographer and her collaborators. Nonhuman scenographic assemblages perform for other nonhuman bodies, and they do not need human observants to happen or to be validated. This might be the case of natural landscapes, the processes of decay, nature in bloom, rainbows or falling stars. If scenography needs the presence of a human spectator, this should necessarily be one with a deeper level of consciousness about the vitality of nonhuman bodies or the vibrancy of space alone.
1.5 Past-present-future performativity of scenography through digital media

The OPM season ended after the Final Gala in May 2011, and the scenographic elements were recycled or trashed. The design of the original scenic elements remains in my personal archive and can be seen performing virtually on YouTube, on the screen of a TV, a computer or other electronic device.

Once the final event of the OPM happened, I was only left with the virtual re-presentation of my scenographic work. Performance scholar Peggy Phelan argues that once a performance is recorded, documented, or represented, it becomes “something other than performance” (Phelan in McKinney and Buttersworth 2009: 8). However, I believe that the traces of its original performativity might keep on living “in the present” if they perform in a continuous, now...now...and now. According to theatre and performance studies researcher Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006), who has written extensively on “postdramatic theatre”, scenography is a framed reality, a set of images that can be considered a form of presence, “abstracted from the past/present/future system” (Lehmann 2006: 170). Scenography may have accomplished its original purpose in a live event, but its performativity can be digitally documented and re-presented in the future, through photography, video, or film. Digital technology has become an alternative medium to present “live” performance arts in a virtual “present”.

As it happens with the work of many performance artists, a virtual performance of scenography on digital media, is not “something other than performance” but merely a different kind of performance, one with virtual spectators that may not necessarily be reunited in a group, inhabiting the same time and the same place. Digital technologies question the dominant status of live performance over a mediatized re-presentation of it. Film and video make the performance of a spectacle available to a multitude of spectators that do not have the opportunity to attend the “live” performance.

I am convinced that digital technologies have been an outstanding tool to register performance arts making them available to virtual spectators willing to re-view the “live” arts of the past. There is no question that it will always be different to have the experience “live” than to watch it on a screen. After analysing the visual records of the OPM, I find it necessary for designers, researchers, and scholars to study the records and remnants of the live arts to have fresh re-views of their mutant nature. I argue that in order to study the agencies of scenography in our world, it is relevant to record it, to find the means of recovering some fragments of its original “life” in time and space, and make it live “forever” in another kind or mediated register/mode.

Scenography is hard to track down, especially because it is a sort of happening and an event that may abandon the dramatic plot. Scenography is a work of art that performs like a sunset, a rainbow, or a perfumed breeze.

As an example of the power of the copies of “the real”, philosopher Roland Barthes suggested that photography reproduces to infinity what has occurred only once: “photography repeats what could never be repeated existentially” (1980: 4). Following Barthes’ argument, my fundamental claim is that there are no “inadequate” media to record, archive and study different dimensions of scenography. From my point of view, a mediated experience of scenography becomes a record of a “lived” experience in the past that has an effect, in the present, on the spectator’s senses and
state of mind. This is what makes me think that the study of the evanescent spatialities that participate in the event of scenography can only be based on its remnants. As I have explained above, it is true that digital materials produce impressions and emotions different from those produced by live experiences; however, they are no less relevant. It is pertinent for any scenographer to weigh the value of every record that could account, document, file, evidence, chronicle, or transcript the power of the spatialities found or provoked by the practice of scenography. I would like to invite the reader to consider that the spatialities represented in the photographs may have escaped in time, but not necessarily in form. Their photographic representation informs and inspires the invention of new scenographic assemblages in the future.

The visual ethnography of scenography can become an alternative field of references and a virtual site for a retrospective of the previously unknown. The visual records of scenography expand its performativity beyond the original performance and its original purpose into another kind of performativity-through-scenography. Furthermore, as a central contribution of my dissertation, I argue that it is not only what directors or producers have authorized the live audience “to see”, but the vitality of most of the unseen, or unexpected that can awake a wiser, more conscious, and respectful use of materials and spaces. To offer an analogy, and as an architect, if my study were to be considered in a case of urban planning, I would like to lead a team of professionals that is ready to document and analyse what happens to human and nonhuman bodies in between the houses, the blocks, the quarters, to spatial tensions that come about through the mundane and the unpoetic. I would direct our focal point of observation to the impossible-to-plan-exactly activities, gestures, and events to discover new and unimagined frames of architectural composition. Through recording, photographing, shooting videos of activities and events that are serendipitous, architects and urban planners might get closer to appreciating the fluid performativity of spatial ecologies integrated by human and nonhuman bodies.

Back to the scenic context of my investigation, it is the scenographic performativity of the evanescent spatialities that remains fertile for further analysis. I argue that the visual ethnography of the “unimagined” constitutes an opportunity to produce a post-performance of scenography, one that plays virtually on a screen in front of a sensuous unimagined spectator.

It can also be said that curating the virtual post-performance of scenography is a task that expands the practice of the scenographer. It is possible to imagine that the post-performance of scenography serves beyond its formal and original purpose and informs the reader or younger designer about how to question the limited conventions of drama. It is also a virtual event that articulates and points out the human and nonhuman dynamics at work in the scenographic assemblage. This virtual study capacitates the scenographer to explore in very close detail the components and moments that enable spatial and temporal gestures/activities/relations/etc. in a similar way as to a magnifying glass letting us reach a completely different view than the one that we can reach through “normal” perception. The virtual post-performances enable retrospective and prospective analyses that could not be reached otherwise.

As a virtual example of the post-performance of unimagined scenographic assemblages, I offer three links on-line:

https://vimeo.com/372772982
These links reproduce three brief videos of the interactions of human and nonhuman bodies on stage before the Final Gala at the National Palace of Fine Arts, one of them is a montage I made to show the work during World Stage Design 2013. The camera is located at the desk of the Jury. In my perception, it is possible to detach from the apparent chaos and enjoy the performativity of each moving body on the stage. They are subjective views shared by the scenographer-participant of the event. These visual materials offer what could also work as the scenographer’s fieldnotes. These videos show random human behaviour but also the nonhuman agencies. I argue that these kinds of digital materials may become a pedagogical instrument that allow students to get a feeling about the practice, the vibrancy, and the mystique of scenography.

1.6 Postulates and discoveries made during OPM

Through a retrospective analysis of the visual materials I collected, I was able to evaluate the unimagined potentiality of my own design. Having visual records of the processes of design brought me material evidence of the evanescence of unimagined spatialities created by chance, by accident or simply by paying amorous attention. None of these serendipitous assemblages, humbly documented by my photographs, were imagined by any human agent, nor was their performativity conditioned by the presence of any “public”; rather, they occurred spontaneously, were caught on camera accidentally, or provoked by the rhythms of the technical rehearsals.

After analysing the OPM in retrospective, I am convinced that the study of the evanescent spatialities that vibrate during construction and rehearsal periods show an extended potential that could be incorporated into the official performance of the scenographic assemblage. The OPM contest played successfully, according to what the television producers had planned. They made all the final aesthetic decisions in tune with the technical requirements of the live broadcasting. But we never had the time nor the opportunity to appreciate the myriad unimagined possibilities that appeared during the collection of the unexpected evanescent spatialities. Perhaps this is hardly ever an aim of a scenic production, especially when “time is money” according to our capitalistic ways, but I find it very relevant to emphasize that the production/performance frame served as a space/time/laboratory for experimenting with the aspects of unimagined scenic compositions already viable in the site. In my opinion, the final aesthetic decisions about the spatiality of the show were basic and effective, especially when incorporating the [conventional] contributions of the members of the jury and respecting the formal traditions of classical ballet. Looking back, I wonder what would have happened to the OPM project if the visual collection of the evanescent spatialities would have been available as visual references for analysis and discussion in our creative meetings, and if some of those assemblages could have been staged and incorporated to enhance the spatialities of the show.

As another postulate, I argue that the human and nonhuman bodies on a stage start performing in autonomous ways well before the formal performance starts, the visual documentation also
indicates that it is possible to interact with fugacious "living" spaces, while they are pulsing and manifesting their potential and to absorb/be inspired by their vitality.

I find it possible to speculate that their “liveness” can only be revealed to a sensuous-conscious-spectator, starting with the scenographer herself. Human designers ought to be concerned with how nonhuman performers communicate with the world through their own body language. As an architect and an artist interested in a more conscious relationship with the ephemeral buildings I create, I aspire to understand the “language” of a given/found space. As the collection of photographs suggest, there are moments when human and nonhuman bodies interplayed by chance, creating ephemeral ecologies that were mysterious and fascinating. Following Karen Barad’s reflections about phenomena “agency is not an individual property rather who and what acts, is a phenomenal question. It is a decision, an incision, a cutting together/apart of the agentic qualities of phenomena that emerge in the ongoing performance of the world. This means that we might recognize agency in different forms as relations, movements, repetitions, silences, distances, architecture, structures, feelings, things, us/them/it, words...” (Barad, 2003, p. 827). After recording and collecting the “unimagined”, I am convinced that the visual ethnography of the evanescent spatialities can be seen as useful/relevant/new scenography-based-registers/modes.

To keep the reader under the influence of Barad’s words, I refer here to her phrasing that "practices of knowing and being are not isolable; they are mutually implicated. We don't obtain knowledge by standing outside the world; we know because we are of the world. We are part of the world in its differential becoming. The separation of epistemology from ontology is a reverberation of a metaphysics that assumes an inherent difference between human and nonhuman, subject and object, mind and body, matter and discourse." (Barad 2007: 185). She also argues that there is “no privileged position from which knowledges can be produced, as the researcher is of the world”. I agree with her when she observes that researching phenomena, then, is a methodological practice of continuously questioning the effects of the way we research, on the knowledges we produce. This unfolds itself as an ethic-onto-epistemology of knowing in being and as an emerging way of knowing that belongs to the scenographer “Ethics is about being response-able to the way we make the world, and to consider the effects our knowledge-making processes have on the world” (Barad, 2007: 381).

To conclude this chapter, I would like to support Henk Borgdorff’s academic [and political] stand when he explains that artistic research [AR] does not have one exclusive methodology, but one qualifying condition: AR concentrates on the practice of making and playing so artwork and are practices are partly the material outcomes of the research (Borgdorff 2012:123).

It has been extremely helpful to experience that research through practice has three attributes that constitute the metaphysics of AR:

AR concerns and affects the foundations of our perception, our understanding and our relationship to the world and other people.

AR is material thinking.

AR is not about theory but about thought. It is not primarily directed at “knowing that...” or “knowing how...” but at a not-knowing or a not-yet knowing. It creates room for the unthought, that which is unexpected—the idea that things could be different. (Ibid.: 124)
Creating room for the “unthought...that which is unexpected...” means to me that the discipline of scenography is certainly expanding. In Borgdorff’s perspective, artistic research seeks to convey and communicate content that is enclosed in aesthetic experiences, enacted in artistic practices, and embodied in artistic products (Ibid.: 144). For me, it was relevant to understand that the content of my investigation seems to elude direct access, and as a matter of principle, it refuses a simple explanatory gaze. Borgdorff points out that artistic research has an experiential component that cannot be efficiently expressed linguistically. The subject of the research is the je ne sais quoi of artistic or aesthetic experience. During the collection of evanescent spatialities in OPM, and in the context of my discoveries, I learned that my research became a form of knowledge production that could provide a specific articulation of the pre-reflective, nonconceptual content of art. My intuitive artistic actions embodied knowledge in a form that at first seemed not directly justifiable in the following chapters, I will continue to expose that my study was constituted only through practices, actions, and interactions. I believe that even if I am not fully able to explain it [in words] without the visual outcomes, my research will remain open, inviting “unfinished thinking”, new insights, revelations, and new products. According to Borgdorff, it is in the intimacy of experimental practice that we can recognize “the cycle of learning in action” research, where research findings give immediate cause for changes and improvements (Ibid.: 155).

I consider the act of re-viewing the performativity of scenographic assemblages as a sign of permanent vitality. Anthropologist Paul Stoller claims that memory (and history) is an embodied phenomenon, “historical texts are read, re-read, interpreted and re-interpreted” (1997: xvi), so we can keep on building knowledge around a visual ethnography of scenographic performativity. The media of presentation and re-presentation of scenography must be strategically included as one of the primary tasks of scenographers. Recording scenographic performativity can be part of the design in such a way that it becomes as relevant for scholars and researchers as the artistic event itself. The record of the processes of art, from a conceptual contemporary point of view, can also be approached as an artistic event. The expanded scenographer-curator becomes a creative thinker who proposes a re-vision of what was invisible for the public and the already seen. She becomes part of the future re-presentation of what has already been presented in the past and a vehicle for the unimagined spatialities, which could be revalued as an alternative source of aesthetic pleasure and scenographic research.
Chapter 2: Don Giovanni or the Dissolute Acquitted [DG] (2012)

Case Study 2: Don Giovanni o el disoluto absuelto (Don Giovanni or the Dissolute Acquitted).
Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, Teatro UNAM. Mexico City. March 2012.¹²

This chapter will inform the reader as to which were the circumstances that allowed me to encounter unimagined behaviours in the performativity of the scenographic assemblage of a theatre production and how I managed to re-produce it with the aid of digital technology.

Don Giovanni or the Dissolute Acquitted [DG], is a theatre play written by Nobel prize winner José Saramago, that was world premiered in 2012 at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). I was invited to work as a scenographer and to create the designs of the set, the costumes, and the lighting design. I completed the scenographic design for DG following the conventional scenic practice: serving the drama in the text and collaborating with the perspective of the director to create the theatrical performance. As a result of my collaboration with director Antonio Castro, the scenographic device was designed to allow ten scenic changes and to perform under the enhancement of a light plot of forty lighting cues.

I chose to build DG’s set according to most traditional theatrical practices by using light and reusable materials. Following my architectural aesthetics, I used steel and unpainted wood to build the platforms, the side panels, the back wall and the two pieces of the plafond. The structure was apparent, and I did not require any scenic painting. It could be said that I designed a postdramatic set as the materials I used in the construction of the scenic pieces did not pretend to imitate or represent anything. The scenographic elements, especially the vertical ones, and the two plafond pieces were geometrically designed to procure mobility. I used the lighting technology

that was available in the theatre, Leekos, LEDS, Fresnels, etc. Architectural shapes, vibrant colours, and scenic movements were used in a basic manner giving relevance to the material characteristics of the wooden structure.

2.1 Visual ethnography of the evanescent spatialities as an extension of my scenographic practice

As I put forth in Chapter 1, I am used to documenting the construction, installation, and rehearsal process of my scenic work by producing photographs and videos to enrich my personal archive. After the research conducted on Opera Prima in Movement, which allowed me to evaluate the unimagined potentiality of my own design, I was ready to interact with those fugacious “living” spaces promoted as evanescent spatialities, while they emerged manifesting their potential and absorbed/be inspired by their vitality and to find a way to incorporate their natural vibrancy into the final scenic design of the show. Visual documentation of DG took place during construction and installation processes with the aid of my assistant Lariza Reyes.

To present the original design of the theatrical scenographic assemblage, as it remains in the official records of Teatro UNAM, I share some of the technical plans I drew for its construction.

![Figure 29. DG: Ground plan. Set design Mónica Raya (2012).](image)
Figure 30. DG: Top projection of the plafond. Set design Mónica Raya (2012).

Figure 31. DG: Elevation that shows the scenographic elements. Set design Mónica Raya (2012).
Costumes, lighting cues and set movements were decided according to our interpretation of the text, the scenic staging of the director and, in a more general sense, according to the established conventions and politics of the industry of cultural entertainment. The official photographs of the theatrical performance were taken by Andrea López following the conventional registers of theatre design, including of course, the obligatory presence of the human actors.

The next photographs serve my study as an example of what I have noted as a conventional photographic record of a theatre performance, or what I sometimes name as a formal performance. These photographs were taken during a general rehearsal and portray the human actors in action, show their positions in space and show fragments of the material characteristics of the scenographic assemblage in the background.

I intend for the characteristics of the official photos of the show, to serve as a visual comparison with the images of the evanescent spatialities that were unimagined previously, discovered by chance and provoked by my experiments later in the process.
Figure 33–34–35. DG: These photographs were taken during the general rehearsal of Don Giovanni or the dissolute acquitted. To give focus to the human bodies, the rest of the scenographic assemblage is shown fragmented and in the background. The human spectators never see the performance as a framed shot, but the production’s photographs usually disregard the visual composition of the scenographer. Teatro UNAM, Mexico City, 2012. Scenic Design: Mónica Raya. Photo ©Andrea López.
2.1 Collecting the visual ethnography of the evanescent spatialities as an extension of my scenographic practice

As I did with OPM, during the first steps of my investigation, I asked my assistant Lariza Reyes and professional photographer, Andrea López, to help me collect the moments when the evanescent spatialities manifested so they could be documented and traced. Once again, this method of intuitive visual ethnography proved to capture the extraordinary aesthetic potential inherent in the interaction of scenographic bodies. As a result of this subjective and continuous practice, we got dozens of photographs that were a testament of unseen usually discarded details, unsuspected angles, and close-ups of the ephemeral assemblages of human and nonhuman bodies. Once more, these photographs enriched both my portfolio and my investigation with new references for my study.
Figure 37. DG: Installation of the lighting instruments. Lights on the stage. Photo © Mónica Raya.

Figure 38. DG: Installation of DG’s scenographic elements at the Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón. Photo ©Lariza Reyes
Figure 39-40. DG: Unimagined colours and geometrical shadows that manifested during technical rehearsals for the staging of *Don Giovanni or the dissolute acquitted*. Teatro UNAM. Photo © Andrea López.
Figure 41–42. DG: Technical staff posing with unimagined lights that manifested by chance during technical rehearsals for the staging of *Don Giovanni or the dissolute acquitted*. Teatro UNAM. Photo © Andrea López.
Figure 43. DG: Unimagined golden and red shadows. Technical Rehearsals for the staging of Don Giovanni or the dissolute acquitted. Teatro UNAM. Photo © Andrea López

Figure 44. DG: Stage Manager Santiago López and scenographer’s assistant Lariza Reyes working on stage. Evanescent spatialities found by playing during lighting technical rehearsals. Photo ©Andrea López
Following the importance of producing a visual ethnography as explained in the introduction of my study and as a source for investigation in OPM, I managed to produce a fresh field of study for my inquiries. Both the photographs produced during the OPM performance and DG’s design process were shot by different individuals. These subjective impressions of past spatialities remain in my archive and represent new material to be experienced by a new spectator.

2.2 Accidental discovery of unimagined scenographic performativity before the public show

The first sight of the scenographic assemblage going beyond its theatrical “duties” was experienced during technical rehearsals when we were timing the rhythm of the scene changes. All the scenery movements were performed by twelve members of the technical crew, and it was most important to me to choreograph and rehearse the symmetry and the rhythm of the movements to create the feeling of an uninterrupted flow. By chance, the technical rehearsal was taking place under the projection of eight Leekos that had not been turned off by mistake. The movements of the scenographic elements under the effects of the light and the absence of human bodies on stage revealed an unimagined performance. A silent and slow choreography of appearing and disappearing shadows played in front of our eyes. Fortunately, I had my video camera ready to document the fortuitous accident. This first video captured a manifold of evanescent spatialities playing independent of the dramatic action designed for the theatrical performance.
In this original video, the viewer must wait 20 seconds before the first change of the space appears on the frame of the camera. My voice can be heard calling the technical cues and talking to the stage manager.

This is the link online to the video of the incident:
Documental Toma Blanca DG [https://vimeo.com/85471836](https://vimeo.com/85471836)

![Figure 46–47. DG: Screen shots from the documentary video of the accidental discovery. The first image on the left corresponds at 1’16” of the unimagined performance and the second on the right at 4’40”.

![Figure 48–49. DG: Screen shots from the documentary video of the accidental discovery. The first image on the left was recollected at 0’58” and the second on the right at 4’10”.

Looking back at the unimagined scenographic performance captured by the video recording, it is easier to understand the reasoning behind the concept of *evanescent spatialities*.

As I mentioned in my introduction, using serendipitous accidents, incidents as material of art such as Dada’s creative strategies where anything can be material of an artwork as well as readings of Futurist manifestos about nonhuman bodies on stage provided historical precedents for my
experimentation and a new perspective for scenographic practice. Traditional practice pays
attention to the scenographic actions that serve the text or the dramatic situation but rarely has a
disposition to exhaust the aesthetic possibilities of the scenographic design. I believe that a playful
meditative approach to scenic actions makes true sense, and that it is not enough to approach
them as mere visual aids to human on the stage.

I would like to think that I came up with a method to create another kind of framing of what
scenography can do, and what can be done with/after/during the processes of scenography. This
could be a method of research where the performative potential comes into being in focus and can
be studied in a post-performance study.

2.3 A new experimental nondramatic performative protocol to provoke the
emergence of unimagined spatial performativity on stage

Excited and surprised by the discovery and the beauty of the accidental scenographic
performance, in DG, I confirmed that the aesthetic agency of the evanescent spatialities took place
by chance, but also as a spatial message for the scenographer, a sort of nonhuman calls for my
attention. In Chapter 1, I worked on OPM documenting their vibrant existence. On this new
occasion, I did not want simply to observe but to answer the call by imagining a new protocol of
scenographic movements and allowing the unimagined performativity to happen on the stage. I
asked photographer and collaborator Andrea Lopez to help me record a new set of videos and I
also asked the artistic director and producer of Teatro UNAM, for an extended permission to shoot
the videos with the support of the [human] technical crew. I decided to provoke, what I have not
previously foreseen, by designing a new [nondramatic] performative protocol. This meant that
the scenographic changes were going to be free from the cues designed to serve the dramatic
action for each scene of the play and there was not going to be any [human] actor to enhance.

I was simply curious to experience the spatial performativity of each one of the designed scene
changes under the continuous projection of the forty [pre-recorded] lighting cues.

To perform the new protocol, I intuitively designed simple relations that could be related to
some of the basic mathematic methods of the OuLiPo workshops of potential literature. The
French experimental literary “practice” used and improvised with invented “rules” that were
followed in producing new texts, which in my case were scenographic possibilities.13

During the new performative protocol, each one of the unimagined scenographic assemblages
showed unforeseen potential and all the possibilities enamoured me with their unexpected
vitality. This meant that I became unsatisfied with my ‘conventional’ design after I saw hundreds
of alternatives to the set movements I have chosen for the show.

As I stated before, the 40 lighting cues I had designed for the stage actions ran without
interruption illuminating each one of the 10 set movements with an outcome of 400 alternative
images. After finishing the 10 videos, I decided to make two extra recordings. One of them shows

13 https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2013/jul/12/oulipo-freeing-literature-tightening-rules ... Plus you
can find lots of material of OuLiPo online also in their own site...
the ten movements in a continuous flow under the effect of one single clear light cue without any change. (See at https://vimeo.com/44672921)

The last video I recorded shows the uninterrupted [slow] flow of the 10 movements and the 40 light cues interacting simultaneously (see at https://vimeo.com/44421635). I discovered the combinations could be in the thousands, so I decided to call the exercise Austera Matemática Teatral, although I am not sure that it defines the sequels of my discovery properly.

As a result of my scenographic experiment, I produced 12 videos (see Appendix 2 XX), that last less than 8 minutes each, where the performance of hundreds of evanescent spatialities was documented.

I published some of my discoveries on VIMEO and, as an artistic research exposition, in the Finnish journal, Ruukku 3 Nr.2 dedicated to Materiality and Artistic research.

Looking at my RUUKKU #3 exposition might help to explain my formulations in detail. These are the links online to watch the videos: http://ruukku-journal.fi/en/issues/2/call

To illustrate this Chapter and to appreciate better, the astonishing moments captured on the collection of videos, I curated 10 series of screen shots to analyze the unexpected aesthetic agency of the performing bodies. To identify each moment, I have used the following nomenclature:

SS: “Screen Shot”; AMT-DG: “Austera Matemática Teatral- Don Giovanni”; “mov 0”: indicates the stage movement; and (3’ 20’’) indicates “minute three and twenty seconds”.

I have selected 224 screen shots for my personal archive, to keep as visual evidence and as new references for analysis and inspiration.

For the purposes of this thesis, I selected two images per video.

Figure 50–51. DG: Evanescent spatialities found through a non-dramatic performative protocol. On the left, SS AMT-DG mov 0 Preset 5’50” and on the right, SS AMT-DG mov 0 Preset 0’12”. ©MónicaRaya
Figure 52–53. DG: On the left, SS AMT-DG mov 3 (0'05') and on the right SS AMT-DG mov 3 (0'12)'.
©MónicaRaya

Figure 54–55. DG: On the left, SS AMT-DG mov 4 (0'18') and on the right SS AMT-DG mov 4 (0'24)'.
©MónicaRaya

Figure 56–57. DG: On the left, SS AMT-DG mov 6 (3'45') and on the right SS AMT-DG mov 6 (6'45)'.
©MónicaRaya
Figure 58–59. DG: On the left, SS AMT-DG mov 7 (4'50") and on the right SS AMT-DG mov 7 (5'46").
©Mónica Raya

Figure 60–61. DG: On the left, SS AMT-DG mov 8 (2'00") and on the right, SS AMT-DG mov 8 (6'30").
©Mónica Raya

Figure 62–63. DG: On the left, SS AMT-DG mov 9 (0'21") and on the right, SS AMT-DG mov 9 (3'35").
©Mónica Raya
The unimagined and evanescent spatialities captured by the technology of digital images are the artistic outcome of my research and they serve to prove that there were dozens of unimagined scenographic solutions that could have been analysed and incorporated to enhance the official dramatic performance. These examples serve as manifestations of nonhuman materiality and performativity in my attempt to understand their latent vitality.

2.4 Testing my research as an alternative documentation of the autonomous performativity of scenography

To test how the outcomes of my research would be responded to, I decided to share my research practice at several scholarly events. In 2013, I prepared for participation in the event called PERFORMANCE ENCOUNTERS: Inter / Intra - Cultural Contexts for the Art of Stage Design, at the OISTAT Performance Design and OISTAT Research meeting at the Shanghai Theater Academy. I wanted to expose my findings to a group of international colleagues. Exploring new media for my presentation, I created a new video called Don Gio Love Machine (see Don Giovanni o el disoluto absuelto on https://vimeo.com/71605538 ) which on this occasion was received with what I interpreted as some admiration and curiosity.

The video is a re-make of one from the Austera Matematica Teatral series and re-presents a scenographic performativity that is normally withheld from a regular spectator. The scenic actions in the video are not presented in real time the actual performance took 9 minutes approximately

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14 I intend to use the word love to explain my fascination with the evanescence of space. My affection derives from the fusion of my body senses with the environment, with matter and with the ephemeral. Love describes my multi-directional relationality with the evanescent spatialities and to what Strøker observes as “an expressive fullness” of space. I chose the word love to deliberatively express my own affections in the description of my design journey and my attentiveness for the energy of sparialities that may appear and disappear “unseen”.

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but manipulated to accelerate the rhythm of the scenic changes. I also added a soundtrack, a cover from Donna Summer’s pop hit ‘I feel love’ sung by Kin Wyman from the album named *Unclubbed*. I chose it because it addressed a contemporary take on the psychopathology of the character of Don Giovanni and because it also reflected the way I felt towards the experience of the human and nonhuman choreography that performed on stage.

Interested in the reactions among other colleagues, I decided to present *Don Gio Love Machine* again at the 4th Global Conference Performance: Visual aspects of Performance Practice at Oxford, the same year. The video performed as a complement to my visual presentation and as an expanded documentary that informed the viewers about the autonomy of a scenographic assemblage playing outside the rules of dramatic conventions.

One of the reactions that I remember vividly came from a fellow scholar arguing that she could not relate to the performativity of the scenographic assemblage as she had been expecting the moment when a [human] actor entered the stage. It seemed to me that it was possible to express disdain towards the scenographic perspective of my work by arguing that it was not possible to “see” what is usually expected from the practice of conventional scenography. I felt happy when I started to answer questions raised by other fellow photographers, videographers and anthropologists who felt they could relate to my findings. This second exposure of Don Gio Love Machine as a presentation of a scenographic assemblage performing “with autonomy” felt quite distant from the perspectives of some theatre specialists.

In my opinion, this piece of artistic research belongs to the debate that is still taking place in those cultural contexts where even the simple term *scenography* sparks conflict in both the academic and professional arenas. With *Don Gio Love Machine*, a video-piece that I consider as belonging to the extended practice of scenography, it becomes clear that working as an artistic researcher presupposes risks and errors, but also challenges traditional and overly esteemed paradigms.

To look for a broader exhibition of the video, I published it on vimeo.com and called it *Don Giovanni o el disoluto absuelto Mónica Raya*, found under the Video profile Monica Raya Estudio. To discuss its content, I prefer to call it by its original title, *DG Love Machine*, and this is how I will refer to it in the following paragraphs of this chapter.

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15I deliberatively used the concept “love” when I chose the sound of the song “I feel love” by Donna Summer to enhance the scenographic performance in the video called “Don Gio Love Machine”. As I mentioned in the text, the title for the video works as a reminder of the psychotic relationships of the mythical Character of Don Giovanni, as much as what the scenographic assemblage became in my perception: a machine that made me fall in love with its vibrant becoming.
I have chosen to explain the content of this video, as I have been discussing it in several of my presentations to show students the hybrid nature of my work. This video re-presents 296 evanescent spatialities that lived for only one second in the real world and can only still be appreciated in digital format. Its duration is 04’ 53” in total and enhances the performativity of light, space, and movement. It also shows human interactions backstage, a choreography that is never seen by the regular audience.

By conducting an experimental nondramatic performative protocol, I was able to provoke unimagined spatialities that surpassed the dramatic conventionality of our mise-en-scène.

To give another example of experiments with evanescence, ephemeral architecture is also a form of material performance that disappears faster that the processes of “slow” architectures. Ephemeral architecture has earned its own place throughout history of art. The contemporary practice of ephemeral architecture offers light festivals, installations, and temporal interventions of urban spaces.

Another artistic practice connected to passing events is documentary photography. Curator Emma Lewis suggests that the documentary mode has been reimagined by photographers who play with chronology, narrative, and forms of presentation. According to this new practice, it is possible to document life in fragments: “tender ethereal images that offer glimpses of seemingly unrelated details, textures or fleeting gestures” (Lewis, 2018:133). This photographic genre is currently denominated in Expanded Documentary and the inclusion of the ephemeral is one of its characteristics.
My collection of the screen shots may be considered as a redirected technique of documentary photography to more personal ends. I propose that the viewer approach the “not yet known” and “not yet imagined” performativity of my records as an alternative way of understanding the still unexplored material vibrancy of scenographic assemblages.

Figure 67–68. DG: SS DG Love Machine 01’40” SS DG Love Machine 01’ 51”’. Don Giovanni o el disoluto absuelto Mónica Raya. vimeo.com: Mónica Raya Estudio. ©Mónica Raya.
Figure 69–70. DG: SS DG Love Machine 01’ 52” and SS DG Love Machine 01’ 36”. Don Giovanni o el disoluto absuelto Mónica Raya. vimeo.com.: Mónica Raya Estudio. ©Mónica Raya.
At the end of 2013, the same year, I prepared the photographs and videos of my investigation of DG to participate in the World Stage Design [WSD] contest, which was mounted in Cardiff (2013).¹⁶

¹⁶ OISTAT describes WSD as the first and only designer-based exhibition to showcase and celebrate theatre designs from individual designers. Held every four years, the first WSD was mounted in Toronto, Canada, in 2005. The original event was organized by Eric Fielding, a member of the International Organization of Scenographers, Theatre Architects and Technicians (OISTAT) and was inaugurated to celebrate designs around the globe, in two-year intervals with the Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space. WSD has been celebrated in five
Having participated as a scenic designer at WSD 2005 in Toronto and as scenographer at WSD 2009 in Seoul, I submitted the photographs of the alternative performativity of DG’s scenography, expecting to be amongst the final selection to participate in the public exhibition in Cardiff at WSD 2013.

Unfortunately, the images of DG I chose to show were not selected to participate in the set design category nor in the lighting design category. A few weeks later, I was honoured with an invitation to participate as a member of the jury, a situation that would take my own work out of the contest anyway. Enamoured with the outcome of my scenographic investigation and concerned about the reasons that prevented its exhibition, I looked for an opportunity to talk to some of my fellow jurors and asked them about their reaction to my work. Two of them kindly explained me that my spatial investigation did not qualify as scenography. One of the reasons they offered was that the new performative protocol I had created never performed in front of a regular audience. The second reason was that the stage was always “empty” and none of the actual performers (human) could be seen on stage. I therefore encountered a second occasion where a conventional approach to scenic design had prevailed, one that continued to place human bodies at the centre of scenic performativity.

Almost 10 years after the first exhibition of *Don Gio Love Machine*, I still receive enthusiastic reactions to it. I expect that the artistic outcomes obtained in this part of my dissertation will offer some material opposition to the prevailing arguments that hold that scenographic performance can only be validated with the presence of human performers and by the attendance of human spectators.

### 2.5 Observing scenographic assemblages and the aesthetic autonomy of nonhuman agency

So far in my study, I have shown how the performativity of evanescent spatialities found in scenographic assemblages catalysed exceptional “happenings” where space and nonhuman bodies became the main performer-spectators. To support my observations, I refer to three possible routes:

First, I will go back to Aronson, who envisions that expanded scenography sits well within posthuman disciplines (McKinney and Palmer 2017.: xvi). Secondly, I will relate to performance scholars Hannah and Harsløf who also observe that performance design asserts the artists/designers awareness of how design elements actively extend the bodies of the performers “even without and in spite of the human body” (2018: 12). Finally, I will return to what art scholar Michael Kirby notices in *happenings*, where it is possible to detect contributions of each person, the accidents of weather, the slips in timing, etc. which cannot be envisioned ahead of time. “In a *happening*, it is important to allow for the unexpected, so chance becomes a co-creator” (1965: 51). Kirby claims that the methodical use of chance began with Dada in 1916 (Ibid.: 35) and...
according to his knowledge, it is at this moment in the history of art, that the distinction of performing and not performing began to break down and the “found environment” was discovered and used (Ibid.: 29).

Theoretically and philosophically, I will keep on taking some distance from those leading scenography scholars who bind scenography to the history of theatre and move closer to the writings of those thinkers that reflect upon vibrant materialities and nonhuman performers. In this section, the reader will find that my narrative has been permeated by some thinkers that problematize the anthropocentric, cultural paradigms that have colonized and keep “colonizing” the world.

So far, I have analysed scenography as an environment where human and nonhuman bodies interact in ways that allow for discoveries, accidents, and surprises. I have investigated scenography as a spatial design discipline that is continuously transcending conventional paradigms and artistic boundaries. I understand scenography as a material body that has efficacy, can do things, and has sufficient coherence to produce effects that can alter the course of events.

This appreciation has been reaffirmed not only by the notion of scenography as defined by Sodja Lotker and Richard Gough where scenography is “a body, a discipline, a method, a foundation on its own right […] a discipline that has its own logic and its own distinctive rules” (2013:3), but also by Jane Bennet’s analysis (2010) of Bruno Latour’s explanation of what an actant does.

Bennet argues that to identify any human-nonhuman assemblage as a locus of agency, is to unsettle the belief that humans are special in the sense of existing outside the order of material nature (Bennet 2010: 36). I find that this kind of reasoning shakes the anthropocentric understanding of theatre and architecture and problematizes the idea that scenography acquires its value only in relation to human performers or spectators, something that I have been arguing throughout this chapter.

Bennet suggests devising new procedures, technologies, and regimes of perception that enable us to consult nonhumans more closely, or listen and respond more carefully to their outbreaks, objections, testimonies, and propositions. I feel inspired by Bennet’s observations when she demands to engage more civically, strategically, and subtly with nonhumans in the assemblages in which you participate. She explains that it is worth running the risks to be associated with superstition, the divinization of nature or romanticism, essentially because it works against anthropocentrism. Bennet claims “This material vitality is me, it predates me, it exceeds me, it postdates me” (Ibid.: 120). In my research, the vitality of space has exceeded me by manifesting without previous expectations. I am certain now that this vitality, will be present again if I attend to it from the very beginning of the design process. It is possible to design scenographic assemblages that are “ready” to show their own logics.

As I have pointed out before, Feminist theorist Karen Barad also offers an elaboration of performativity that allows matter its due as an active participant in the world’s becoming (2003: 803). She claims that all bodies come to matter through the world’s iterative intra-activity and

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17 At the end of the dissertation, the reader will be able to track ideas inspired by Barad (2003), Bennet (2010), Haraway (2016), Latour (1993, 1999), Deleuze and Guattari (1987), Manning (2013); the practice of contemplative and meditative design in Trungpa (2008), Hakubai (2018), Akama, Light and Kamihi (2020), and the analysis of atmospheric architectures and emotional spaces by Griffer (2014) and Bohme (2017).
that bodies are not objects with inherent boundaries and properties but beings in their differential
becoming (Ibid.:818). So far, I have been consistent in observing and recording the “differential
becoming” of my scenographic work. Here, in DG, it is possible to find the “destabilized
boundaries” by looking at the images that show the unimagined performativity of the
scenographic assemblage.

Earlier in my introduction, I also mentioned Bruno Latour’s urge to detect, see, hear, smell,
taste, and feel, a fuller range of nonhuman powers circulating around or within our human bodies.
The “democratization” of who can act raised an awareness of “the agency of things” (Laurier 2004:
203) that has nourished the nonhuman turn. There is a broad new field for scenographic
investigation just by the act of meticulously looking to the vitality of nonhuman agency.

2.6 The vital creative pulse of the unimagined

As discussed in previous chapters, my spatial experiments are not to be presented as an original
artistic action as they can be easily related to the radical aspirations and manifestos of Futurist
architects and other early scenographers, such as Adolph Appia, Edward Gordon Craig, Loie
Fuller or Joseph Svoboda. Back in 1914, Antonio Sant’Elia had already called for the static
monumentality of architecture to be replaced by “a taste for the light, the practical, the ephemeral
and the swift” and in 1915, Enrico Prampolini demanded a “colourless electromechanical
architecture” capable of becoming a “polyexpressive magnetic theatre” (Hannah 2019:178). My
experiment is very familiar to what McKinney and Buttersworth find in Fillipo Marinetti’s concept
of a “synthetic theatre” one that was centered on abstraction, improvisation, and the use of
elements such as gestures, words, sounds and lights which were autonomous and alogical
(2009:143). Art historian Michael Kirby also explains how Giacomo Balla explored the dynamic
role of light by eliminating the human actor in the staging of Stravisnky’s Feu d’Artifice in 1917,
where “he built a keyboard that played the light in 49 different settings for a performance that
lasted 5 minutes” orchestrating sound, light and color into a single, entirely non-representational
work (see Kirby, 1971 in Palmer 2013: 167).

As I mentioned in the introduction chapter, Appia and Craig’s work has been the subject of study
by many scholars infatuated by their revolutionary theories and their ideas were already
embedded in my education as a scenic designer. Although I got to know better the work of these
artists while I attended graduate school, I was always inclined to experiment with the expressive
potential of architecture, and I also envisioned the theatre as an animated laboratory for the
embodied expression of ideas working in real space and real time. Hannah points out that Craig
believed that the “supreme force” of rhythm gave life to inanimate forms (2019: 121).

It is relevant for my study to mention how both Craig and Appia considered that the theatrical
environments they were able to create were a “living thing” and therefore, a dynamic performative
entity that had to be treated with finesse, by carefully coaxing it into action, as one would a
[human] performer. Nevertheless, I need to stress that my artistic research differs from the works
of both designers as they kept the human performers at the centre of their experiments. Appia
saw the live [human] performer as “the measure of all things” (Hannah 2019 :125) and Craig saw
the [human] performer as one element among many (McKinney and Buttersworth 2009: 20). In my case, I think that the behaviour of the scenographic assemblage of DG was a random accidental situation during rehearsals, which gave me the opportunity to imagine and conduct an experiment that proved that there is no need for a central human performer on stage and that the evanescent spatialities of my study were spectacular in their own right, without the presence or validation of a regular [human] audience.

I would like to remark that the centre of my study is not to claim originality in the methodology of my investigation but to shift our attention to what is usually ignored, discarded, or marginalized during the rehearsal process and to unveil its creative and political potential.

Since I started my retrospective, I have produced more than 5000 images that re-present the “private” performativity of the “unseen” that constitute an original source for an alternative post-performance of scenography.

As an outcome of my findings, I have changed my professional practice and now aim to build scenographic assemblages that enable unimagined emergence. It is possible to do it by observing carefully how materiality relates in the space and allowing accidents as “participation” instead of “error”.

Case Study 3: The Flight of Quetzalcóatl (La Huída de Quetzalcóatl) (LHQ) Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, UNAM. Mexico City, November 2017.18

La Huída de Quetzalcóatl (The Flight of Quetzalcóatl) [LHQ] theatrical production was world premiered on October 20th, 2017, at the Cultural Centre of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). It is the only theatre play written by Mexican historian, anthropologist, and philosopher Miguel León-Portilla, born in Mexico City in 1926. Leon-Portilla is considered a cultural hero for translating and re-evaluating Nahuatl literature and religion, bringing attention to the accounts of indigenous participants in the conquest of Mexico. His works have been translated into more than 20 languages and are widely read.

I had the privilege of meeting León-Portilla at a private gathering celebrating his birthday. In a kind and simple conversation, I introduced myself as a theatre professional and he revealed to me he had written a theatre play when he was 29. After few exchanges about my experience and professional career, he asked me candidly if I would be interested in staging his play. Amazed by the possibilities of the enterprise, I accepted the offer. The next day, he managed to send me a tiny book that carried a philosophical dissertation in the voice of the mythical priest Ce Ácatl Topiltzin Quetzalcoátl, one of the most ambiguous and contradictory characters of Mesoamerica. The play, he said, had been staged by students in France and at the National School of Anthropology in Mexico, but had never reached the professional stage.

A great deal of positive circumstances created a favourable panorama for this production. The project served as a tribute to honour the life of the Mexican professor Emeritus Miguel León Portilla as well as an artistic opportunity to premiere it at Teatro UNAM.

3.1 Expanding practices of scenography: Conducting the production of a whole theatrical production as research in action

To start with the project, I invited a group of outstanding professional actors (most of them had written or directed a play before), to work on a collective adaptation of the original text. I also asked the choreographers to avoid normalized body movements and managed to train the group of performers in Xilam, a martial art inspired by pre-Hispanic warriors and Chinese kung-fu. In collaboration with the sound designer, we re-invented a mix of urban contemporary dance with pre-Hispanic sounds. I designed sets, costumes, and lights, and collaborated with Medusa Lab to create the digital mapping of the virtual scenography. My aim was to construct a scenographic assemblage that could serve the dramatic goals of the theatrical production as well as the nondramatic experiments of my investigation. The production took me a year of study and more than 300 hours of rehearsals, try-outs, and production meetings. I ventured for a high-risk and speculative approach which was supported by León-Portilla himself. LHQ became a shared artistic experience between 160 collaborators and 10,000 spectators.

In the following section, I will show, in practice how my ideas were materialized and how the unimagined performativity of the play affected the performance of the show.

Once appointed as the artistic leader of the project, I decided to approach the philosophical text as a scenographic investigation, avoiding the term “to direct”. I decided not to perform as a scenic director or as a conventional scenic designer but as a scenographer-thinker in action, as an artistic researcher that was prepared to use her professional experience to investigate a Mesoamerican myth and its transmission to a heterogeneous audience living in the 21st century.

As the lead conductor of the scenic investigation, I divided my research into two parallel paths. On the one hand, performing as scenographer-thinker, I wanted to influence the spectators into a reflection about original American cultures, about their philosophy before colonialism destroyed them. I wanted to reinforce the audience’s sense of dignity, one that is continuously under attack by occidental rationalism. I took the challenge of materializing the legend of a Mesoamerican hero. I was convinced that the cultural elements of LHQ demanded a post-colonial approach.

On the other hand, as a scenographer expanding the practice, I was intrigued and committed to using the stage as a laboratory to investigate the philosophical ideas of the author through the materiality of scenic action. I wanted to provoke the new scenographic assemblage into unimagined manifestations, those that could only happen during the intimacy of technical rehearsals and get to visually record their evanescence.
3.2 The conventional practice: Performative stage architecture and the design of the (dramatic) movement protocol

For designing the space on the stage, I wanted to re-create a classical geometrical space, inspired by Mesoamerican models, using my intuition and the knowledge I had acquired through the study of other performance arts and the description of ancient sacred rituals.

The architectonic ensemble of the scenographic assemblage was integrated by 13 architectural elements made of steel and wood. Three of the hanging bodies had a trapezoidal shape, the plafond had a circular crater in the middle where a circular black mirror came in and out. The main hanging wall had protuberances for wall climbing. There were four prisms on casters to roll on the stage. There were four step modules also rolling on casters and one small ramp.

Figure 73. LHQ: Elevation Plan. Mónica Raya
Figure 74. LHQ: Scenographic elements. Cars and Temple. ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 75. LHQ: Elevation for the Shadow wall and Black Mirror. ©Mónica Raya.
Figure 76. LHQ: Plafond. ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 77. LHQ: General ground plan. ©Mónica Raya.
Figure 78. LHQ: Section ©Mónica Raya.
As I did during the design processes for the other two case studies, I worked on a scale model to experiment with the mobility of the conventional scenographic assemblage and designed twelve sets to investigate the performance of the philosophical [dramatic] text enacted by the human actors.

Figure 79–80. LHQ: 1:50 Scale model built to design the dramatic movement protocol. Pre-set 1 and Set scene 2. Hand made by Aris Pretelin. ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 81–82. LHQ: 1:50 Scale model built to design the dramatic movement protocol. Set scene 3 and Set scene 4. Hand made by Aris Pretelin. ©Mónica Raya.
Figure 83–84. LHQ: 1:50 Scale model built to design the dramatic movement protocol. Set scene 5 and Set scene 6. Hand made by Aris Pretelin. ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 85–86. LHQ: 1:50 Scale model built to design the dramatic movement protocol. Set scene 7 and Set scene 8. Hand made by Aris Pretelin. ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 87–88. LHQ: 1:50 Scale model built to design the dramatic movement protocol. Set scene 9 and Set scene 10. Hand made by Aris Pretelin. ©Mónica Raya.
3.3 The stage as a laboratory: Collecting evanescent spatialities in three different theatre venues

Following the methodology introduced in the earlier chapters, I documented several aspects of the evanescent spatialities that appeared on stage during construction, installation, and technical rehearsals. As a result of my experiments, I argue that it is very clear that scenography can perform in spectacular ways “in its own right” before and after it is presented to the (human) public.

For this process of the mise en scène of LHQ, I managed to occupy three different stages in three different venues to have the best spatial conditions to investigate the set movements and the technicalities of the digital scenography. Observing the vitality of the scenographic assemblage in performance served as a necessary step to learn about its actual potentiality before arriving at the stage of the main venue, the Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón. I wanted to make sure that the human acrobats felt safe when they were rigged up on stage, I wanted to feel the rhythm of the architectonic elements, how fast or slow they should be moved by the (human) staff, but most of all and after the discoveries made in the process of rehearsing DG, I wanted to contemplate the scenographic assemblage in three different spaces and perceive if there were different moods or changes in its performativity.

The first spatial rehearsals took place at the Foro Experimental José Luis Ibáñez at the Faculty of Philosophy and Literature; a black box theatre whose technical facilities allowed us to try a very basic rigging system and design the acrobatic moments. In this space, we had the first physical encounters between the human and nonhuman bodies of the main architectonic pieces of the scenographic assemblage.
Figure 91–92. LHQ: Testing vertical dancing. Foro Experimental José Luis Ibáñez (FEJLI)
Photo © Mónica Raya
After training and rehearsing for two weeks at the Foro, we moved out and installed the scenographic assemblage on the stage of the Teatro Carlos Lazo, at the Faculty of Architecture. This was the first occasion where we were able to complete the montage of the scenographic assemblage, use the theatre rigging system and focus some of the lighting instruments to investigate the aesthetics of the dramatic movement protocol and the mapping of the digital scenography.

As soon as the scenographic elements were loaded in the theatre, I reminded my assistant scenographer Aris Pretelin, technical director José Álvarez and professional photographer Andrea López, to photograph the aspects of the evanescent spatialities that caught their attention. Once again, the collective recollection of the ephemeral took place. Dozens of photographs documenting the unimagined performativity of the scenographic assemblage were shot. In the next pages, the reader will find some of the visual records of the unimagined performativity followed by my comments and observations:

Figure 93. LHQ: This is one example of the evanescent spatialities photographed during rehearsals at the Teatro Carlos Lazo. This image shows the first try-out of the video mapping and represents visual evidence of the sensual vitality of the nonhuman bodies that played in the scenographic assemblage.
Photos by ©Mónica Raya.
Figure 94. LHQ: This is a shot of the scenographic assemblage under the effect of the working lights at the Teatro Carlos Lazo. The wall on the left, belongs to the auditorium. The set was not particularly designed for this stage, but I loved the way the space warmly welcomed the mobile architecture of my design. Photos by Mónica Raya.

Figure 95. LHQ: This image shows the assemblage under a found light cue that was recorded for a previous show. It was available on the light console. I asked the technical staff to show me whatever they had recorded on their files. This is another example of unimagined aesthetics found by chance at the Teatro Carlos Lazo. This image brings visual evidence of the vibrant vitality of scenographic assemblages and nonhuman bodies. Photos by Mónica Raya.
If the reader followed my comments, I ought to mention that I chose to express my subjective reactions, as I was the only spectator paying attention to the “happenings” on the stage. I dare to say, as a provocation, that I fell in love, not with my work but with the vibrancy and aesthetic agency of the nonhuman performers. I have always been the first spectators of my own work. I openly share that there were evanescent spatialities that I thought were “beautiful”. Far from imposing my own sense of beauty, I want to commit and express my reactions as the first attentive-affective spectator of the unimagined spatial events.

During the morning of September 19th, our montage at the Teatro Carlos Lazo was interrupted by a severe earthquake. Due to the state of emergency, the theatre remained closed for several days. I regret losing the time I had planned for experimenting with the video mapping and its performativity in this space and waited until we had the chance to load out the scenographic assemblage and start the final installation on the stage at the Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón.

Once the period of montage was finished, I started to work with the [human] technical staff to feel the weight and rhythm of the architectonic elements and choreograph the movements of the scenographic assemblage as a whole.
Figure 97. LHQ: Provoked random interaction of lights and architecture during load in at the Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón without the attendance of a conventional audience and without anyone’s “validation”. Photos by ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 98. LHQ: Human performers getting an opportunity to interact with the monumental body of the scenographic assemblage and its nonhuman performers at the Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón. Photos by ©Mónica Raya.
Figure 99. LQH: Unimagined house for hanging lights. Evanescent spatiality collected during the final days of installation at the Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón. Photos by ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 100. LHQ: Exploring the effect of the back lights: playing with obstacles and discovering shadows. Evanescent spatiality collected during lights installation at the Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón. Photos by ©Mónica Raya.
3.4 Visual ethnography of the scenographic assemblage performing under a random non-dramatic performative protocol

For three days, I worked with the technical staff to set the dramatic movement protocol to best serve the philosophical text and the human performance. Nevertheless, I managed to program enough technical rehearsals to “play” with the elements of the assemblage and be able to document their “free from meaning” performativity. At first, I decided to repeat the experiment I had done in DG, recording each one of the twelve set movements under the effect of 61 lighting cues. Once again, I asked, my fellow photographer Andrea López to help me make a new set of video recordings.

On this occasion, I observed that the task was going to be physically exhausting for the crew. So, I decided just to follow my intuition and video random or selected set scenes or movements. We made 22 videos, each with a different duration, which documented the unimagined performativity of the scenographic assemblage. They can be found in Appendix 3 and can be reviewed on Vimeo by following the links next to them. The notation is to be read as this: $V_1$ is Video One, $\text{LHQ}$ is the case study and $10'38''$ is the duration of the video.
In addition to providing the links to the videos, I have made and selected some screen shots to show the unimagined performativity of the scenographic assemblage. I have used a notation where ‘SS’ means Screen Shot; ‘V1’ means Video one, and I have added the precise moment when the evanescent spatiality manifested (minutes and seconds).

As I mentioned previously, I decided to do the collection of spatialities spontaneously. In this coming section I share 22 digital images, one per video. All of them only performed live once on the stage-laboratory.

**Figure 102.** LHQ: *Black Lines.* Evanescent spatiality provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017) SS V1 0’54''. ©Mónica Raya.

**Figure 103 LHC: House with arms.* Evanescent spatiality provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017) SS V2 0’ 00''. ©Mónica Raya.
Figure 104. LHQ: *Blue Humans at work*. Evanescent spatiality provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017) SS V3 3’41”. © Mónica Raya.

Figure 105. LHQ: *Green House*. Evanescent spatiality provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017). SS V4 6’ 57”. © Mónica Raya.
Figure 106. LHQ: *Black hat*. Evanescent spatiality provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017). SS V5 o’19”. ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 108. LHQ: Tezcatlipoca’s eye. Evanescent spatiality provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017). SS V21 8’57”. ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 110. LHQ: Watermelon. Evanescent spatiality provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017). SS V20 1’00”. ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 111. LHQ: Big Eye. Evanescent spatiality provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017). SS V20 1’00”. ©Mónica Raya.
Figure 112. LHQ: *Black fire*. LHQ Evanescent spatiality provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017). SS V8 0’36. ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 113. LHQ: *Black Pineapple*. Evanescent spatialities provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017) SSV9 0’21”.
©Mónica Raya.
Figure 114. LHQ: *Stone Jewellery*. LHQ: Evanescent spatiality provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017). SS V13 2’40”.

©Mónica Raya.

Figure 115. LHQ: *Double snake*. Evanescent spatiality provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017). SS V13 1’19”.

©Mónica Raya.
Figure 116. LHQ: *Cosmic dust and smile*. Evanescent spatiality provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017). V14 2’30”. ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 117. LHQ: *Sacred geometry*. Evanescent spatiality provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017) SSv11 2’40”. ©Mónica Raya.
Figure 118. LHQ: *Standing Presence*. Evanescent spatiality provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017) SS V10 0’ 10”. ©Mónica Raya.

Figure. 120. LHQ: *Yellow corners*. Evanescent spatiality provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017). SS V1 3’16”. ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 122. LHQ: *Water Snakes*. Evanescent spatiality provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017). SS V17 7' 13". ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 123. LHQ: *Smoked blue*. Evanescent spatiality provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017). SS V22 10'30". ©Mónica Raya.
If I were to try to quantify the number of evanescent spatialities recorded in my visual ethnography, I would think that each second of each video would/could document one evanescent spatiality. By doing 22 videos with different durations (reported previously) I might think that I was able to document 5788 evanescent spatialities. If we add the other 5780 evanescent spatialities documented through my experiments with the scenographic assemblage of DG (made on the same stage-laboratory years before) I would end up with a total of 11,568 scenic alternatives.

Returning to an explanation of the unimagined performativity of the scenographic assemblage in LHQ, I share that none of the light cues in the images were pre-recorded or “designed” by me (the actual lighting designer of the theatre production). They were a result of a random-playful approach to the use of the lamps connected to the lightboard. These evanescent spatialities happened on stage during a technical rehearsal dutifully planned on the production schedule. It means that I managed to open the time frame for “playing” with the autonomy of the nonhuman performers of the show.

I understand that other human and nonhuman spectators may find that my findings are irrelevant and senseless as they do not serve the text or play during a performance that is open to the public. But that is exactly one of the points of my research: to spur sensuous spectators to break the boundaries of the theatrical traditions and mindfully observe the aesthetic outcome of an autonomous scenographic performance. I am sure that the experience of looking again at the evanescent spatialities that appear and disappear during technical rehearsals might refresh what the eyes of a designer could see up until now.

As I have already argued, the visual ethnography of the evanescent spatialities performs as not-yet-known and not-yet-imagined scenographic possibilities. For the LHQ archive, I made a
curated collection of 930 digital images that became a sort of referential source of the unimagined settings. I can also confirm that my intuitive method for dismantling the fixed presuppositions of a dramatic scenography, especially those which insist on submitting the purpose of scenographic assemblages only to serve traditional theatre making, was very exciting.

As an exercise for my reader, I would suggest playing any of the videos I produced for this investigation and framing a chosen moment by making a screen shot. Then, look at it, and reflect about the nonhuman performers within the frame: Lights, shadows, wood, metal, transparency, different tones of green, red, or yellow. I think that my techno-contemplative method of preserving the evanescent spatialities from oblivion proposes a meditative/active aesthetic response to past scenographic assemblages that we can only revisit on a screen.

3.5 Unimagined atmospheres: Performing collective rituals to create a sacred spatiality inside the theatre

After observing and documenting the unimagined behaviour of the nonhuman components interacting together in the scenographic assemblage, I decided to follow a new intuitive impulse. As irrational as it may sound, I felt the energy of some invisible forces playing along with us during the rehearsals, and then the need to take a new performative action to support the context of the metaphysics of the text. I felt the need to produce a space that could hold our embodiment of the Mesoamerican deities on the stage. I wanted to explore the possibility of performing a ritual that could consecrate the space on the stage and charge it with the spirituality of the human [and nonhuman] ensemble. I wanted to transform the space of the real into a space for the others. I thought that my actions could be interpreted as a ritual offering to the ancient gods that were impersonated on the mise en scène.

According to anthropologists Judith Okely and Helen Callaway, the experiential knowledge and practice of fieldwork can be considered autobiographical when the personal experience stands as a political and theoretical way to understanding the voices of others (1992: xii) and I think that this last point, “to understand the voices of others” relates well to my findings in this last chapter of my dissertation. I actively contributed to the creation of an unusual atmosphere, something I had not imagined previously, one that could be felt around us, one that was not architectural, scenographic or merely theatrical. Instead of collaborating with the technical staff doing the usual stage work, I talked to them, inviting them to join-feel-believe we were building a sacred place that needed a sacred mood. I explained to them that we were going to impersonate, and therefore incarnate an ancient myth that challenged the passing of time, and that according to the Mexica’s beliefs, wearing the attire of the God, made God’s presence real. I never imagined that the spirituality embedded in the philosophical text written by Leon Portilla could send me into a religious mood, into a “more than present” mood.

To expose this section of my research, I will use a subjective narrative; one that offers the autobiographical experience of my fieldwork in a combination with a participatory experience and its embodied knowledge.

Since the beginning of my artistic/research journey in this project, I had had the intuition to invite classical ballet dancer Gustavo Sanders to be a member of our human cast. He is a
professional ballet dancer whom I met previously on a design project for the National Company of Dance and who has the particularity of exposing his self as “having been called” to follow a spiritual path to heal the Valley of the Anahuauc (known as the geographical site of a powerful civilization before the Conquest of Mexico). His personal story, as a spiritual guardian, can be read in his book, *Peregrino del Anáhuac: Sanando la Tierra para una nación* (2019).

Infatuated by the faith and mysticism of Sanders, I asked him to help me build an atmosphere in the theatre that could help our human performers to reach a new level of spatial consciousness. I felt it was necessary to make a fieldtrip to the archaeological site of Tula and asked Sanders to guide the members of our human cast (those that would be willing to attend voluntarily) with the purpose of making a ritual offering as a sign of respect to the ancient gods depicted in our play.

Just before continuing with the exposure of my findings, I would like to emphasize that I will keep on incorporating my feelings into the results of my research simply because intuition has guided me through the artistic experimentation and the embodied experiences I am about to narrate.

![Figure 125. Tula, Hidalgo. Archaeological site. Photo ©Diana Reséndiz](image)

At some point in the process, I felt I could not go on with the *mise on scène* on the stage without exposing ourselves to the invisible forces of the historical site of one of the most powerful myths in America. Tula reached its height as the capital of the Toltec Empire between the fall of Teotihuacan in 650 A.D and the rise of Tenochtitlan in 1325. Tula fell around 1150, but it had significant influence in the following Aztec Empire, with its history written about heavily in myth.

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19 “Crusader of the Anahuac, healing the land for a Nation”. Trans. MR
To find a new direction in the purpose of provoking the “unimagined”, I imagined the visit to Tula as an opportunity to design a “scenographic” journey; one that could also be remembered by the human performers while playing/dancing on the stage.

From this moment on, I would like the reader to hear my voice as a performer-participant of the trip, recalling the experience as a researcher in action:

“It was 7am when we gathered at the gates of the site, excited and ready. In preparation for the visit, Sanders had instructed us to wear white cloths, a red band around our heads, and a red band around our stomachs to physically manage the sacred energy of the site. We were also instructed to wear ayoyotes (seeds that serve as percussion instruments), around our wrists and ankles to make a soft noise while we entered the place. Sanders organized us in a double line of dancers, taking the shape of a snake. It is interesting to mention that some members of the cast decided to attend the special tour with their family members. I perceived a general feeling of excitement and the conscious notion of attending an unrepeatable event.

Before we started to walk towards the ruins, Sanders indicated that marching in the front of our congregation would be a man and a woman. Gastón Yáñez, the actor playing Quetzalcóatl, took the role of man and I, the researcher-performer took the role of woman. Sanders and his comadrita (that was his female mate that accompanies him every time he needs to heal the land) led the ensemble formed in two long lines. Sanders warned us to pay attention to every creature or any event on the road, even if they seemed ordinary, as we were about to enter on a new level of awareness. Sanders’ invitation made me eager to look for more-than human signs.

In my mind, the ritual entrance to Tula became an invitation to experiment with the space through the perspective of a forgotten faith. Our ritual walk/dance started with the sound of Sanders’ conch. He blew it like a trumpet and its deep sound woke up many of the small living creatures around the field. We started to dance and step rhythmically in order to rattle the ayoyotes wrapped around our wrists and ankles. Sanders told us that the sound would scare the evil spirits”.

Figure 126. LHQ: The cast performing a ritual offering in Tula. Man and woman were needed to conduct the floral offering. We wore white clothing, red bands around heads and waists and ayoyotes (rattles) around our ankles to make noise during our march and scare evil spirits. Photo by ©Diana Reséndiz.
"We moved forward on the path making a curvy advance, like the curvy movements of a snake on the ground. I opened my eyes, my ears, and my heart. I was surprised when I saw two very small children, a boy and a girl, who came out of the cactus trees to watch us pass. It was too early in the morning and too far from the town to find a good reason to see children at the historical site. The colours of the valley were beautiful, and the air fresh and transparent. As a revelation, I started noticing the presence of hundreds of small butterflies; the only living creatures the king Ce Ácatl Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl dared to offer to the gods in sacrifice.

To get to the central plaza of the archaeological site, we followed the path and walked/danced across a little marketplace where street vendors sell contemporary copies of pre-Hispanic artifacts, arts and crafts and semi-precious stones. At first, they observed us with surprise and curiosity. Out of nowhere, the sound of a ceramic flute accompanied, the sound of the ayoyotes that moved to the rhythm of our dancing pace. In that moment, I had the feeling that they were not “street vendors” but the descendants of the ancient guardians of the site. These kinds of thoughts appeared in my mind in a very simple manner. I had the choice of believing in them or just letting them pass as my own fantasies.

Our group advanced piously and in a happy mood, committed to “seeing” the divine signals. We followed Sanders and his female mate, until he chose a place in the open space of the square between the pyramids. He invited us to imitate him and perform a salute to each of the Cardinal Points, followed by the deep blows of his conch. Sanders and his comadrita conducted the placement of el tendido de flores (flower ritual) and the actor that was impersonating Quetzalcoatl and I performed the actions as we were instructed”.

![Figure 127. LHQ: Tendido de Flores (Flower offering). Gustavo Sanders and his Comadrita (female partner) conducted the mounting of the floral offering. After the ritual, we took it back with us, as the authorities do not permit rituals inside the site without a special permission. Photo ©Diana Reséndiz](image)

“As the site is a public space, by that time in the morning, there were more people visiting the ruins of Tula. Two young men and a woman observed our actions and asked me directly if they
could join the ritual. I was open to any collateral actions that could be provoked by our improvised performance and welcomed them to participate with us. Sanders cleaned them with the sound of the conch, blowing on the surface of their bodies as he had done previously with every member of our group. Nobody in our group felt that it was inappropriate to admit strangers. It could be said that, somehow, the intuitive ritual performance had united us with the ancient site, the valley, the land, and the human and nonhuman creatures around us. Once we felt we had fulfilled the objective of our journey we went back to the parking lot and shared some food and drinks. We left Tula and drove back to Mexico City.

Returning to a more intellectual approach and trying to contextualize the experiment, it is important to engage with Scottish anthropologist Victor Turner, who observes that the performance of a ritual is both serious and playful (1982: 35). A seminal author on this matter, Turner defines ritual as a “prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in invisible beings or powers, regarded as the first and final causes of all effects” (Ibid.: 79). Turner thinks of ritual essentially as a performance and reflects that to perform a ritual is “to bring something about, to consummate something, to carry out a play” (Ibid:2), but he points out that in the “carrying out”, something new might be generated. He thinks that the “flow” of action and interaction in a ritual performance may be conducive to unprecedented insights and even generate new symbols and meanings (Ibid.: 79). His ideas regarding the production of “unprecedented insights” made me connect directly with his perspective. Turner also reflects upon this “liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc. from the normative constraints of society” and calls it communitas (Ibid.: 44). He observes that the spontaneity and immediacy of this “liberation” can seldom be sustained for long and always brings about a deep style of personal interaction, consistent with some of the ideas I have been grappling with in the past chapters underlining the evanescence of atmospheres and space. As Turner puts it, communitas has “something magical” about it; “a shared feeling of endless power”, “a flash of lucid mutual understanding on an existential level” and the sensation that the individuals who interact with one another in this mode become “totally absorbed into a single synchronized, fluid event” (Ibid.: 48).

What does it mean to “flow” with a situation or an event? Turner brings attention to what Hungarian psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi locates in six distinctive features of the flow experience that helped me understand my own exposure to the experiment:

1. The experience of merging action and awareness.
2. Merging is possible by a centring of attention on a limited stimulus field.
3. Loss of ego. The self becomes irrelevant since there is no need to bargain as to what should or not should be done. All things are felt to be one, in “a sort of Zen experience”.
4. A person in “flow” finds herself in control of her actions and of the environment.
5. You must be a believer, even if this means temporarily willing the “suspension of disbelief”.
6. You must understand that the “flow” seems to need no goals or rewards outside itself. (See Csikszentmihalyi 1975 qtd. in Turner 1987: 54-55).

As I described at the beginning of this section, the trip we made to Tula was not a simple historical visit. I started to have “funny feelings” and the sensation that I was becoming a sort of
bridge between what at first appeared to be two different realms. I decided to listen to the later and
continue with my performative research as a journey of unimagined awareness and as a lived
experience immersed in a different state of mind. I cannot know if every participant managed to
control their egos inside the site, but I felt there was a pious understanding of the spiritual offerings
to the forces of the “invisible”. I decided to act in total belief of the existence of the Mesoamerican
gods concluding that awareness and humbleness are two very fine qualities to be considered in
developing a practice of expand-ing scenography.

To offer my reader some artistic support for my inquiries about the spatial performativity of
“invisible” forces, it is relevant to mention that when Antonin Artaud came to Mexico in 1936, he
was also looking for a spiritual experience. He thought that Mexico could present the idea of a
“new” man (or at least “new” for the young Europeans of the beginning of the 20th Century), one
that could carry the ancient vital relations of man with nature that were established by the old
Toltecs, the old Mayas and “all those races which down through the centuries created the grandeur
of the Mexican soil” (1988: 372). In some of his letters, Artaud blamed the Renaissance for
debasing the idea of man by a false interpretation of the Ancients. He argued that the Ancients had
an overpowering sense of the presence of “other” forces, and they sought them throughout their
entire organism, “if necessary, by the means of a real vertigo”, to remain in contact with the release
of these forces (Ibid.: 360). Artaud attended several rituals conducted by indigenous people in the
Mexican desert without really understanding much of what was going on and failed completely in
his quest to bring back to Europe the secrets of ancient knowledge of Mexico.

In searching for a more contemporary source, I found a paper presented at the 16th Participatory
Design Conference 2020 celebrated in Manizales Colombia, on an investigation entitled
“Expanding Participation to Design with More-Than-Human Concerns”. In their article, designers
Yoko Akama, Ann Light, and Takahito Kamihira (2020) challenge hierarchies of human dominion
by asking ethical, political, and onto-epistemological questions regarding how worlds and futures
are shaped when more-than-human entities – plants, animals, rocks, rivers and spirits—participate
in our becoming. Akama, Light and Kamihira ask for a radical rethinking of design in practice, as
well as for recognizing “pluriversal” worlds and the theory of more-than-human spheres. In their
study, they also offer an autoethnographic research method of sharing their own experiences, by
trying to translate “the untranslatable” and interpret cultural phenomena in English to share
emotional and intimate experiences (Ibid.: 2).

In their academic article, Akama, Light and Kamihira employed “logics” from different
worldviews, hoping to allow a more spiritual dimension to inform design (Ibid: 4). “Many
worldviews regard the sacred and transcendent as spiritual entities. These sacred entities might
be trees, animals, rocks, mountains, and/or rivers. In many cultures around the world, more-
than-human entities are revered for their wisdom, teachings, and transcendence” (Ibid.: 4). They
point out that these practices are more difficult for many Western thinkers to see, because their
dominant culture plays a large part in determining what would be normalized as mundane,
scientific, and logical across the world. This is not merely inclusive politics; it also acknowledges
“how destructive the dominant growth-oriented and human-centric approach has been” (Ibid.:9). In
conclusion, these fellow researchers claim that more-than-human concerns offer a way to think
past the limits of current design trajectories while engaging with the spiritual dimensions that are
absent from design’s usual commitments (Ibid.: 12). My interest in building a “sacred spatiality” for us to perform within found a strong resonance with these kinds of concerns. I wanted to contribute to the vibrancy of our scenographic assemblage by welcoming and provoking the participation of the invisible.

As a continuation of the mood/disposition that the collective dance/offering in Tula had brought to our group, I wanted to bring/produce some of the spatial energy felt in our journey back into the space-mood of rehearsals. I was open to see or to feel, if my spiritual commitment to offer our representation of the myth of Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca affected in any way the performativity of the elements that were integrated with the scenographic assemblage. I felt it was necessary to go back to the stage asking Gustavo Sanders to perform another ritual ceremony to attune with the spatiality of the theatre. I felt concerned about the possibility of disturbing the balance between the invisible nonhuman power of the gods, and our sincere-but-naïve-but-improvised ceremonies.

Once again, there was no obligation for anybody to attend or perform in the ritual gatherings. The volunteers (cast, collaborators, and staff) came together on the stage, and Sanders started the spiritual event by blowing his consecrated conch towards the four cardinal points. He invoked the names of Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca and asked for their blessing. My aim was to provoke a holistic spiritual connection between the human and nonhuman performers, enhance their capacity to act “according to an internal logic” and give rise to a collective state of awareness and “flow”.

![Figure 128. LHQ: I asked Gustavo Sanders to perform a ritual on the stage, to salute the ancient gods and ask for their permission to embody them and their blessing. Attending the ritual was completely voluntary for cast and crew members. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón. (2017). Photo © Diana Reséndiz](image)

After the collective performance of our “rituals” was done and over, the rhythm of the production went back to normal, but I deliberatively became even more attentive to objects, shadows, sounds or atmospheric changes during the rehearsal process. In order to find a theory or a study that could help me analyse my own behaviour, I was drawn to the work of
anthropologist Kathleen Stewart (2017) who is trying to find ways to approach the complex and uncertain objects that fascinate us or exert a pull upon us. In her opinion, ordinary affects are “things that happen in impulses, sensations, expectations, daydreams, in strategies and their failures, in forms of persuasion, contagion, in modes of attention, attachment and agency, and in social worlds of all kinds that catch people up in something that feels like something” (Stewart 2007: 2.) In accordance with Stewart, I saw myself trying to “gaze, imagine, sense, take on and perform not a flat and finished truth but some possibilities that came into view in the effort to become attuned to a particular scene”. The result of my new “spiritual” awareness brought “a mass of resonances linking precise moments through a thin line of connection”, leaving me “with an embodied sense of the world as a dense network of mostly unknown links” (Ibid.: 6). In her study, Stewart observes that ordinary affects are also the stuff that intimate lives are made of, those that can be experienced as a pleasure or a shock, or as “a sensibility that snaps into place” (Ibid.: 2).

Stewart’s mode of thinking on the affects of the present moment has served me as a source of personal insight. Her desire for finding complex affective attunement with “the non-coherent, the incommensurate, and the scenic” has inspired me to rethink the intimate yet collective artistic experience of my investigation. Her thinking has nurtured my desire to be open for events to unfold and to dwell in the potential stored in emergent assemblages, found objects or things “that have dropped out of the loop” (21). Therefore, I find it relevant to share some of the events that showed me the efficacy of the rituals.

The first event that caught my attention was looking back at the head of the lighting crew, Agustin Casillas, who suddenly decided to wear stone and jade necklaces during work hours, a personal action that enhanced the beauty of his indigenous character. On a different day, the head of the construction team, Mario Alvarez, gave me a personal gift. He brought me a beautiful black stone, carefully selected by one of the street vendors in Tula, where he had decided to travel and visit on his own. The black stone looked like an obsidian at first, but the more I wore it, the more some threads of silver crystals began to sparkle. I wore the stone around my neck during the rehearsal process of LHQ, charging it with the energy of our efforts and with a lot of affection. I still wear it when I feel the need of some “divine” protection, and it remains at the side of my bed.
Another unexpected happening was the visit of a mysterious nomad man. It took place one morning right before one of our technical rehearsals, when one of the security guards told me there was someone looking for me at the back-stage door of the theatre. When I came out, I saw a very thin man, maybe in his fifties, all dressed up in white. Around his neck, he was carrying a small section of a marine shell, one that is associated by several scholars with the signs and symbols of the god Quetzalcóatl (QZ). He looked at me with some surprise and said he did not know that QZ could be a woman. He explained that he was a lone traveller and showed me some printed posters with a poem he had written in honour of our venerated god. I decided to exchange some money for his poetry and after the transaction, we said goodbye. I went back inside and put the posters at the back of the doors in the dressing rooms. Before he left, I invited him to watch the performance of our scenic work. I was told that he came back the next day to collect his ticket and I never saw him again. I thought that his visit was very unusual. According to the legends of Tezcatlipoca, one of the gods impersonated in our performance could manifest in the human world in the body of a stranger. He was also known as capable of leaving some calamity behind following his appearance. I decided to be gentle and generous to him.

Because of the visit of the stranger, I expressed to our technical director my wish to hang a QZ shell around my neck and Mario managed to find the person that could make the shell cuts. Mario produced many of these “jewels” and gave them away as presents for other members of the cast and crew.

As these peculiar events and new affections for objects marked our way towards the public opening of the show, I found that a new dialogue or partnership between human and nonhuman bodies had been opened. I really felt that an attuned space had emerged in the theatre.
Figure 130. LHQ. At the centre of the image, a skeleton figure can be distinguished on the surface of our black mirror. It is possible to see the side of a skull and what seems to be a small arm made of bones. Some of the members of the technical staff and I started to share this kind of “visions”. We did not laugh or make fun of them. We just worked on the stage with the idea that we were sharing the space with “invisible presences.” ©Mónica Raya.

During this chapter and looking back at my attempt to build a “sacred” atmosphere on the stage, I turned to German philosopher Gernot Böhme (2017) and to his Atmospheric Architectures: The Aesthetics of Felt Spaces. In his study, he proposes that one of the best ways to access architecture as spatial art is through bodily presence (see Engels-Schwartzpaul 2017: 1). Böhme asserts that in bodily felt spaces, atmospheres can activate a kind of architectural engagement quite different from that triggered by Euclidean geometries (2017: 2). According to Böhme, the knowledge about the production of atmospheres has a very significant power. It uses neither physical violence nor commanding speech but engages with the affectivity of people. Although it operates in the realm of the senses, this power impacts the unconscious and is more difficult to grasp than any other power (Ibid.: 28). Finally, he observes that atmospheres arise between people and things; that they are neither subjective or objective but the “shared reality of the perceiver and the perceived” (Engels-Schwartzpaul 2017: 23).

Böhme argues that the aim of scenography is not to form objects but rather phenomena. An atmosphere itself is not a thing but rather a hovering in-between things and perceiving subjects. The making of atmospheres is restricted to the arrangement of the conditions under which the phenomenon can appear. Atmospheres are expansively diffused feelings experienced as poignant forces. They can also be interpreted as impressions by divine beings or as visitations of demons (Böhme 2017: 167).

Böhme’s studies have helped me fortify the idea behind my strategies and my findings. I was consistent when I decided to engage the affectivity of the technical staff by asking them to share whatever they perceived as unusual. I also made scenography leave the stage area and spread out into space in general. Coinciding with Böhme when he asserts that “The art of staging is not really
about views but much more about the making of tuned spaces” (Ibid.: 162) and these I had the chance to experience during the making of LHQ.

Searching for another philosophical context that could explain this kind of lived experience, I found support in the ideas set forth by German philosopher Elizabeth Ströker about the nature of space. Ströker’s reflections offer a definition of lived space in which it is the subject who faces the theme of space analysis in its entire range of problems. She points out that the “way” the subject investigates through the various spaces is her/his own way. She argues that the subject must not be interrogated primarily in her/his judgement “about” space, but in terms of her/his comportment “in” it (1987: 16), as I argue here. Ströker observes that space is not a mere medium of measurement but “an expressive fullness”. She explains that an attuned space “is a space of labour, of leisure, of festivities, of devotion—a space that is loved, feared, avoided; one that has its own proper visage” (Ibid:19). This is another reason why I chose to deliberately express my own affections in the description of my design journey, my love, my fear, and my attentiveness for the energy of the “unseen”. She maintains that the understanding of attuned space is not the cognition of space, but a way of being moved and affected. “Space is not primarily an object for a subject who performs acts of spatial understanding. Rather, as an attuned space, it has an appropriate mode of coexistence with the lived ego of the observer” (Ibid.: 19).

The next digital images show some of the evanescent spatialities I captured during the intervals between technical rehearsals. They help me to illustrate the things I “saw” and how I felt during the process. The text that accompanies them is a personal interpretation of their peculiarity.
Figure. 131–132. LHQ: These two photographs were taken from the perspective of my working table, located in the centre of the auditorium. In the top photograph, I saw a gigantic eye looking back at me. In the bottom photograph, the gigantic eye is now looking down at José, the technical director/stage manager. Most of these evanescent spatialities happened by unexpected interactions between the human and nonhuman bodies on the stage. Photo by © Mónica Raya
These two photographs show the faces of two monumental characters, with eyes, noses or opened mouths. I did not imagine this type of performativity when I designed the scenographic assemblage. I saw the manifestation of these evanescent spatialities as an outcome of the invisible bridge I decided to build by performing our spiritual rituals. It was not only me who became open to interacting with invisible forces on a different level of consciousness, it was a common feeling, a shared atmosphere. ©Mónica Raya

3.6 New discoveries, “funny” feelings, and the need for new ethics towards the treatment of space: Reflections for a mindfully calibrated scenographic design

To summarize and appreciate the outcomes of the investigation put forth in this chapter, I would like to call attention to the expanded alternatives to the conventional practice of scenography
(especially to the one that was established by the modes of production in modern theatre) performed during the creation of this show.

As a creative producer, scenic director, visual ethnographer, spiritual bridge, and space philosopher, I revised the methodologies for the creation of scenographic performance, refining and conducting a spatial investigation by using the stage as a laboratory and by producing more digital materials that helped me to reveal the sensual performativity that may not be necessarily communicated by words. A perceptive, receptive engagement with the subject matter is often more important to the research than getting an “explanatory grip”. My investigation also seeks to enhance the knowledge and skills accumulated through practice and its apprehension through the senses (see Borgdorff 2012:163).

Even if I could be considered the author of the “total” invention of the show, I declined to have a credit in the program as the director, as I was mindfully aware that I was permanently informed by invisible forces, unimagined circumstances, and discoveries produced by the vitality of the whole scenographic assemblage (including the human performers). Trying to bring some professional ethics to the experience, it is possible to hold the idea that I was not the author of the show as much as I was the provocateur.

LHQ opened its public performance on the 17th of November 2019, and as I mentioned before, the show performed 30 nights at the main theatre of the University Cultural Center (UNAM) in front of more than 10,000 human spectators. The whole spectacle was recorded “for posterity” by the University TV Channel and it has an open public viewing that can be found at the next link on YouTube: https://youtu.be/tip5njQL3Yo.

After the official video was released for public viewing, I decided to analyze the visual documentation of the evanescent spatialities that incorporated the bodies of the human and nonhuman performers that were was made without my design super-vision.

In the video, the human actors are mostly seen in close-up shots, performing with their costumes and make-up. It is not surprising to appreciate that the stage architecture only becomes a blurry backdrop. I also observed that the close-up shots showed a smaller universe of performing matter comprised of exotic attires.

I managed to produce a new collection of images and found that they differed from the previous ones. As I observed previously, the video recording for the TV human audience shows the scenographic architecture mostly as a background and underestimates its performativity. It seems that for the purpose of a TV human audience, it is not the whole scenographic assemblage that matters but the gestures of the human bodies.

This new collection of digital images helps me to illustrate the conventional approach to a scenographic performance: a normalized prevalence of the human actor as the center of the show. In this last exercise, I produced 108 screen shots. Once again, the eye of a camera helped me to frame some scenographic moments I would like to keep for further study or simply for my own aesthetic satisfaction.
Figure 135. LHQ. Screen Shot at 16’ 50” taken from the video on-line available on the internet. It is wonderful to see the vibrant material connection between every-body on the stage. Photo by © Mónica Raya. To watch the full show of LHQ go to (https://youtu.be/tip5nJQL3Yo) © Mónica Raya.

Figure 136. LHQ. Screen Shot taken at 1h 22’ 21”, from the video performance available on You Tube. The materiality of the costumes becomes the main performer in the photograph. (https://youtu.be/tip5nJQL3Yo) photos by © Mónica Raya.

Acknowledging the vitality of the evanescent spatialities through photos and videos brings me back to the philosophical ideas expressed by Gernot Böhme, when he explains that for a long time, it was thought that cognition and communication as modes of being were to be reserved for human beings. It moves me when he reflects:
“Is not every flower proof that natural things [bodies] present themselves, out of themselves to others?

It seems it is possible to detect forms of presence, which are the modes in which a thing [body] steps out of itself.” (See Böhme 2017: 46).

I also concur with Elizabeth Ströker’s ideas, when she explains that the understanding of space is not perception, and that awareness of space is not cognition. She argues that space exercises an “effectivity”; it addresses, it imparts. It is rather a way of being moved and affected, (Ströker 1987: 19).

To explain myself on a transdisciplinary basis, I would like to relate to the concepts that Zen architect Hakubai Mosko and photographer Alxe Noden express about the performativity of Zen gardens. For Mosko and Noden “the Zen Garden is a place that is sacred as it engages us with something beyond ourselves. It is a space to find pleasure and ease but also insight and wisdom” (2018: 4). In my case, the stage became sacred as it made me engage with something beyond myself. “The Zen Garden is a place where everything is alive and where we come alive as well” (Ibid: 5). This je ne sais quoi about the liveness of space was something that I carefully observed and confirmed through my investigation.

To conclude, I would like to support Borgdorff’s (2012) claims on art practice in general, when he explains why the need to create demarcations, dichotomies, definitions, and identities is so problematic. It is not possible to assume a stable concept of art since the presumed boundaries of the world are the subject of constant debate (Borgdorff 2012: 132). The metaphysics of art means an understanding of art as a critical reflexive practice, encompassing non-conceptual content, which sets our aesthetic, intellectual and moral life into motion. It also means an understanding of artistic research as a practice of that [fundamentally unfinished] critical reflection (Ibid.: 138).

After working on the three projects, I decided to present in this dissertation, I am certain it is quite possible to engage in a more contemplative and mindful scenographic design, just by recognizing the fact that space is not a void (not even metaphorically). I have discovered how relevant it is to think ethically about the performativity of the spatialities that emerge from chance, to have a political stance and be respectful of performing materialities. My line of argumentation follows Zen master and philosopher Chögyam Trungpa (2008) when he suggests that there are experiences available to us when we give up our small mind and become completely open. These openings are opportunities to understand something beyond the veil of the ordinary and to turn the ordinary into insight (Trungpa 2008: 109).

Finally, because of my actions on stage and the nourishment brought from the intertextual reading of fellow thinkers, I look forward to participating in creating unconventional forms of documentation and dissemination that go beyond our current perception, our understanding, and our affective relationship to the world and other people.

I would like to engage with the articulation of unfinished thinking in and through art and with pedagogic and artistic opportunities where it is possible to create a reflective environment that includes all the known and “unknown” participants. I suggest enhancing the perception of scenographic designers and promoting the outcomes of an expanded sensibility as fundamental to the development of new scenographies. My research offers a personal testimony as a scenographer but also offers new approaches to teaching future designers to look beyond the
traditional parameters for designing a spatial event, to pay attention to the liveness of nonhuman performers and to work in sync with the rhythm of a given/found space and its autonomous dynamics. I will keep on revising the conventional productions of the industry of entertainment with a critical eye towards refining the perception and political reactions of future human audiences. I will also share my interest in stimulating a more sensitized approach towards nonhuman performers and their own autonomous behaviours.

Figures 137-138- 139-140- 141. LHQ: Unimagined Performing Spatialities invisible for a regular audience, visible for a mindful-contemplative scenographer. © Photo by Mónica Raya
4. Conclusions

Through my study, I insisted on analyzing the field of scenography beyond the limitations of theatre studies. My retrospective and practice-based analysis constitutes an ethical disagreement with the human-centred hierarchical practices of the theatre and favours a more open-ended experience of human and nonhuman bodies in the ephemeral coalitions of scenography. Hann observes that “scenography is not the objects of the theatre, but how assemblages of materiality are encountered as staging” (2019: 76), something that I have experienced in my spatial experiments and learned by reading posthuman philosophers.

4.1 Scenography beyond the limitations of theatre studies

In my process, I have demonstrated that “the black box” is a wonderful spatial laboratory that no longer recedes into an imagined (conventional) void but reasserts itself as “a site for potentiality” (Ibid.: 86). It is obvious that I have not been the only artist/architect/designer/scenographer that has used the space of a stage to connect with the agency of space itself. In order to confirm that the scenographic practice can be revised away from the historical and human-centred account of theatre making and theatrical representation, I attempted to underline some interesting aspects of 10 well-known artists whose work, in my perspective, should be considered and studied as part of the history of expanding scenography:

Richard Wagner (1813-1883) German composer, philosopher, scenographer, aesthetician and thinker of dramatic music, the author of The Artwork of the Future was a virtuoso of emotional spacing. He believed a Gesamtkunstwerk -- translated as ‘total work of art’, ‘ideal work of art’, ‘universal artwork’, ‘synthesis of the arts’, ‘comprehensive artwork, ‘all-embracing art form’ or ‘total artwork’-- is a work of art that strives to use all or many art forms. In my embodied experience, I want to emphasize how, in my experience, Wagner’s work creates an atmospheric effect that successfully touches the human spirit. He was able to build a sensual world through material vibrations. He envisioned that this particular experience had to be perceived in a dark auditorium, away from any ordinary visual or sensual distraction of the theatre of his time. He became an architect of emotions, building holistic sensual performances. Every time I open myself to the experience of Wagner’s work, live or mediated, his musical compositions open an intimate space that feels endless, fully cosmic. Wagner ought to be studied as a master of spacing, as a total scenographer.
Adolphe Appia (1862-1928), the famous Swiss stage designer and scenographer, was a pioneer in foreseeing the art of the theatre without the human actor being the dominant element in production. In Appia’s work, the actor receded into the background to take his place among other bodies (human and nonhuman) “ready to follow the convolutions resulting from the momentary importance of any one of them as they were brought into play” (see McKinney and Buttersworth 2009:154). Appia is also remembered for designing practical settings that were formed from simplified three-dimensional elements such as walls, stairs, and plateaus, which Appia called practicables. As a kit of parts, the objects could be moved around to create iconic spaces or “terrains”. Appia abstracted natural landscapes into architectonic forms and softened them by diffuse, projected and moving light, “creating a living atmosphere on stage” (see Hannah 2019:126-127).

Edward Gordon Craig (1872-1966), was an English performer, theatre director-designer, producer, scenographer and theorist, that developed the idea of The Thousand scenes in One Scene, “a design of a simple setting which could be infinitely flexible and capable different expressions and moods” (McKinney and Butterworth 2009: 20-26). Craig was a pioneer in experimenting with the expressive potential of architectonic space on the stage. He used various techniques to present the inherent rhythms and musicality of performance as an uninterrupted flow. His presentational Architectonic Scene rendered scenography as a “genuine” construction (see Hannah 2019:122). Craig believed that the “supreme force” of rhythm gave life to inanimate forms transforming space into a living entity (Hannah 2019:121). Both Craig and Appia knew that the theatrical environment was a place for the creation of a “living thing” and therefore a dynamic performative entity that had to be treated with finesse, carefully coaxing it into action. Both saw the theatre as an animated laboratory for the embodied expression of their ideas which allowed them to do research in real space and real time beyond dramatic pledges to illustration or representation.

Loïe Fuller (1862-1928) was an American dancer and early scenographer, who provided the first evidence of the actual realisation of modulated lighting changes in relation to music. Fuller recognised the importance of experimentation and embraced new technologies and scientific discoveries. She patented techniques for lighting the stage and for the construction of costumes and developed new colour media in her own laboratory (see Palmer 2013:156). I will point out that her experimentation seemed to take advantage of ‘fortuitous mistakes’ [unimagined] discovered through dancing and playing with light. Her team, usually numbering between 14 and 38 technicians, was led by her two brothers. They rehearsed extensively without any cue sheets, since Fuller feared that her lighting ideas would be “stolen by others” (Ibid.:151). Somehow, she foresaw that her work would be ‘stolen’ to further the discovery of the artistic potential of lighting design.

Luis Barragán (1902-1988) was a Mexican engineer and architect, whose serene and evocative architecture won him the Pritzker Prize in 1980, and whose architectural work has always attracted other architects by his mystical dialogue with light and space. He was able to create an ‘emotional architecture’, one that would encourage meditation and quietude. According to Figueroa and Castorena, Barragán studied daylight using large scale models (a scenographic practice) that were professionally photographed, allowing for options to be evaluated and new
ideas tested. He supervised the building processes daily and was extensively criticized for modifying ‘on site’ many of the openings (it was highly expensive), including their proportion, size, and location. In Barragán’s buildings, the selection of color was always left to the end. Once some choices were done, a full-scale test was carried by painting all the walls and –if necessary- repainting them as many times as needed. Barragán found out an effect that can be described as colored light. He usually hid the light source and then painted the glass, mixing warm light with planes lit by cold light. The result was a mixture that changed the indoor quality of space. He achieved spectacular effects using simple devices such as painted or stained glass, reflective grids, trellises, etc. Barragán perceived artificial lighting as a medium to produce a completely different perception of the space at night. By reducing artificial lighting to a minimum, Barragan made an efficient and selective use of electric devices. He derived this principle from a philosophical attitude in which artificial light was not to substitute for daylighting, but, rather, to give spaces a sense of mystery, intimacy, enclosure, and relaxation (see Figueroa and Castorena 2006).

It is still common to find critical views that consider scenography to be ‘fake’ and the term “scenography” as an insult to the art of architecture (considered by some purists as nothing less than the art of truth). Nevertheless, the truth about the materiality of space is beyond its architectural functions, and more about its autonomous, vibrant, living pulse; something that, thinking with some irony, a true architect should know by heart.

Tadeusz Kantor (1915-1990). Polish painter, Assemblage and Happenings artist, theatre designer, scenographer, director, and performer is another artist that is well known for using the stage as a laboratory. Some of my own observations about the agency of scenographic environments intersect with his poetic achievements working with nonhuman performativity. Bodies in Kantor’s scenographic assemblages affect other bodies without granting to human bodies any kind of performative supremacy. Scenography is not ‘subordinated’ to a particular kind of body. Kantor considers space as an active and influential force which lies at the center of his work. In his theatre pieces, space performed as a dynamic agent. “Rather than considering space as a passive receptacle, Kantor saw the tension between objects and the space in which they were held” (McKinney and Buttersworth 2009:64). According to Kobialka, “Kantor’s artistic endeavours show similarities and intersections with Marcel Duchamp’s ready-mades, Oskar Schlemmer’s stage of abstraction, Jackson Pollock’s action painting, Christo’s small-scale packaged objects, Allan Kaprow’s Happenings and Robert Wilson’s Theatre of images” (1993: xvi). Kantor was one of the first contemporary artists who offered performed comments regarding his own work in progress (see Ibid.:xix).

Josef Svoboda (1920-2002) Czech carpenter, architect, scenographer, and multimedia artist is supposed to be one of the best examples of scenographer as such. ‘Joseph Svoboda demonstrated a remarkable combination of the qualities of an architect, the detailed technical knowledge of an engineer and a scenographer’s artistic sensibilities” (Palmer 2013:108). ‘Svoboda’s lighting innovations enabled light to be used as though it were a plastic material, and the stage space could be demarcated by light. The effect of light as substance came about as the light beams picked up dust or haze in the atmosphere of the theatre and it seemed like solid forms could be created and then dissolved” (McKinney and Buttersworth 2009: 66-67). In my opinion, not many of his devices could have been invented without the politics of socialism in Eastern Europe, which
validated art as an integral part of national identity and encouraged him to create a new kind of theatre, one where he could produce technical innovations and openly experiment with the elements of scenography in total independence from traditional stage directors and conventional dramatic literature.

Robert Wilson (1941-) is another contemporary performance artist that uses the stage as a total work of art. ‘Since the late 1960s, Robert Wilson’s productions have decisively shaped the look of theater and opera. Through his signature use of light, his investigations into the structure of a simple movement, and the classical rigor of his scenic and furniture design, Wilson has continuously articulated the force and originality of his vision creating close ties and collaborations with leading artists, writers, and musicians’ (see robertwilson.com). According to Wilson himself “light is the most important actor on stage’ (Palmer 2013:117). In my opinion, Wilson has had a massive influence on the stage since the 1970’s and embodied for a long time, the artistic practice of scenography in the fullest sense.

Heiner Goebbels (1952-) is a German composer, director, and a researcher-creator of scenography who has overridden the need to strictly adhere to formal academic convention by testing and re-evaluating his own ideas over time and in different contexts (see Collin 2017: xix). Goebbels sets out a “collaborative, non-hierarchical model in which no one discipline dominates and in which the integration of theory and practice are core principals” (Ibid.: xviii). He also calls into question the institutionalized models of how to direct, act, design, sing, and make music. He devises a production with and through the potential of all participants: pianos, stones, water, salt, wood and metal. Mistrusting “representation” becomes a matter of principle. I find it relevant to underline that his scepticism is not just against human actors, but fundamentally against the conventions of theatre: ‘against stage design which illustrates, against merely functional lighting, against costumes which comment, and against texts which above all want to make announcements rather than maintain an artistic reality’ (Goebbels 2015:83). For me, he is a guiding light (or sound) in the search for unimagined performing spatialities.

Finally, I will bring the focus onto my personal champion:

Katrin Brack (1959-), German scenographer whose work might be a pristine example of the performative autonomy of a scenographic assemblage. According to Anja Niouduschewski, her reductionist choice to depend on the performance of one simple material: rain, confetti, foam, snow, or balloons has made monumental artistic assertions. In her opinion, Brack stretches time and space while capturing the ephemeral quality of a live performance by creating one image in progress with no beginning or end (2010:14). Niouduschewski remarks that every critic that has reviewed Brack’s work, has characterised her as: “the minimalist, the meteorologist, the architect, the landscape designer, the atmospherist” (2010: 15), making her relation to the space on the stage hard to grasp. These terms also describe the expansion of her material’s perspective “into infinity and intangibility”. (2010:19). Brack’s scenographic installations have been explored successfully by director-collaborators Luc Percéval and Dimitir Gotscheff, demanding that the human actors and their fictional characters explore the given conditions and understand that the atmosphere is an uncontrollable co-player (see Ibid:17).

For Stefanie Carp, Brack has given rise to something on stage that contradicts the absoluteness of human-centred dramatic time. Her stage installations are proliferations: they grow or decay.
Her sets are not sets. They are not storable. For Carp, “matter moves in an apparently uncontrolled way through space like a natural occurrence, a continuous dazzling rain, a dense downpour of confetti, a constantly reshaping and actor swallowing fog, or an unstoppable spurting of foam; they are all independents events with their own independent time” (Ibid: 21). The material she has chosen does not become an allegory but remains innocent as if radiating energy. “Brack’s world is not a social world but an environment that is simply there and is independent of humans, consisting basically of time, quantity calculations and light” [...] “They are never realistic; they appear not to signify anything. They are not symbols but a climate with independent life that is unconcerned by the human conflict on stage” (see Carp 2010:20-21). Carp observes that Brack creates spaces beyond social history where human characters encounter situations that determine their existence, their type of movement: they encounter another existence that is not concerned with them. According to Carp, Brack created the greatest resistance to human acting (Ibid: 22).

To finish this part of my analysis, I will take into account that resisting human centred performances makes a radical political and ethical difference when thinking about theatre. I am most inclined to further investigate these nonhuman manifestations.

4.2 A personal manifesto on expanding scenography

I am happy to finally publish the ideas that haunted me back in 2015 when I presented them for the first time at the IFRT conference in the Prague Quadrennial. They became the motor of my artistic work and the flesh of this thesis and, after putting them into practice, I can offer them as my “lived” artistic experience.

0 Scenography is a performing body.

Scenography is a body, a non-human body. Scenography plays its own dialogue, its own movements. It breathes and talks and shouts or remains silent. It is possible to consider nonhuman bodies as performing, independent of human sight. Scenography neither exists only in relation to human actions or actors, nor activates only in front of a human spectator.

1 Expanding scenography is defined as such by the scenographer.

I think that scenographers are entitled to define their work as scenography expanding. The acceptance of the continuous expansion of the discipline and the field of study is a matter of an open disposition.

2 The scenographer is the first human spectator of scenography (and can be the only human one).

According to McKinney and Butterworth, “expanded” scenography activates new modes of spectatorship (2009, 196). I argue that designers and makers are the first human spectators of the performativity of scenographic assemblages. This performativity starts with the first assemblage of materials and may end with the deconstruction of the whole.

3 The scenographer is a performer.

The scenographer performs too. Most of the time, the scenographer’s performance is hidden from a conventional audience, who is supposed to only appreciate the outcomes of the “final”
product. Rehearsals, experiments and tests, try-outs of scenographic assemblages, costumes and props are performances embedded in the practice of design and they are spectacles in their own right, even if a regular audience did not pay for a ticket.

4 Scenographic assemblages perform also before and after the attendance of a human spectator.

During my dissertation, I offered visual evidence of the ever-continuous performativity of scenographic assemblages, trying to deconstruct and challenge the idea that the performance of scenography only counts if it happens before a human audience. The pre-performance of scenography starts with the assemblage of materials and the processes of constructing. They constitute performances of transformation and the limitation of potentialities. I documented evidence of the pre-dramatic performance of scenography during the construction periods, loading-in days, and technical rehearsals of three different scenographic assemblages. I have thousands of images that I offer as a testimony of new unimagined aesthetics and agency. After the artistic event is over, scenography performs on paper, on electronic devices, on videos, on frames other than the stage away from “the rules of traditional performance”. Post-performance scenography operates without a sovereign of the process. It plays free.

5 Scenographic performance expands through digital documentation.

As a conclusion of my research, I argue that scenographic assemblages sustain a lively pulse, performing in photographic images, electronic devices and video or computer screens. Digital records are also framed re-presentations. It seems that the electronic representational system constitutes “an alternative and absolute world” that incorporates the spectator/user in a new state “spatially decentred, weakly temporalized and quasi-disembodied” (Ibid.: 170). Scenographic assemblages may remain for retrospective study as a printed or electronic image, still or moving. They may also become an artistic material that performs in different ways, on different fields. Visual and digital materials generate a new space for “post-performance”. They play in front of a new spectator, one that has become a reader, a student, or a researcher.

4.3 Future perspectives for thinking and teaching expanding scenography

To conclude with my analysis, I found that the conceptual foundation of my inquiry holds with Jane Bennet’s perception that presents and understands space as “a turbulent field in which various and variable materialities collide, congeal, morph, evolve, and disintegrate” (2010: Xi). I conducted an intuitive post-human approach that stretched my own scenographic concepts of agency, action, and freedom. In my experience, space has always acted as an agent with its own trajectories, propensities, or tendencies; it has always induced me into an aesthetic-affective openness and a political curiosity for the contributions of nonhuman actants “and into a cultivated, patient, sensory attentiveness to nonhuman forces operating outside and inside of the human body” (See Bennet 2010, x and xiv). The outcomes of my investigation make me argue that a scenographic assemblage that is designed with the vibrancy of spatial agency in mind will behave as an autonomous nonhuman body, capable of unimagined actions.
To close this dissertation, I think that expanding scenography should resist a foundational tactic. In this sense, “expanded” means “it has already expanded” ... but the expansion still continues.

It is not possible to define the discipline of scenography by the coherence and continuity of any pre-established norms. It is necessary to include the emergence of the “incoherent” and “discontinuous” and include the multiple descriptions of *the experience of scenography*.

I think that expanding scenography must be appreciated under a new set of terms that move away from the hierarchies of “subordination” established by traditional theatre or the entertainment business. Scenographic agency and its definition should not be determined fully in advance until it is observed performing before, during and after the time of the event. Scenography is a living body and an open-ended process. I invite my readers to discover the potential of the unsuspected and to nourish their artistic experience beyond the conventional norms of professional set design. Scenography should not depend on the sensibility of one director that may not be interested at all in allowing the elements of the system to perform according to their own “capacities”. Scenographic assemblages may be more exciting on stage if imagined as self-shaping and self-limiting, keeping their inherent contradictions intact.

Finally, it is a fact that the three scenographic assemblages of my study have been dismantled, destroyed, or recycled. It was never anybody’s intention to preserve them as an artistic unity to be part of a museum collection. I aim for an art that is conducive to perception and mind expansion in a non-capitalistic sense. I might be the author of the experience but not the owner nor the seller. My goal is to teach how to create an artistic experience from an evanescent situation, provoking the performativity of human and nonhuman bodies controlling it or leaving it out of control, free of charge. I have established a set of conditions for my artistic work; the only validation it needs comes directly from the body (human or nonhuman) experiencing it.

To conclude, I allege that space is the primordial body that houses our bodies and that it communicates, in a natural-cosmic way, through our human perception. I find that there is a possibility of establishing an alternative dialogue with space before, during and after we interact directly with it. I do not think you need to be human to value the sensual impact of space. The conceptualizing of unimagined evanescent spatialities in my work aims to shift the focus from “scenographic objects and matters” to aesthetically appreciating the most ordinary, incidental, accidental human and nonhuman assemblages that show their agency away from the gaze of a conventional public. My study can help designers to intensify self-consciousness and self-spatial awareness and start looking at ephemeral assemblages from unimagined points of view that come from pure intuition.

I recommend taking a post-human approach to understanding that scenography works as a system and considering that bodies in space are always performing their own agenda. My intention is to enable participants of a spatial situation to merge together all of the conditions of the space they get in touch with. I argue that there is a misleading emphasis on spectator participation in relation to scenography, and on human participation at the center of every scenic/spatial event. I aim to critically impact the way spatial design is taught and to expand these reflections into other areas of scenographic and architectural practice. Finally, I will encourage an open recognition of scenographers expanding as independent thinkers, philosophers, political
activists, researchers, curators, or artistic directors that are willing to mindfully observe the vibrancy of spatial agency and its yet unimagined manifestations.

Even if it seems too subjective to propose that others follow their intuition, I do not wish to limit my metaphysical approach to space. I hope to keep using the stage as a laboratory of the unimagined, and hope that institutions open to the potential of what might be considered disorderly conduct in the production of performance arts. I am interested in artistic actions that could be perceived as disrespectful to the principles of what theatre is and aim to bring a disruption of the current concepts around the submissive discipline of theatrical scenography. I aim to provoke and co-exist with scenographic assemblages that may have “their own agenda” and behave independently from human desires. I wish my experimental work might encounter new allies and encourage new troublemaking practices in scenographic design.
References


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Figures

Figure 1. OPM: Photo of the White Model. ©Mónica Raya
Figure 2. OPM: Elevation Plan for stage portals. ©Mónica Raya
Figure 3. OPM: Elevation plan including all the flying silhouettes. ©Mónica Raya
Figure 4. OPM: Construction Plan for ‘Giant Mouse’ and ‘Moon’. ©Mónica Raya
Figure 5. OPM: Construction Plan for ‘Ship’ and ‘Flame’. ©Mónica Raya
Figure 6. OPM: Construction Plan for ‘Rabbit’, ‘Snowflake’ and ‘Flower’. ©Mónica Raya
Figure 7. OPM: Construction Plan for ‘Rooster’ and ‘Swan’. ©Mónica Raya
Figure 8. OPM: Construction Plan for ‘Beast’ and ‘Windmill’. ©Mónica Raya
Figure 9. OPM: Construction Plan for ‘Judges catwalk’. ©Mónica Raya

Figure 10. OPM: Naked stage with Ship silhouette. This photograph shows one of the first trials of the performativity of the flat silhouettes. The black legs are not on the ground level. The image shows non-designed lights and shadows. The evanescent spatiality of the image shows an unimagined assemblage of human and nonhuman bodies getting to know each other.

Figure 11. OPM: Ship Silhouette and projections. In this image, the Ship’s silhouette carries a projection on its surface, and the back screen shows an abstract back projection. The materiality of the wooden silhouette interacts with the “immateriality” of light. This interaction only lasted few seconds; it is only me that has a record of its evanescence. Photo ©Paulina Campos.

Figure 12. OPM: Unimagined Assemblage. There was no stage management responsible for this image. The photograph shows the interaction between the bodies of the human dancers, the back and frontal light, and the silhouettes of the stage elements. It is also possible to advert the duplicated shadows of two stagehands invading the space without intention. I still feel a sort of fascination for this accidental scenographic assemblage performing as an evanescent spatiality. Photo by ©Lariza Reyes.

Figure 13. OPM: The Backstage Perspective. Many interesting assemblages of human and nonhuman bodies were recorded from the back of the stage. Unfortunately, this perspective is seldom appreciated by the directors or the producers and very rarely by a regular audience. However, these views would have taken a maximum use of the space and shown an alternative way of approaching the dancer’s experience. Photo by ©Lariza Reyes.

Figure 14. OPM: Behind the Screen. This image shows the shadows of the technical crew working behind the back screen. The actions of the invisible human performers fixing the projector in the back, show a second space and a non-rehearsed choreography, one that could have been carefully staged by an attentive director and added to the show on television. I argue that the study of the evanescent spatialities that perform before the regular audience enters the venue is an informative and inspirational mise-en-scène tool that could take scenography to unforeseen levels of action. Photo by ©Mónica Raya.
**Figure 15.** OPM: *Study of Depth.* Taken from behind the Jury’s desk, this photograph reveals the layers of the scenographic space and its depth, and therefore additional possibilities for different scenic actions. My claim is that with the help of the visual records of the scenographer, that can also be appreciated as “visual notes” the shootings of the TV show could have anticipated better angles for a much more interesting “making of” the contest. Photo by @Mónica Raya.

**Figure 16.** OPM: *Spatial Dimensionality.* This photograph captures the scenic elements hanging from the ceiling of the auditorium. It was my intention that the TV cameras would capture these angles and offer alternative images to use in the editing room. I wanted to show the vibrancy of the architectural spatiality. Unfortunately, the potential use of the scenic elements was reduced to the usual frontal shots of the stage. Photo by @Mónica Raya.

**Figure 17.** OPM: *Angles and Color.* The collage of these images allowed me to reflect on color and lights, and how I would have used them if I had been the lighting designer. Most of these trials were discarded by the producers but saved by the scenographer on a digital format. Photos @Mónica Raya.

**Figure 18.** OPM: *Saturation.* This photograph shows the action of lighting designer simply playing with light projectors. The solid materiality of the scenic elements added to the production of multiple shadows. I see this image as a tool for documenting the unimagined. I wish this nondramatic performance of nonhuman bodies could have contributed to charge the space of the stage with life of its own. The collection of the evanescent spatialities that appear and disappear during rehearsals may help designers notice the unexpected vitality of given spaces. Sometimes I feel the space is talking to me, saying “look at me!... Look what I can become!” Photo @Mónica Raya.

**Figure 19-20.** OPM: *Unimagined Reflections.* I took these photographs of the OPM scenery at the Palace of Fine Arts during the lighting rehearsal for the *Live Grand Finale*. The image of the proscenium is doubled by the mirror effect produced by the shiny surface of the Jury’s table. The silhouettes of the seats also take part in the composition. These mysterious scenarios existed only few seconds before they were erased by the lighting designer. To document the reflection on the table was my privilege. Photos @Mónica Raya.

**Figure 21-22.** OPM: *Invisible Reflections.* These images were to be appreciated only from the Jury’s table. Then, the only spectator was the scenographer herself, and now it can be shared with the reader of the image. Photos @Mónica Raya

**Figure 23-24.** OPM: *In between scenes.* These photographs show the ballet dancers from an unusual stage angle, but one that could have been taken advantage of, with the crane holding the TV camera. The human dancers were preparing for the performance; the lighting designer was also rehearsing his lighting cues. These moments preceded the formal performance but could have been re-staged for the show, if I had previously spotted them and used them as feedback for the producers. They showed the ephemeral reality of the reality show. Photos @Andrea López.

**Figure 25.** OPM: *TV camera meets Ship and human dancer.* Three bodies appear in the center of the image; two of them are nonhuman: the TV camera on a crane and the scenic silhouette of the Ship. When I saw this image in retrospective, I wished I had imagined a more audacious use of the technological devices, that would have allowed the directors and producers to consider the presence of the body of the camera for many of the dancing scenes in the program. Photo @Mónica Raya.

**Figure 26.** OPM: Spatial perspectives on TV. Screen shots from the videos available on You Tube. Gala 1. ©Photos Lariza Reyes /Aris Pretelin.

**Figure 27.** OPM: Spatial perspectives on TV. Screen shots from the videos available on You Tube. Gala 4. © Photos Lariza Reyes /Aris Pretelin.
Figure 28. OPM: Spatial perspectives on TV. Screen shots from the videos available on You Tube. Gala 3. © Photos Lariza Reyes /Aris Pretelin.

Figure 29. DG: Ground plan. Set design Mónica Raya (2012).

Figure 30. DG: Top projection of the plafond. Set design Mónica Raya 2012.

Figure 31. DG: Elevation that shows the scenographic elements. Set design Mónica Raya 2012.

Figure 32. DG: Plans for the platforms and other scenographic elements. Set design Mónica Raya 2012.

Figure 33-34-35. DG: These photographs were taken during the general rehearsal of Don Giovanni or the dissolute acquitted. To give focus to the human bodies, the rest of the scenographic assemblage is shown fragmented and in the background. The human spectators never see the performance as a framed shot, but the production’s photographs usually disregard the visual composition of the scenographer. Teatro UNAM, Mexico City, 2012. Scenic Design: Mónica Raya. Photo ©Andrea López.

Figure 36. DG: This is an open shot of the human actors performing within the scenographic assemblage taken during the general rehearsal. This shot was advised by the scenographer. Teatro UNAM, Mexico City, 2012. Scenic Design: Mónica Raya. Photo ©Andrea López. Production Photographs of Don Giovanni or the dissolute acquitted. Teatro UNAM, Mexico City, 2012. Scenic Design: Mónica Raya. Photo ©Andrea López.

Figure 39-40. DG: Unimagined colours and geometrical shadows that manifested during technical rehearsals for the staging of Don Giovanni or the dissolute acquitted. Teatro UNAM. Photo ©Andrea López.

Figure 41–42. DG: Technical staff posing with unimagined lights that manifested by chance during technical rehearsals for the staging of Don Giovanni or the dissolute acquitted. Teatro UNAM. Photo © Andra López. Technical Rehearsals for the staging of Don Giovanni or the dissolute acquitted. Teatro UNAM. Photo ©Andrea López.

Figure 43. DG: Unimagined golden and red shadows. Technical Rehearsals for the staging of Don Giovanni or the dissolute acquitted. Teatro UNAM. Photo © Andrea López.

Figure 44. DG: Stage Manager Santiago López and scenographer’s assistant Lariza Reyes working on stage. Evanescent spatialities found by playing during lighting technical rehearsals. Photo ©Andrea López.

Figure 45. DG: Stage manager Santiago López and scenographer Mónica Raya, walking on the set for DG. Stage lights were there by accident. Photo ©Lariza Reyes.

Figure 46–47. DG: Screen shots from the documentary video of the accidental discovery. The first image on the left corresponds at 1'16" of the unimagined performance and the second on the right at 4'40”.

Figure 48-49. DG: Screen shots from the documentary video of the accidental discovery. The first image on the left was recollected at 0’58” and the second on the right at 4’10”. ©MónicaRaya

Figure 50-51. DG: Evanescent spatialities found through a non-dramatic performative protocol. On the left, SS AMT-DG mov o pre-set 5’50” and on the right, SS AMT-DG mov o pre-set 0’12”.

Figure 52-53. DG: On the left, SS AMT-DG mov 3 (o’05”) and on the right SS AMT-DG mov 3 (o’12”). ©MónicaRaya

Figure 54-55. DG: On the left, SS AMT-DG mov 4 (o’18”) and on the right SS AMT-DG mov 4 (o’24”). ©MónicaRaya

Figure 56-57. DG: On the left, SS AMT-DG mov 6 (3’45”) and on the right SS AMT-DG mov 6 (6’45”). ©MónicaRaya

Figure 58-59. DG: On the left, SS AMT-DG mov 7 (4’50”) and on the right SS AMT-DG mov 7 (5’46”). ©MónicaRaya
Figure 60-61. DG: On the left, SS AMT-DG mov 8 (2'00”) and on the right, SS AMT-DG mov 8 (6’30”). ©Mónica Raya

Figure 62-63. DG: On the left, SS AMT-DG mov 9 (0’21”) and on the right, SS AMT-DG mov 9 (3’35”). ©Mónica Raya

Figure 64-65. DG: On the left, SS AMT-DG mov 11 (0’05”) and on the right, SS AMT-DG mov 11 (3’40”). ©Mónica Raya


Figure 67-68. DG: SS DG Love Machine 01’40” SS DG Love Machine 01’ 51”. Don Giovanni o el disoluto absuelto Mónica Raya. vimeo.com: Mónica Raya Estudio. ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 69-70. DG: SS DG Love Machine 01’ 52” and SS DG Love Machine 01’ 36”. Don Giovanni o el disoluto absuelto Mónica Raya. vimeo.com: Mónica Raya Estudio. ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 71-72. DG: SS DG Love Machine 02’ 41” and SS DG Love Machine 03’ 03”. Don Giovanni o el disoluto absuelto Mónica Raya. vimeo.com: Mónica Raya Estudio. ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 73. LHQ: Elevation Plan. ©Mónica Raya

Figure 74. LHQ: Scenographic elements. Cars and Temple. ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 75. LHQ: Elevation for the Shadow wall and Black Mirror. ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 76. LHQ: Plafond ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 77. LHQ: General Ground Plan ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 78. LHQ: Plafond ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 79-80. LHQ: 1:50 Scale Model built to design the dramatic movement protocol. Preset 1 and scene 2. Hand made by Aris Pretelin. ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 81-82. LHQ: 1:50 Scale Model built to design the dramatic movement protocol. Set scene 3 and scene 4. Hand made by Aris Pretelin. ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 83-84. LHQ: 1:50 Scale Model built to design the dramatic movement protocol. Set scene 5 and scene 6. Hand made by Aris Pretelin. ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 85-86. LHQ: 1:50 Scale Model built to design the dramatic movement protocol. Set scene 7 and scene 8. Hand made by Aris Pretelin. ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 87-88. LHQ: 1:50 Scale Model built to design the dramatic movement protocol. Set scene 9 and scene 10. Hand made by Aris Pretelin. ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 89-90. LHQ: 1:50 Scale Model built to design the dramatic movement protocol. Set scene 11 and scene 12. Hand made by Aris Pretelin. ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 91-92. LHQ: Testing vertical dancing. Foro Experimental Jose Luis Ibañez (FEJLI) Photo ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 93. LHQ: This is one example of the evanescent spatialities photographed during rehearsals at the Teatro Carlos Lazo. This image shows the first try-out of the video mapping and represent visual evidence of the sensual vitality of the nonhuman bodies that played in the scenographic assemblage. Photos by ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 94. LHQ: This is a shot of the scenographic assemblage under the effect of the working lights at the Teatro Carlos Lazo. The wall on the left, belongs to the auditorium. The set was not particularly designed for this stage, but I loved the way the space welcomed the mobile architecture of my design. Photos by ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 95. LHQ: This image shows the assemblage under a found light cue a cue that was recorded for a previous show. It was available on the light console. I asked the technical staff to show me whatever they had recorded on their files. This is another example of unimagined beauty found by chance at
the Teatro Carlos Lazo. This image brings visual evidence of the vibrant vitality of scenographic assemblages and nonhuman bodies. Photos by Mónica Raya.

Figure 96. LHQ: The moment captured by this photograph shows a member of the technical staff immersed in the body of the scenographic assemblage under the light effect of a single [random] stage lamp. I find that the dialogue with the adjacent walls of the theatre is beautiful. Teatro Carlos Lazo. Photos by Mónica Raya.

Figure 97. LHQ: Provoked random interaction of lights and architecture during load in at the Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón without the attendance of a conventional audience and without ‘validation’. Photos by Mónica Raya.

Figure 98. LHQ: Human performers getting to interact with the monumental body of the scenographic assemblage and its nonhuman performers at the Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón. Photos by Mónica Raya.

Figure 99. LHQ: Unimagined house for hanging lights. Evanescent spatiality collected during the final days of installation at the Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón. Photos by Mónica Raya.

Figure 100. LHQ: Exploring the effect of the back lights: playing with obstacles and discovering shadows. Evanescent spatiality collected during lights installation at the Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón. Photos by Mónica Raya.

Figure 101. LHQ: Checking the lights illuminating the plafond. Ephemeral tranquility photographed during the montage at the Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón. Photos by Mónica Raya.

Figure 102. LHQ: Black Lines. Evanescent spatiality provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017) SS V1 0’54”. Mónica Raya.

Figure 103 LHQ: House with arms. Evanescent spatiality provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017) SS V2 0’00”. Mónica Raya.

Figure 104. LHQ: Blue Humans at work. Evanescent spatiality provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017) SS V3 3’41”. Mónica Raya.


Figure 106. LHQ: Black hat. Evanescent spatiality provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017). SS V5 0’19”. Mónica Raya.


Figure 108. LHQ: Tezcatlipoca’s eye. Evanescent spatiality provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017). SS V21 8’57”. Mónica Raya.


Figure 110. LHQ: Watermelon. Evanescent spatiality provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017). SS V20 1’00”. Mónica Raya.

Figure 111. LHQ: Big Eye. Evanescent spatiality provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017). SS V20 1’00”. Mónica Raya.

Figure 112. LHQ: Black fire. LHQ Evanescent spatiality provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017). SS V8 0’36. Mónica Raya.

Figure 113. LHQ: LHQ: Black Pineapple. Evanescent spatialities provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017) SSV9 0’21”. Mónica Raya.

Figure 114. LHQ: Stone Jewellery. LHQ: Evanescent spatiality provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017). SS V13 2’40”. Mónica Raya.
Figure 115. LHQ: *Double snake*. Evanescent spatiality provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017). SS V13 1’19”. ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 116. LHQ: *Cosmic dust and smile*. Evanescent spatiality provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017). V14 2’30”. ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 117. LHQ: *Sacred geometry*. Evanescent spatiality provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017). SS V11 2’40”. ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 118. LHQ: *Standing Presence*. Evanescent spatiality provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017) SS V10 0’10”. ©Mónica Raya.


Figure 120. LHQ: *Yellow corners*. LHQ: Evanescent spatiality provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017). SS V1 3’16”. ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 121. LHQ: *Tezcatlipoca’s palace*. LHQ: Evanescent spatiality provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017). SS V1 9’56”. ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 122. LHQ: *Water Snakes*. Evanescent spatiality provoked at technical rehearsals. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017). SS V17 7’13”. ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 123. LHQ: *Smoked and blue*. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017). SS V22 10’30”. ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 124. LHQ: *Colorful geometry*. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017). SS V18 8’19”. ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 125. LHQ: *Tula, Hidalgo. Archaeological site*. Photo by ©Diana Reséndiz.

Figure 126. LHQ: The cast performing a ritual offering in Tula, the ancient city of Ce Ácatl Topiltzin Quetzalcóatl, king of the Toltecs. At the front, Sanders, and his female partner. Both man and woman were needed to conduct the floral offering. We wore white clothing, red bands around heads and waists (to protect ourselves from evil energy) and ayoyotes (rattles) around our ankles to make noise during our march and scare evil spirits. ©Diana Reséndiz.

Figure 127. LHQ: *Tendido de Flores* (Flower offering). Gustavo Sanders and his *Comadrita* (female partner) conducted the mounting of the floral offering. After the ritual, we took it back with us since the authorities do not permit rituals inside the site without a special permission. Photo ©Diana Reséndiz.

Figure 128. LHQ: *I asked Gustavo Sanders to perform a ritual on the stage, to salute the ancient gods and ask for their permission to embody them and their blessing. Attending the ritual was completely voluntary for cast and crew members. Teatro Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (2017). © Diana Reséndiz.

Figure 129. LHQ: This is a photo of the black stone that was chosen by a vendor in Tula specially for me to wear. The person that gave it to me, the head of the stagehand team, Mario Alvarez described my duties to the vendor and this stone was chosen among others. When I received it, it was deep black. After a few days the crystal sparkles appeared. I was very surprised by this, but Mario found it natural. It makes me feel as if my energy was saved in the stone, as if something was activated by an unknown power. It has become an amulet for protection. Is this primitive thinking? ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 130. LHQ: At the centre of the image, a skeleton figure can be distinguished on the surface of our black mirror. It is possible to see the side of a skull and what seems to be a small arm made of bones. Some of the members of the technical staff and myself started to share this kind of ‘visions’. We did not laugh or made fun about it. We just worked on the stage with the idea that we were sharing the space with ‘them’. ©Mónica Raya.

Figure 131-132. LHQ: These two photographs were taken from the perspective of my working table, located in the center of the auditorium. In the top photograph. I saw a gigantic eye looking back at me. In the bottom photograph, the gigantic eye is now looking down at José, the technical
director/stage manager. Most of this evanescent spatialities happened by unexpected interactions between the [human and nonhuman] bodies on the stage. © Mónica Raya

**Figure 133-134.** LHQ: These two photographs show the faces of two monumental characters, with eyes, noses or opened mouths. I did not imagine this type of performativity when I designed the scenographic assemblage. I saw the manifestation of these evanescent spatialities as an outcome of the invisible bridge I decided to build by performing our spiritual rituals. It was not only me who became open to interact with invisible forces on a different level of consciousness, it was a common feeling, a shared atmosphere. © Mónica Raya.

**Figure 135.** LHQ: Screen Shot at 16' 50” taken from the video on-line available on the internet. It is wonderful to see the connection between every-body on the stage. Photo by ©. Mónica Raya. To watch the full show of LHQ go to (https://youtu.be/tip5nJQL3Yo) © Mónica Raya.

**Figure 136.** LHQ: Screen Shot taken at 1h 22' 21”, from the video performance available on You Tube. The materiality of the costumes becomes the main performer in the photograph. (https://youtu.be/tip5nJQL3Yo) © photos by © Mónica Raya.

**Figure 137-138-139-140-141.** LHQ: Unimagined Performing Spatialities: invisible for a regular audience, visible for a mindful-contemplative scenographer. © Photo by Mónica Raya.
Appendices

Appendix 1

OPM Gala 1

https://es.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=%C3%93pera_Prima_en_Movimiento&oldid=119370290

Scarlett González: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=esgVo-alFxg
Laura Patricia Velásquez: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qK3_eCxjdIk
Pitzintekutli Méndez: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FOUMJbPDnDU
Bárbara Treviño: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KR02ykxLEww
Yubal Morales: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KC2FHQK5AWk
Yoalli Sousa: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6L1t2pUAyg
Norman Barrios: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sXEsgVXxfks
Fausto Serrano: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ouyT4X1q6x8
María Antonieta Lamothe: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EOeg0Gcoca8

OPM Gala 2

Laura Patricia Velázquez: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tqWtnq9CAQ
Jesús Torres: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=shVuk2_Df4
María Antonieta Lamothe: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CDy1RdJoluk
Aisha Moreno: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=06gymUdMgPA
Norman Barrios: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kGvcGsmWoKA

OPM Gala 3

Dalí Estrada: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KR02ykxLEww
Bárbara Treviño: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UbH4kyRq-VI
Norman Barrios: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LqIHrY6A9nw
Damián Zamorano: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h7KAawhIUQU
Fausto Serrano: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sExmT5_NEOM
María Antonieta Lamothe: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b8q3iplQp38
Alan Ramírez: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vXYseliJSRU
Roberto Rodríguez: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=27OZoGgtbNc
Yoalli Sousa: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OHowh7Rv5wg
Aisha Moreno: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d4TJsRKMCOI
Fernanda Cervantes: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_3ZXEjx5nnY
Mario Chimal: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5iRMlwysvKA

OPM Gala 4
Nayely Quiroz y Alan Ramírez: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yNBZf3RL1Dk
Yoalli Sousa y Mario Chimal: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lfF3C8KOC9c
Bárbara Treviño y Damián Zamorano: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tECHoY1k6QQ
Dali Estrada y Roberto Rodríguez: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AyzLqKawK9A
Antonieta Lamothe y Fausto Serrano: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dy-rKNAWteg
Patricia Velázquez y Norman Barrios: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wwW1yiAsHlg
Fernanda Cervantes y Jesús Torres: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RxqH1SI7mCY

OPM Gala 5
Antonieta Lamothe y Jesús Torres: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G6-VRGRe3c8
Fausto Serrano: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2T7ptqIfxhQ
Nayely Quiroz y Fausto Serrano: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mRX9-916UbE
Patricia Velázquez y Norman Barrios: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GEtuOasQVKe

OPM TV shows available on line.
Opening. Part 1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-Aei-NyvVA
Opening. Part 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4H1s8Ely6GE
Opening. Part 3: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=scAeavxL-H4
Opening. Part 4: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zGQrquSb5s
Opening. Part 5: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1rDvYXV7q9Q
Opening. Part 6: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4JMUFCrJao

Second TV show Part 1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=imNIXt56sD8
Second TV show Part 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MYicMoppgKo
Third TV show Part 1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=exo_YRvayM
Third TV show Part 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h49XkozL9-s
Third TV show Part 3: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PE5bfK9TV-o
Fourth TV show Part 1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZVozoijTPY4
Fourth TV show Part 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rPPnmiliSww
Fourth TV show Part 3: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=baz76u4njH8
Fifth TV show Part 1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J-AE2JZAVqE
Fifth TV show Part 3: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L-WE46ITuoU
Sixth TV show Part 1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJFOC6dBIAM
Sixth TV show Part 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yhnNhvELnEw
Sixth TV show Part 3: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pajshEahQ3Q
Seventh TV show Part 1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kh5Qh9NmrzM
Seventh TV show Part 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MyBxl9VijJI
Seventh TV show Part 3: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aErxEtOht8k
Eighth TV show Part 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WKYTie1f9tc
Eighth TV show Part 3: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oMWD5It4RDg
Final Contest. Part 1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=go4Xb8nbcRA
Final Contest. Part 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=joKG4efIdPI

Appendix 2

VIDEO MATERIALS

Austera Matemática Teatral Don Giovanni Toma Blanca
https://vimeo.com/44672921
Austera Matemática Teatral Don Giovanni Movimiento 0 Preset
https://vimeo.com/85373875
Austera Matemática Teatral Don Giovanni Movimiento 3
https://vimeo.com/44480806
Austera Matemática Teatral Don Giovanni Movimiento 4
https://vimeo.com/4432026
Austera Matemática Teatral Don Giovanni Movimiento 6
https://vimeo.com/44325741
Austera Matemática Teatral Don Giovanni Movimiento 7
https://vimeo.com/44417561
Austera Matemática Teatral Don Giovanni Movimiento 8
https://vimeo.com/4433078
Austera Matemática Teatral Don Giovanni Movimiento 9
https://vimeo.com/44683339
Austera Matemática Teatral Don Giovanni Movimiento 10
https://vimeo.com/44392304
Austera Matemática Teatral Don Giovanni Back
https://vimeo.com/85367967
Austera Matemática Teatral Don Giovanni Luz y Movimiento
https://vimeo.com/44421635
Don Giovanni o el disoluto absuelto. Mónica Raya (OISTAT Shanghai 2013)
https://vimeo.com/71605538
Documental Toma Blanca Don Giovanni Ensayo
https://vimeo.com/85471836

Link Dropbox
The individual videos can also be found at vimeo.com:

1. **Austera Matemática Teatral Don Giovanni Preset 0** @AndreaLópez
   https://vimeo.com/85379875
2. **Austera Matemática Teatral Don Giovanni Movimiento 3** @AndreaLópez
   https://vimeo.com/44480806
3. **Austera Matemática Teatral Don Giovanni Movimiento 4** @AndreaLópez
   https://vimeo.com/44323026
4. **Austera Matemática Teatral Don Giovanni Movimiento 6** @AndreaLópez
   https://vimeo.com/44325741
5. **Austera Matemática Teatral Don Giovanni Movimiento 7** @AndreaLópez
   https://vimeo.com/44417561
6. **Austera Matemática Teatral Don Giovanni Movimiento 8** @AndreaLópez
   https://vimeo.com/44333078
7. **Austera Matemática Teatral Don Giovanni Movimiento 9** @AndreaLópez
   https://vimeo.com/44683339
8. **Austera Matemática Teatral Don Giovanni Movimiento 11** @AndreaLópez
   https://vimeo.com/44392304

**Appendix 3**

V1 LHQ 10’38”. 12 set scenes and their moving transitions under 61 lighting cues.
https://vimeo.com/395528464
V2 LHQ 0’ 47”. Rehearsal transition from the Set scene 12 to the Preset.
https://vimeo.com/395539831
V3 LHQ 7’ 30”. Set Scene 12 under 61 lighting cues.
https://vimeo.com/395543250
V4 LHQ 4’ 37”. Set Scene 1 under 61 succeeding lighting cues.
https://vimeo.com/395553418
V5 LHQ 1’ 25”. Transition from Set Scene 3 to Set Scene 4. The black mirror.
https://vimeo.com/395559623
V6 LHQ 7’ 08”. Set Scene 5 under 61 succeeding lighting cues.
https://vimeo.com/395560143
V7 LHQ 1’ 09”. Transition from Set Scene 5 to Set scene 6.
https://vimeo.com/395560786
V8 LHQ 1’ 38”. Set Scene 6 under random lighting transition. Human crossing.
https://vimeo.com/396061490
V9 LHQ 0’ 21”. Random fleeting spatiality.
https://vimeo.com/396061887
V10 LHQ 0’ 10”. Random fleeting spatiality.
https://vimeo.com/396061998
V11 LHQ 7’31”. Random Set Position under 61 succeeding lighting cues.
https://vimeo.com/396062292
V12 LHQ 7’06”. Set Scene 10 under 61 succeeding lighting cues.
https://vimeo.com/396062965
V13 LHQ 0’17”. From Set Scene 12 to Pre-set 1.
https://vimeo.com/396065336
V14 LHQ 2’30”. Pre-set 1 under random scenographic mapping.
https://vimeo.com/396065879
V15 LHQ 1’33”. Pre-set 1 under random scenographic mapping.
https://vimeo.com/396067466
V16 LHQ 0’4”. Scenographer on her designed stage.
https://vimeo.com/396067621
V17 LHQ 7’18”. Pre-set 1, random mapping under 61 succeeding light cues.
https://vimeo.com/396068262
V18 LHQ 10’06”. Transition from Preset 1 to Set scene 5 plus mapping under designed light cues.
https://vimeo.com/396069469
V19 LHQ 1’53” Transition from Set Scene 5 to 6 under mapping and under designed light cues.
https://vimeo.com/396071920
V20 LHQ 1’00”. Transition from Set Scene 6 to 7 under designed light cues.
https://vimeo.com/396073299
V21 LHQ 10’27”. Transition Set Scene 7-8-9-4-10 under designed mapping and light cues
https://vimeo.com/396073563
V22 LHQ 11’20”. Random-accidental-chance.
https://vimeo.com/396075289
My research presents a philosophical retrospective report and analysis of accidental aesthetic encounters with unimagined scenographic performativity. The aim is to point at the aesthetic potential of the ephemeral in the construction-rehearsal processes of scenography and to what I present as evanescent spatialities.

Conceptualizing the unimagined spatial performativity aims to aesthetically appreciate the most ordinary, incidental scenographic assemblages that display their brief performativity away from the gaze of a conventional public. Evanescent spatialities are not necessarily or primarily designed by human agents, nor are they conditioned to “exist” by the presence of a human performer or human audiences; rather, they occur autonomously and spontaneously and may be discovered or provoked by the act of playing.

I took a feminist post-human approach to understanding that scenographies work as human and nonhuman assemblages and that bodies in space are always performing their own agenda.

My research exposes an intimate and author-ized visual archive that makes my photographic and video work an expansion of my practice. I envision that scenographers will continue to expand the discipline by exploring the world beyond anthropocentrism and the capitalism of the human-made. My study performs my conviction that a scenographer can also act as a philosopher and as a political activist.
My research presents a retrospective analysis of accidental aesthetic encounters with unimagined scenographic performativity. My aim is to point at the aesthetic potential of the ephemeral in the construction-rehearsal processes of scenography and to what I conceptualized as the evanescent spatialities. My intent is to appreciate the most ordinary, incidental human and nonhuman assemblages that display their brief performativity away from the gaze of a conventional public. They occur spontaneously but also provoked by the act of playing.

I took a feminist post-human approach to present scenographic assemblages as bodies in space that are always in the state of becoming. My research exposes an intimate visual archive that makes my photographic and video work an expansion of my practice and an exploration of space beyond anthropocentrism and the human-made. In the end, my study performs my conviction that a scenographer can act as a philosopher and as a political activist.