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APPROPRI-ACTION  
**CAMP**  
CONTAMINATION  
PATTERNS  
TRANSFORMABILITY  
INFRA-MALL  
LANDSCAPES  
EPHEMERAL  
**PLACES**  
THEATRICALITY  
NEARNESS  
HOMELY CITY  
**LAYERS**  
ASSEMBLAGE  
THRESHOLD  
**WORDS**  
INTERACTION  
**FETISH**  
INTERIORITY  
OPENING  
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PROGRAMS  
CONTEXTILE  
**UNITY**  
POETRY  
REPRESENTATION  
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CROSSING  
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COLOURS  
**HOME**  
BEHAVIOUR  
VERSATILY  
CONNECTIVITY  
**HAPTIC**  
DECOR.ACTION  
IN-BETWEEN  
MEMORIALISED  
**NATURE**  
PERFORMATIVITY  
PROSTHESIS  
TRANSGRESSIVE  
**INSIDE**  
**VISTA**  
NETWORK  
CON·NO·TA·TION  
ELEGANCE  
TRANSITION  
**HYBRID**  
INHABITING  
BOUNDARIES  
CONFIGURATION  
**SHELTER**  
MONTAGE  
PERMEABLE  
PAPERSPACE  
**SURFACE**  
**PATHS**  
TRANSFORMATION  
**OBJECT**  
STRUCTURE  
RE-FUNCTION  
**PRIVACY**

INTERIOR WOR(L)DS \*

ATMOSPHERE  
**BODY**  
EXPERIMENTATION  
COMPOSITION  
INCLUSION  
FLEXIBILITY  
MEETING  
ARTIFICE  
**DEPTH**  
PERCEPTION  
**LIGHT**  
HOSPITALITY  
MEMORY  
PROPORTION  
**SKIN**  
TECHNOLOGY  
MOVEMENT  
SUSTAINABLE  
**RE-USE**



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*Interior Wor(l)ds*

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## Contaminations

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A word check on “contamination” defines it as: “the blending of two forms or of two constructs, in such a way as to give rise to a third form or a third construct”. (1)

The text, which refers to architecture and interiors, to crossovers and osmosis, musters a series of thoughts on the term “contamination” within the overall concept of scenography, not only for theatrical performance but also within an urban context.

Scenography, par excellence, that which relates to live performance in a theatrical setting, is closely linked to the theme of urban scenery. In these two diverse methods of “staging”, the disciplinary confines between the worlds of architecture, art and technology are weak and permeable boundaries; however, they share a common objective: to sensitize and harness the given space, whether it entails producing scenic elements for a show, a street, a piazza or a ludic event.

The substantial difference is that the scenic project is more often perceived, yet not fully experienced; in the case of urban installations, however, the user is invested with a key role in the event. One need only look at the Parco della Scultura in Architettura (in San Donà di Piave, Italy) to understand how architects and artists have realized axiomatic structures (2) where the interplay of art, design and architecture is an established fact.

The installation, even though rich in significance, is immobile; the spectator is therefore the active subject: the visitor is drawn in and thus engages with the architectural and sculptural elements of the object. By contrast, in theatre design it is the spectator who remains immobile and passive: here we have a clear reversal of roles.

As it often happens, the typical example is the spectator/user/inhabitant, the one who the performance/staging/installation is thought for and adjusted on.

That is the reason why the field of theatrical communication, once more, has resulted open to the most extreme themes and solutions: from the setting up of platforms for stadium megashows – of which examples of lack of balance between the audience and the stage – up to the total destruction of space as a collective place for theatrical

Fig. 1.  
Christian Boltanski, *Tant que nous sommes vivants*, Teatro Valli, Reggio Emilia, 2005 (ph. M. Caselli Nirmal)  
© Archivio Biblioteca Mediateca Teatro Valli.

(1) “Contaminazione”, Italian dictionary: Treccani, Roma 2009.  
(2) Krauss 2007.





Fig. 2.  
Aldo Rossi, *La casa abbandonata*, San Donà di Piave, 1996 (ph. arch+art).



Fig. 3.  
Pier Luigi Pizzi, *St. John Passion*, Teatro La Fenice, Venice, first night 1984.

(3) Abbato et al. 2007, 9-10.

(4) *Calderón*, by P.P. Pasolini, directed by L. Ronconi, sets by G. Aulenti, Teatro Metastasio, Prato, 1977.

(5) *L'Orfeo* by C. Monteverdi, directed by L. Ronconi, sets by M. Palli, Teatro Goldoni, Florence, 1997.

(6) *St. John Passion* by J.S. Bach, director and stage designer P.L. Pizzi, Teatro La Fenice, Venice, 1984.

communication. What I am referring to is the experience of “room theatre”, where actors – each in a little room – are visited by a spectator at a time and in front of him they play their parts. At this point I will endeavour to investigate through the appraisal of a number of completed stage design projects in the Italian tradition, how and with what tools directors and scenographers have succeeded in actively engaging the audience. This can come about only if, in theatre, one speaks about the “contamination” of spaces (stage and stalls) and of people (actors and spectators). In an urban setting, however, we discover a different “contamination”, a contamination between experiences and fields of research apparently very distinct (art, sculpture, design, photography).

The theatre is the type of building that has been the least modified over the last two centuries; the vast majority of theatre buildings respond to the characteristics of the Italian-style theatre, the most widely used for the majority of productions. With this, one does not wish to refute the accepted principle of this hallowed spatiality, but it should be brought into question and freshly debated with the aim of creating active audience participation in the action: this is not a coercive space that imposes constraint, but a space that can be reinterpreted. The scenic container should in fact be regarded as a space where breaks with convention can take place in the sense that the standard model of frontal symmetry between auditorium and stage can be altered and shifted, thus challenging the traditional axial, one-directional vision.

The aim is to explore “a general loss of the optimal relationship between the volumes of the auditorium and those of the stage area (...) the result of this lack of dialogue between the world of architecture and that of the scenic arts often manifests as dissatisfaction felt by the theatre planner and designer, and by those who work in it, in addition to members of the audience.” (3) New ways of making use of the performance space have been achieved by those directors and intellectuals that have made the scenic space a site for experimentation: I am referring to Copeau, to Schlemmer, to Grotowski and more recently to Wilson, Ronconi, Fura dels Baus, etc.

Luca Ronconi is a director who has often been proactive in reaching beyond the “traditional” by invading the auditorium; one need only look at two of his productions, *Calderon* (4) and *L'Orfeo* (5); Pier Luigi Pizzi employed the same process when staging his *St. John Passion* (6).

In these works the scenic apparatus occupies the place that has always been destined for the audience: the theatres, emptied of their comfortable seats, take on a new spatiality and the spectators watch the show from above from the boxes.



Fig. 4.  
Studio Azzurro, *Giacomo mio, Salviamoci!*, Teatro Lauro Rossi, Macerata, 1998 (ph. A.Tabocchini).

If Ronconi, in *L'Orfeo*, transforms the auditorium into a lake, Pier Luigi Pizzi transforms the auditorium of the Fenice into an immense German baroque church. Indeed, Pizzi attempted to link the typical Bavarian Catholic spectacularity, with its characteristic decorative wealth of rococo stuccoes, with the images of Italian Catholicism (from Caravaggio to Tiepolo, from Canaletto to Rembrandt).

To cite a more recent production, *Giacomo mio Salviamoci!* by Studio Azzurro (7): a multimedia opera-conference based on the life of Leopardi. The narrative unfolds and takes form through the close dialogue between the musical component and its literary and visual elements: the entire auditorium is surrounded by a circular wrap-around maxi-screen that represents the writing desk-world of Leopardi and it is here that a speaker recites his personal tribute to the poet; on this enormous "table" a chain of images dance across the screen, some of which are activated by the narrator's hand as he touches the table. The audience observes from above the run of video projections of objects as icons and witnesses a continuous intersecting across the three different levels of narrative.

Reality-fiction, interior-exterior are the two points of departure of *Viaggio a Reims* (8): the audience inside the theatre sees the actions that take place projected onto a screen in three external sites: the piazza, the Gallery and the San Fedele Church.

The three screens, differently positioned, monitor, provide evidence of and document the events that unfold outside the theatre; they provide a spectacle, but above all they offer a fresh interpretation of an urban space and a scenic continuity between an outdoor space and an interior space.

The television shoot, by exciting different emotions, becomes a distinguishing element of the theatrical event.

A more recent production, one that is closer to installation than to total theatre: *Tant que nous sommes vivants* (9) by scenographer Christian Boltanski. This touring production sees an integration both of the musical elements and the visual and spatial aspects and involves the whole theatre: thus not only the stage area but also the foyer, the boxes, the stairways and the square in front of the theatre.

It has the semblance of an "exhibition" where the show itself is displayed as a unique work of art and where the spectators, a hundred or so at a time, can wander freely through the theatre's interior, just as if it were an exposition, becoming themselves an integral part of the "show" and therefore part of the entertainment.

As the scenographer states: "the audience isn't simply facing the show, it is actually within it. The most important aspect is that it concerns a work that is halfway between the arts related to time (film, literature, music, theatre) and the arts related to space (painting, architecture, sculpture)." (10)

(7) *Giacomo mio, Salviamoci!*, by Studio Azzurro, music by G. Battistelli and text by V. Sermoni, Teatro Lauro Rossi, Macerata, 1998.

(8) *Viaggio a Reims*, by G. Rossini, conductor: C. Abbado, directed by L. Ronconi, sets by G. Aulenti, Rossini Opera Festival, Pesaro, 1984.

(9) *Tant que nous sommes vivants*, touring opera by C. Boltanski, J. Kallman and F. Krawczyk, installation by C. Boltanski, light designer, J. Kallman, music by F. Krawczyk, Teatro Valli, Reggio Emilia, 2005.



Fig. 5.  
Gae Aulenti, *Viaggio a Reims*,  
Teatro alla Scala, Milan,  
1984 (ph. M. Brescia) ©  
Teatro alla Scala.



Fig. 6.  
Christian Boltanski, *Tant que  
nous sommes vivants*, Teatro  
Valli, Reggio Emilia, 2005  
(ph. M. Caselli Nirmal)  
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Mediateca Teatro Valli.

The action that invades the areas of use, traffic and waiting, which in turn become key performers in the theatrical narrative, also through the use of exciting installation apparatus, allows the public not only the prospect of free movement but above all provides a choice in the viewing and listening experience.

On one side the auditorium, the one place that is inaccessible to the public, covered by a plastic backcloth on which an enormous chandelier is placed; on the other side, the stage area with a lone flautist and a few suspended chairs, dotted here and there, in the boxes and foyer, some guitar players and, along the corridors leading to the boxes, ushers, usherettes and spectators sporting masks depicting animal heads.

If in *Viaggio a Reims* the spectator is seated according to tradition and the actor is mobile, in *Tant que nous sommes vivants* the spectator walks around, lingers in the boxes and follows the action from near or afar. In both cases, however, it is a work that relates to architecture and to how the spectator perceives this new theatrical "interior", this new "relationship."

The projects taken as examples reinterpret and reutilize the interior of the "theatre" space partly along the lines of experimental theatre (reaffirming Artaud's magic word "participation"), thus registering and fostering change. Such stagings are samplings of works considered significant as they support the theory of a new way of producing theatre and because they are instrumental in stimulating a collective reflection on the relationship between actors and audience, demonstrating that this can also occur within a conventional theatre space or by also involving localized urban spaces.

This type of stage design was used by the director and by the scenographer as a new constructional element for a performance space, unifying both the two structural elements of Italian-style theatre – stage and auditorium – and in consequence creating a transgression in their usual hierarchy; "it operates – writes Gae Aulenti – through systematic opposition to and with completely different methods from those that the site provides for." (11)

The number of performers, directors and stage designers that experience the limits of the traditional theatre model and who propose a theatre architecture capable of modifying the canonical relationship between stage and auditorium, and consequently establish and recreate a diverse relationship between performer and spectator, is on the rise.

Back in 1968, Peter Brook declared that the problem least resolved in theatre is that of place, namely the contact between the actor and the audience, and that there is still a lack of theatre buildings that offer a practical solution to this problem. (12)

Staging and/or installing are two very frequent ways of projecting

(10) Abbaro et al. 2007, 134.  
(11) Aulenti 1983, 35.  
(12) Brook 1968.

in contemporary cities and must be considered as means of communication and showing up. In the meantime, they open to further enquiries and disciplinary crossings in that they focus both on the themes of new projects within the theatrical space and on the ones of architectural projects as urban interiors. Through providing several illustrations of the emblematic theatrical reality, the aim is to demonstrate that the word “contamination” is part of a “new dictionary” that tells of the complex world of interiors.

(Translated by Maria Harman)

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INTERIOR WOR(L)DS. This publication wants to outline, in one single narrations made of various contributions, the complex scenery of contemporary Interiors by means of words that best characterize them. Words denominate things, words tell stories, word open to other worlds and to different ways of thinking. We also wish to understand, discuss, and compare everyone's notes without any need of traditional classification. While going around, words spread ideas and stimulate images. In a steady process of self-reinvention, words are never definitive and fixed, on the contrary free and open to change. Words represent things and things can be an instrument to create new stories and ideas. As words transform with time in any society, country or economy we should look for the "key words" of Interiors: we will freeze frame certain ideas, by clarifying and asserting them – always remembering they belong to an open panorama of thought.

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