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# Scenography as a Living Transformator of the Theatrical Space: The 'On Stage' Spatialities of Giorgos Patsas and Dionisis Fotopoulos

Nikolas Kanavaris

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this research is to outline an analysis of the work of set designers Giorgos Patsas and Dionisis Fotopoulos. Scenography is understood as the creation of space situated between the dichotomy of space/place and is semiotically analysed in relation to both the text and the actors' bodies. Through this framework, the published retrospectives of the scenographer were interpreted, and interviews with set designers/critics were conducted to discuss selected works. The liminal spatialities of the scenographic proposals of Patsas/Fotopoulos are signified through their articulation with place/dramatic text and space/performing bodies.

## **Key words**

theatre, scenography, space, place, spatiality, text, body, Patsas, Fotopoulos

The study aims to delve into the work and methodologies of two esteemed figures in Greek scenography, Giorgos Patsas and Dionisis Fotopoulos, whose contributions have yet to receive comprehensive systematic examination and theoretical analysis. With a portfolio spanning over 500 performances from the early 1970s to the mid-2000s, their extensive body of work offers a rich foundation for exploring the practice of scenography and its organisational dynamics. An important facet of this exploration is the availability of retrospective publications showcasing their work, which include photographs, sketches, and critical evaluations. Utilising tools developed for scenographic research post-2000s, these retrospectives serve as a valuable resource for historiographical investigation. The examination of these sources seeks to elucidate how scenography shapes the aesthetic experience of a performance and the processes through which meaning is constructed within the theatrical context.

## The liminal spatiality of scenography

The simultaneous presence is, according to Fischer-Lichte (2008: 38–40), the minimal definition of 'theatre'. This peculiarity is a core element of the stage; it constitutes the quality of not only representing spaces and times, but making them coincide, and giving birth to them. The spectators bear witness to this birth. The stage exists in a 'liminal' state because both the actors and the spectators occupy the same physical space, the theatre, but simultaneously inhabit an 'other' space that emerges from the theatrical performance.

Scenography, as the 'writing in space' (PAVIS 2016: 243) of the stage, is an integral part of the world of action that is established by the performance. Scenography is 'the art that organises this space' (SURGERS 2014: 17), the image, the relationships, and the functions it will assume. The term, as reintroduced by Pamela Howard, signifies the broader concept of spatial production brought about by scenography. It is not any more a decorative process or a mere design of the stage (HAVLÍČKOVÁ KYSOVÁ 2023: 84–85), instead it is an art of 'time, motion, action, and space', described as 'a blend of poetry and painting' (ARONSON 2005: 5). Scenography is primarily concerned with 'the design of spaces and spatial relationships' (NIBBELINK 2019: 103) to establish a network of conditions, rules, and protocols that shape the interactions between actors, the material world, and the spoken stories in a 'total synthesis' (PŘÍHODOVÁ 2011: 261). In this space, ideology, concepts, and methods of scenography shape the bodies of the actors, prescribing gestures, movements, and trajectories. At the same time, the stage space takes form, becomes perceptible, and is modified through the encounter and actions of the actors' bodies. It can be understood as a unique 'inhabitation' carried out by the actors, 'along with the text [...] gestures, masks, costumes, a stage, a direction' (LEFEBVRE 1991: 62), and broader as a 'production of space'. 'Yannis Kokkos [...] when referring to scenography, he speaks of "uninhabited places". Non-luminous places. Incomplete places. Places of anticipation that beckon bodies and lights to come and inhabit them' (Kokkos quoted in BANU 1998: 12).

The space produced by scenography is destabilised by the bodily co-presence of actors and spectators. Spectators inhabit the imaginary world and at the same time they exist in the physical world of the theatre. They discover themselves in an in-between situation, observing the 'representation or, conversely, becoming absorbed in it' (PAVIS 2016: 127). This creates a state of instability, where everything is fluid between the presence and the representation, the material and the imaginative, ultimately 'a state of liminality' (FISCHER-LICHTE 2014: 42). 'The stage, as a condition of liminality between the particularistic characteristics of place and the generalistic characteristics of space, is above all a "way" of space, a unique condition of spatiality' (STAVRIDES 2010: 72).

According to Stavrides (2010: 48–84), the stage can serve as a model for understanding space and thus understanding the dialectical interconnection of space and place as defined by De Certeau (1990: 117–118). Aronson, thinking in theatrical terms about De Certeau's concept 'practiced place', concludes that the space as a result of the performance design is not 'the stage, per se' (ARONSON 2013: 88). It is the application of scenography that imbues space with possible meanings in an open process of constant transformations (ARONSON 2017: xv). Scenography as an artistic practice cannot produce stable spaces with unchanging characteristics but instead programmatically proposes ephemeral, transient, fleeting spatial qualities. As observed by Fischer-Lichte, 'The spatiality of a performance is created in, through, and as the performance space and is perceived under the conditions set by the space' (FISCHER-LICHTE 2014: 23). 'Spatiality as a modality of thought' (MCKINNEY 2005: 137) is a useful tool that interprets the constantly fluctuating movements of people, objects, lights, texts, and sounds produced and affected by the scenographic design. 'Stories thus carry out a labour that constantly transforms places into spaces or spaces into places. They also organize the play of changing relationships between places and spaces' (DE CERTEAU 1990: 118).

Scenography, within the framework of De Certeau, might be seen as an 'unsuccessful place', an attempt at stability, the attribution of identity characteristics that constantly evade within the movement of the actors and the narration of their story. Alternatively, it could be perceived as a 'palimpsestuous space'; Kaye suggests that 'different and even incompatible spaces may realize the various possibilities of a single place' (KAYE 2000: 5), in terms of the potential dynamics that emerge from scenographic design. This condition demonstrates the transformative capability that scenography provides to design spatialities that fluctuate between space and place and their 'constantly combined relation' (KERMODE 2013: 7). Scenography is establishing an intermediary spatiality between place and space, oscillating between the characteristics of both. It is produced as an in-between space because it exists to undergo continuous transformation. The liminal spatiality of scenography is situated between the myth of place, its underlying sub-narratives, and its name on one side, and the journey of space, the walking, and the actor's actions on the other.

## The spatiality of scenography in/through the relationship with text and actors

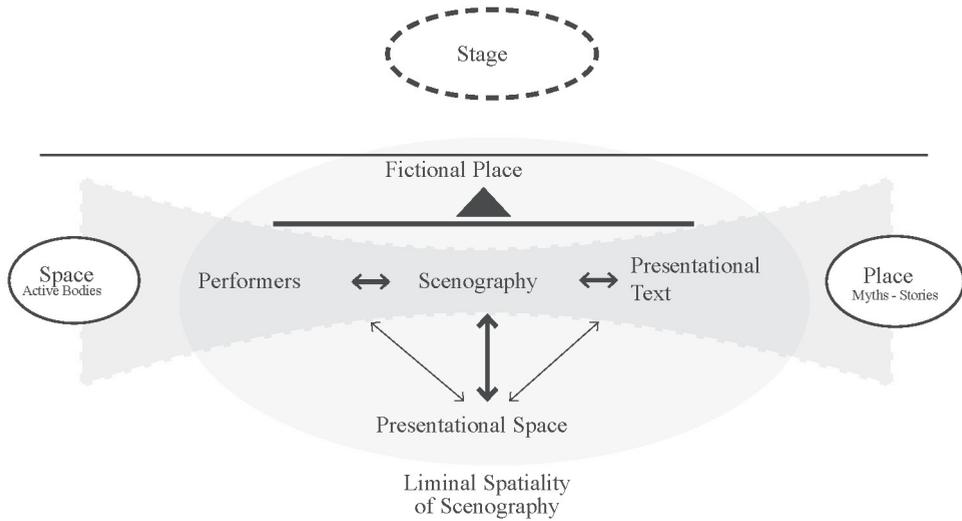
The relationship between scenography and space/place can be perceived as relationships between myth/action, or as described by Fischer-Lichte when exploring the materiality of the performance as a tripolar system. Spatiality, corporeality, and tonality organised by rhythm constitute the ephemeral encounter of actors and spectators (see FISCHER-LICHTE 2014). These relationships determine both the experience of scenography and its semiotics. Each scenography, as an application of a specific system of interrelated signs (ELAM 2002; ASTON and SAVONA 1991), organises the presentational space (scenery, material, or conceptual elements) in a specific way that develops connotative functions and semantic relationships (MCKINNEY and BUTTERWORTH 2009: 152–153). Following McAuley's (1999: 136) framework, the process of constructing meaning in a classical, text-based performance can be defined as the result of the relationship between the presentational text, scenography, and the actor's actions. Focusing on scenography dominant elements (DROZD and KAČER 2020: 16) that structure the relations between the presentational text<sup>1</sup> and the actor's body<sup>2</sup> can be traced and reveal the ways meaning is constructed.

To explore how scenography is installed in each performance, it is necessary to shed light on the articulations it creates with its environment. The focal point is in the 'ways' in which scenography (spatiality) is established as a relationship between place (history, dramatic text, tonality) and space (acting bodies, corporeality), between myth and human action. Meeting spatial theory and semiotics can be crucial in the analysis of performances, as a part of the broader attempt to develop synergies with semiotics (MEERZON and ROZIK 2008), and especially tools utilised in the works of the Prague Linguistic Circle; tools that 'instead of inventing rigid systems, they developed multifaceted set of analytical distinctions that can be used flexibly and universally' (DROZD and KAČER 2020: 15).

Scenography thinks through the relating of these components, and it is specifically this relationality through which performance design 'works'. It seems more appropriate then, to not exclusively focus on either semiotic, phenomenological or material approaches but to join

1 The presentational text, or a more general narrative line (HOWARD 2002; MCKINNEY and BUTTERWORTH 2009), establishes an iconic relationship with scenographic elements with a 'varying degree of semiotic literalness' (ELAM 2002: 21), from text-centred approaches to a stage-centred ones (PAVIS 2003: 198–215). For Kokos 'the dramatic work exists as a primary given' (KOKKOS 1998: 31), while many scholars have formed tripartite schemes: 'acceptance, adaptation, or rejection' (ASTON and SAVONA 1991: 143), 'unity, contrast, topology' (SMALLEY 2012), 'representation, abstraction, paradox' (PANTOUVAKI 2010).

2 The relationship between subjects (acting bodies) and objects within the theatrical convention forms a 'subjective-objective continuum' (ELAM 2002: 14). Veltruský (1964) suggests that an inanimate object can be perceived as a subject performing a role, and a person can be perceived as an element without any will. Drawing on this line, Pavis (1998: 239) proposed the term 'object' (rather than prop) to interpret the stage as a unit in the way it produces meaning, and Sofer (2003: 29) introduced the 'rematerialisation of the Prop' to interpret the complicated life of material object on the stage.



**Fig. 1:** Liminal spatiality of scenography. Concept: author's.

these perspectives in a methodology that responds to scenography's kaleidoscopic qualities (NIBBELINK 2019: 106).

As mentioned in the first section, the stage, as a condition, exists beyond the conceptual distinction of place and space. The 'installation' of the stage as a condition passes through the correlation between the specific characteristics of a place and the general characteristics of the space of human action. Scenography is approached as a liminal spatiality through its articulation with the theatrical text (history, dramatic places) and through its articulation with the actors' bodies, which will deliver the presentational text and act upon it.

## Historiographic research on the work of Patsas | Fotopoulos

The work of the two scenographers under study falls within the post-1970 era, after the establishment of democracy in Greece and the initiation of a cycle of artistic creation. During that period, there is a 'clearly anti-classical shift in the scenic image of performances'<sup>3</sup> (KONOMI 2011: 139). In 1972, a milestone for performances in Epidaurus, the young scenographers Patsas and Fotopoulos transformed the classical image of drama and introduced the logic of 'neo-Primitivism' (KONOMI 2011: 253). Naturalism fades from the expressive vocabulary, while non-Western models are introduced that are not directly related to the Greek tradition as usually happened until

<sup>3</sup> Unless indicated otherwise, all translations from Greek are mine.

then. The work of the scenographers under study consists mostly of performances based on classical texts (ancient Greek tragedies, classical Western repertoire, 20<sup>th</sup> century plays), which are usually staged in major theatrical institutions.

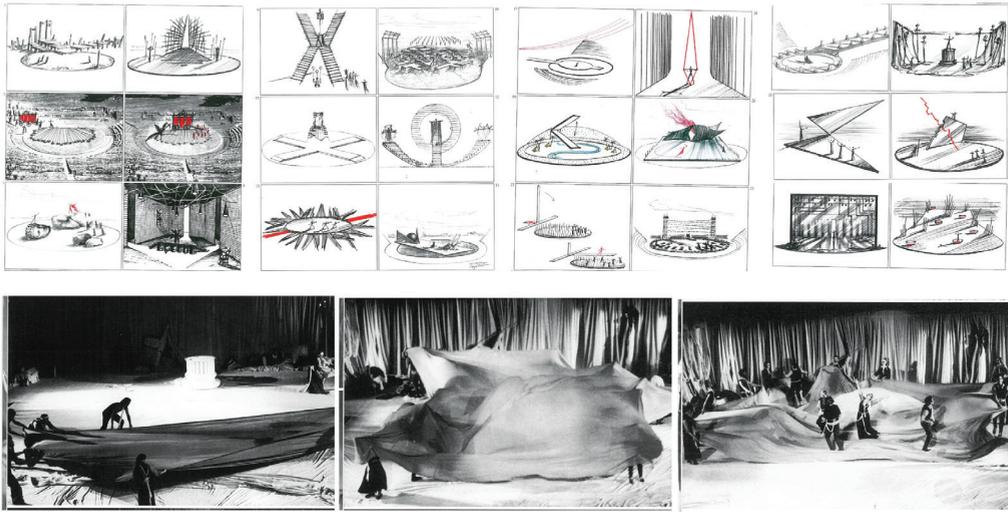
This study explores the artistic contributions of set/costume designers Giorgos Patsas and Dionisis Fotopoulos, primarily drawing insights from their published retrospectives, which seem to follow a common trajectory. Patsas' contributions are primarily sourced from his publications, namely *The Sound of Empty Space* (PATSAS 2006) and *Stage Design – Costumes* (PATSAS 1995), while Fotopoulos' work is referenced from *Stage Design – Costumes 3* (FOTOPOULOS 2011), *Stage Design – Costumes 2* (FOTOPOULOS 1995) and *Stage Design – Costumes* (FOTOPOULOS 1986), in addition to *Dionisis Fotopoulos Scenographer* (URSINI-URŠIČ 2005). Interviews found online serve as supplementary sources of information for the study. The critiques contained in the retrospectives serve as primary sources for interpretation and analysis of their work, contributing to the formation of an archive 'which tells a [...] story' (MCKINNEY and IBALL 2011: 116); in other words, a coherent narrative about their artistic endeavours.

Five scenographic proposals from each designer are selected as samples for further examination. These scenographic proposals (contained in the volumes and selected by the author based on criteria of dispersion over time and the collaborating directors) formed the subject of four interviews. Three scenographers of the subsequent 'generations' who consider Patsas and Fotopoulos as 'teachers', are aware of their work and have collaborated with them; one theatre critic systematically wrote about the period under study. During the interviews, all the material available in the volumes (contributors, photographs, sketches) was provided to the interviewees. The interviews were conducted with: Lili Pezanou (Professor at ASFA), Giannis Metzikof, Maria Konomi (Professor at NKUA), as well as Heraklis Logothetis, a theatre critic and author.

## Giorgos Patsas

I am interested in the rigor of structure... I don't like anything to be left to chance. (PATSAS 2013)

Giorgos Patsas was born in Thessaloniki in 1944 and he discovered his interest in theatre at a young age. He studied at the Free School of Fine Arts with instructors George and Eleni Vakalo. He has a vast body of work in scenography and has received numerous awards and accolades, including representing Greece at the Prague Quadrennial in 1995. Patsas characterises his artistic creation as 'a path of detoxification from the Baroque' (Patsas quoted in FESSA-EMMANOUIL 1999: 205). His work is marked by a continuous effort to achieve minimalism, to simplify because he believes that subtraction is the process that adds poetry to his work (see Fig. 2). The cornerstone of his scenographies is the actor, through whom he attempts to envision and work on the scenic elements. He does not choose to express himself with stylistic variety but simplifies his scenographic proposals to the minimum. He claims that there is a cohesive



**Fig. 2:** Top: Sketches (PATSAS 2006: 20–24). Bottom: Aeschylus, *Psychostasia*, 1979 (PATSAS 2006: 314–317). Set-costumes by Patsas.

thread connecting his entire scenographic body of work, a consistent approach to how he engages with art and reality: '[A]ll my works for me, are one. I can't see them in fragments' (PATSAS 2006: 34).

*Aeschylus, Psychostasia. Dir.: Spyros Evangelatos, 1979 – Abstract transformative space*

Patsas' strong relationship with geometric elements in the scenic space, characterised by clean shapes and stylised forms, reveals his affinity with constructivist ideas (KONTOGIORGI 2000: 39). He usually maintains the proportions and general parameters of the text in his scenography, emphasising extreme geometric forms, abstract shapes, and symmetries (see Fig. 2). His consistent commitment to the 'aesthetic of abstraction' (VAROPOULOU 2006: 11) reflects his orientation towards minimalistic scenography. Utilising the concepts of mobility and suggestiveness (BURIAN 1974: 28), 'action design' (PŘÍHODOVÁ 2018: 461), 'intangible effect' (SVOBODA 2010: 393) to interpret Patsa's work is further supported by his declaration of admiration for the work of Svoboda (PATSAS 2013). In Aeschylus' *Psychostasia*, the stitching together of unfinished tragedies and the elliptical thematic centre allowed Patsas to create vague geometries with fabrics, which form 'an installation around which the work will unfold' (METZIKOF 2021).

*Brecht, Mother Courage. Dir.: Theodoros Terzopoulos, 1982 – Metaphorical environment*

[...] it was like an industrial space, it was at the National Theatre of Northern Greece, but a nearly hyper-realistic space was created, with pipes, soil, and projectors. (PATSAS 2013)

In the case of the play *Mother Courage* by Theodoros Terzopoulos, the scars of war, where *Mother Courage* drags her cart, condensed into a 'muddy ground' (METZIKOF 2021), and two constructions (a surveillance machine with ceiling lights and the cart-vehicle) that follow the simplicity of expression in a constructivist 'Meccano' style (METZIKOF 2021). The set design encapsulates the sense of war and is placed on the 'borders of two countries' (PATSAS 2006: 290). Metaphorically it is situated in 'contemporary post-war Europe' (KONOMI 2021p), with military costumes and *Mother's* modern vehicle, or perhaps in a future of technological dystopia, surveillance, and war. Patsas creates an environment characterised by 'harshness, clear volume, and soil' (LOGOTHETIS 2021). The minimalist environment communicates chromatically with the costumes of the actors, which are integrated into the 'colours of war' (PEZANOOU 2021) and illuminates the conceptual centre of the scenographic proposition through contrast (the girl's white dress) (see Fig. 3).

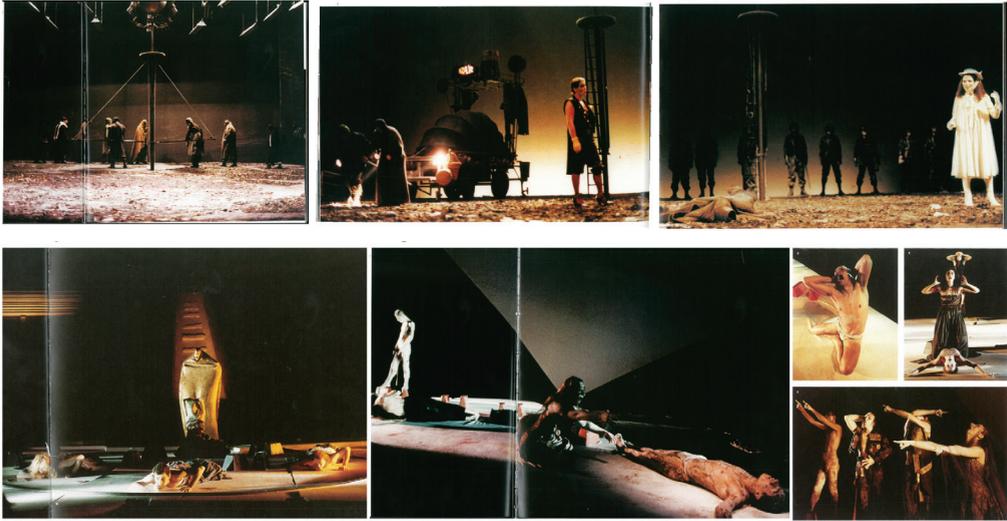
*Aeschylus, Persians. Dir.: Theodoros Terzopoulos, 1990 – Abstract, transformative, sacred space*

Light is an absolutely crucial element. When I design, I think about lighting first, I think about it a lot. (PATSAS 2013)

Patsas is the scenographer who proposes spaces that are 'literally created with light. In these spaces, the invocation of light takes on an organic, substantial, and aesthetic significance' (VAROPOULOU 2006: 16). Another significant relationship he has with Svoboda is the dynamism of light, which brought movement to his scenographies. When Patsas designs the two unequal triangles, one on the floor and the other inclined, he ensures that objects 'grab the lighting and transform it into a poetic image' (PATSAS 2013). The geometricity, the simplicity of the scenery, and the spatial symbolic arrangements of the bodies work together with the lighting, which manages to instantly transform the stage space with minimal means (LOGOTHETIS 2021).

The most crucial role in the scenography of the performance is played by the costumes of the actors (PEZANOOU 2021), which constitute a kind of moving scenography, a set that shrinks and fits to the human body and moves along with the actor (PAVIS 2003: 177). In the case of the ghost of Dareios, 'the costume helps the body to express itself' (PEZANOOU 2021), creating volumes and shapes from the movements of the limbs that intensify the sensation created by its physicality (see Fig. 3).

The image of the naked body, along with minimal clothing, dirty materials, frayed textures, is intensified with makeup, which 'decorates the soul as much as the body of the one wearing it' (PAVIS 2003: 181). It intensifies the sensation of pain, and death,



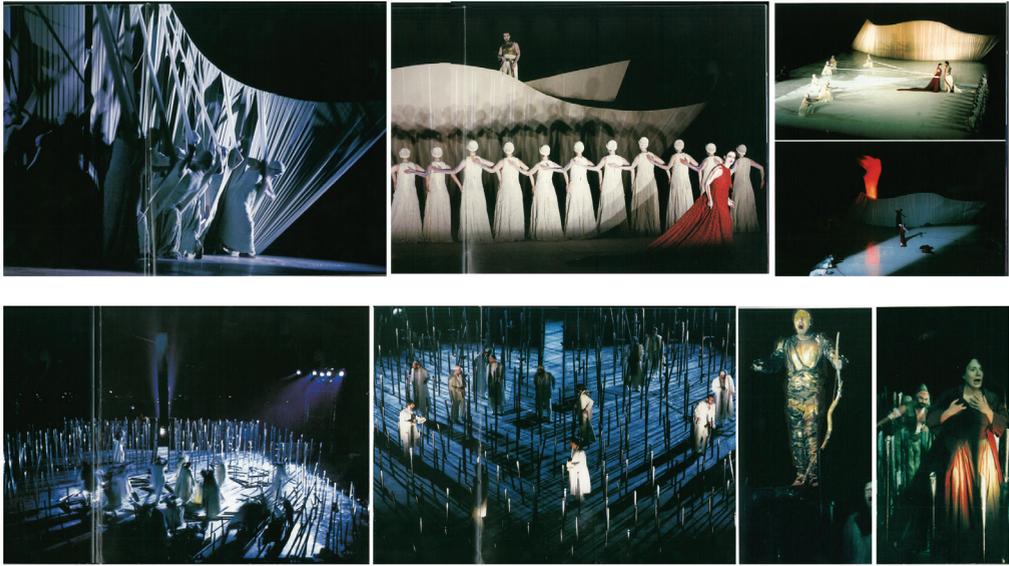
**Fig. 3:** Top: Brecht, *Mother Courage*, 1982 (PATSAS 2006: 288–291). Bottom: Aeschylus, *Persians*, 1990 (PATSAS 2006: 240–243). Set-costumes by Patsas.

reminiscent of the 'Crucified body' (LOGOTHETIS 2021) but also 'Japanese theatre, [...] with muddy bodies [...] perhaps with references to the horror of World War II' (KONOMI 2021p).

The emphasis that Patsas places on the corporeality of the actor is related to his crucial collaboration with director Theodoros Terzopoulos. This relationship finds its foundation in the work of Grotowski, who was not interested in spectacular theatre and aimed for 'a deeper involvement with human spirituality and performativity' (PAAVOLAINEN 2012: 1). All objects on the stage for Patsas, as in Grotowski's theatre, have a primary relationship with the actor because they tend to recede into the background and only gain meaning when held, looked at, or referenced by the actors. Through his collaboration with Terzopoulos, Patsas appears to be influenced by the concept of 'poor theatre', where emphasis is placed on how 'gestures could transform any object into something else' (MCAULEY 1999: 183), and where the actor becomes perceptible as 'a kind of priest' (KONOMI 2021: 103) intensifying psychological tension.

*Euripides, Medea. Dir.: Nikaiti Kontouri, 1997 – Metonymical transformative sacred space*

As mentioned with regard to *Psychostasia*, fabric plays a crucial role in the scenography of Giorgos Patsas and constitutes an element for understanding his scenographic style, which has been described by Eleni Varopoulou as 'writing with fabric' (VAROPOULOU 2006: 11). Fabrics, in their various forms, such as waves, curves, permeating shapes, and folds, 'undermine the stability and static nature of certain elements of the scenographic architecture from within' (VAROPOULOU 2006: 12). Fabrics and their



**Fig. 4:** Top: Euripides, *Medea*, 1997 (PATSAS 2006: 144–149). Bottom: Aeschylus, *Persians*, 1999 (PATSAS 2006: 110–115). Set-costumes by Patsas.

diverse uses provide the power of transformation ‘precisely where everything seems self-sufficient in their staticity’ (PEFANIS 2006: 25). Whether used as unified pieces or in strips, fabrics constitute malleable, sensitive, and playful microcosms, allowing Patsas to ‘find balances and weave relationships with other scenographic realities’ (VAROPOULOU 2006: 15).

In *Medea* by Nikaiti Kontouri, the central idea of the scenographic space is related to the curved structure, which manages to convey the sense of various spaces while maintaining clarity and precision. According to Varveris, the white elastic ribbons took ‘the form of a ship (Jason-Medea), palace (Creon-Tutor-Medea), and city walls (Chorus)’ (PATSAS 2006: 144). The fabric is put into motion by the actors; it is wrapped, unfolded, folded, woven around the body’s limbs in such a way that it becomes a changing organism, a moving element, an extension of the body (see Fig. 4). The fabric strips, whether they originate from the curved structure and connect it to the Chorus or intertwine Medea with the dance, create patterns in the presentational space patterns which make the ‘traces’ of the actors visible in the ‘echo’ of their movement. The actor’s body gains such significance through the fabrics that it manages to overcome the distinction between scenography and costumes in such a way that it becomes ‘a continuous transition from fabric to the body and from the human body to the body of the fabric’ (VAROPOULOU 2006: 12).

*Aeschylus, Persians. Dir.: Lefteris Vogiatzis, 1999 – Abstract, metonymical transformative environment*

There are two elements that I am interested in: abstraction and surrealism. (PATASAS 2018)

The dramatic space of the play *Persians* is the palace of Xerxes, where the chorus has gathered to contemplate the outcome of the war and converse with Queen Atossa. Patsas creates an environment using vertical metallic elements and forces the chorus to move among them, simulating in this way the 'life and experience of battle' (PEZANO 2021). 'The orchestra was a topographic installation, [...] where the actors moved. [...] an installation, made up of the repetition of an element' (KONOMI 2021p) simple but at the same time monumental, a fact that is decisively reinforced by the effect of lighting (see Fig. 4). In this case as well, it appears that light, both through its colours and, above all, through its intensities and direction, creates shadows that alter the visual impression.

Beyond the changing spatial qualities resulting from lighting choices, a crucial aspect lies in the transformation of the scenography initiated by the actors. The metallic elements are not fixed to the floor but can be moved, thus creating larger surfaces where the action can unfold and the scenography can change throughout the course of the performance. In this work, Patsas creates an environment that is dynamic and evolving, adapting it according to the progression of the action.

## Dionsis Fotopoulos

[Scenography is a] self-contained design beyond the word – a meta-lingual image. (Fotopoulos quoted in HOWARD 2002: xiv)

Dionisis Fotopoulos was born in Kalamata in 1943. He studied at the Athens School of Fine Arts (ASFA) and worked as an assistant to Yiannis Tsarouchis. He received the Koun Award and participated in the International Exhibition of Scenography in Prague in 1991. He was also honoured with the title of Honorary Member of the Royal Society of Arts in London. His inspiration is drawn from eroticism and 'Greekness' (see Fig. 5), and he is interested in the combination of elements, the juxtaposition of different forms, techniques, and references to create an identity of 'eclectic maximalism' (KONOMI 2011: 271).



**Fig. 5:** Top: Sketches (FOTOPOULOS 1986: 235, 236, 219, 384–385). Bottom: Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazusa*, 1985 (FOTOPOULOS 1986: 215–221). Set-costumes by Fotopoulos.

*Aristophanes, Thesmophoriazusa. Dir.: Karolos Koun, 1985 – Heterogeneous objects*

Heterogeneity does not frighten me. I discern in it the reflection of existence, in all its manifestations and contradictions. (Fotopoulos quoted in BANU 2005: 46)

Heterogeneity and the pluralism of the scenographic space are guiding principles for Fotopoulos. He does not attempt to find central meanings and cores but rather constructs associative multiple references that shape a broader scenographic framework. In his works, he seems to depict a 'plethora of diverse elements, cultural loans, and traditional themes and thus presenting our contemporary culture as a hybrid' (GEORGIOPOULOS 2005: 19). Heterogeneity, influenced by folk tradition, constitutes a design approach on the border of the postmodern, which openly juxtaposes different and peculiar elements 'within the unifying structure of the scenographic frame, aiming to create a network of references in the viewer's mind' (ARONSON 2005: 18).

Fotopoulos becomes a steady collaborator of Koun, and through these works, he shapes his personal scenographic style, a 'pluralistic scenographic idiom – a kind of aesthetic amalgamation' (KONOMI 2011: 377). The scenographic proposal for *Thesmophoriazusa* is to create a space for a celebration, a carnival-like space (see Fig. 5). Within the performance space, he has gathered elements of folk culture and modern Greek culture, perhaps the 'most astonishing elements' (METZIKOF 2021). These

elements are intertwined with elements of medieval wandering theatre, with three-dimensional scenery, painted backgrounds, curtains, and sheets. The image of the performance 'resembles in paintings by Bruegel' (LOGOTHETIS 2021), in which the painter 'combines bizarre and contrasting elements, but in this way, he manages to strengthen his themes' (ARONSON 2005: 22–23). Fotopoulos does not choose to merge the elements together but, through the balance of contrasts, imparts not just one atmosphere but 'a variety of atmospheres'.

*Aristophanes, Birds. Dir.: Luca Ronconi, 1985 – Autonomous environment*

Hubris, this word suits the work of Dionisis Fotopoulos in the theatre. (CHEIMONAS 2005a: 103)

The autonomy of the image of the stage space is an expressive form that Dionisis Fotopoulos turned to in the 1980s. Scenography can function separately and in parallel with the actors, the text, and the music. It can even serve as a commentary on the text, adding another distinct dimension. It is more likely that they do not maintain even a loose metaphorical relationship but, on the contrary, their autonomy is deliberately sought. According to Pavis (2003: 223), Robert Wilson and Tadeusz Kantor work on text and stage as if they are 'no longer synonymous, (as if) they are separate'. Cheimonas repeatedly characterises Fotopoulos' scenographies as the 'arrogance of the image against the text' (CHEIMONAS 2005b: 181), reflecting a trend that is internationally formed with Wilson's 'Theatre of Images'. The way he articulates the stage space, with the scenery, lighting, costumes, and objects, does not create a cohesive or homogeneous environment for the actors (see Fig. 6).

In Luca Ronconi's *Pluto*, Fotopoulos decides to create a scenography that is 'literally topographic' (KONOMI 2021p), which revives and 'evokes a reminiscence' (METZIKOF 2021). The aesthetic of 'cinematic realism' adopted by Fotopoulos constructs the atmosphere of the period with the costumes, the car, and the farm that evoke a sweet nostalgia. The transformation of the Epidaurus orchestra into a field of wheat highlighted 'the environmental quality of his scenographic proposals' (VAROPOULOU 2005: 77). Fotopoulos constructs a comprehensive and cohesive environment within which the landscape dominates '(as if it is) somewhat stretched, excessive' and the body appears as if 'swallowed by it' (KONOMI 2021p). The power of the image created by Fotopoulos through its realism forms a distinct code.

*Sophocles, Oedipus Rex. Dir.: Giorgos Michailidis, 1987 – Heterogenous autonomous environment*

The autonomy of the image and the environmental dimension of Fotopoulos' scenographies are also expressed through the 'melted materials' he uses (see Fig. 6). An aesthetic that finds references in the broader context of post-war Neo-Realist art (KONOMI 2011: 340), specifically in the work of Tadeusz Kantor, who engages with theatre through his role as a visual artist. The relationship between the work of Fotopoulos



**Fig. 6:** Top: Aristophanes, *Birds*, 1985 (FOTOPOULOS 1986: 232–240). Bottom: Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, 1987 (FOTOPOULOS 1995: 72–77). Set-costumes by Fotopoulos.

and Kantor can be traced in the ‘painterliness’ of their work. Paavolainen (2012: 1) mentions that Kantor’s ‘painterly theatricality often subjected the human element to an all-imposing objecthood’. ‘Of course, my works have elements from the Bauhaus – certainly, they connected me in friendship with Tadeusz (Kantor)’ (Fotopoulos quoted in SUCHER 2005: 95).

The set for *Oedipus Tyrannus* is a ‘minimalistic set’ that simultaneously incorporates elements of ‘grotesque neobaroque’ (KONOMI 2021p) movements. It could be argued that it constitutes an ‘installation art in space’ (KONOMI 2011: 372). It features a perfect cube-mirror, a smooth floor, and within these, ‘sculpted mummies with traces of destruction’ (KONOMI 2011: 372). The mannequins stand amidst the chorus, whose costumes are made from similar ‘melted materials’. Metziko (2021), who had overseen the costume design, observes that the chorus portrays ‘bald, haggard people afflicted by illness’, in such a way that it can be inferred that the mannequins imbue their qualities into the actors. The notion of equality between the mannequins and the actors carries an aesthetic reminiscent of Tadeusz Kantor’s ‘Theatre of the Dead’, in which ‘fragments of objects and dolls can unite with the actors’ (KONOMI 2021p). A conceptual affinity of Fotopoulos and Kantor can be detected in the idea of the ‘object-actor’ or ‘bio-object’. The ‘bio-object’ possesses a similar expressive dynamism as the actor, and the actor-object functions within the framework set by each other. Objects without actors would not activate, nor would actors be able to convey meanings that emanate from the objects themselves (MCKINNEY and BUTTERWORTH 2009: 61).



**Fig. 7:** Top: Charles Perrault, *Barbe bleue*, 2000 (FOTOPOULOS 2011: 80–102). Bottom: Euripides, *Bacchae*, 2008 (FOTOPOULOS 2011: 378–395). Set-costumes by Fotopoulos.

*Charles Perrault, Barbe bleue. Dir.: Konstantinos Rigos, 2000 – Heterogenous objects-actors*

I love exaggeration in every possible way. (Fotopoulos quoted in BANU 2005: 50)

Fotopoulos' work can be characterised by its 'painterliness', which is indicative of his relationship with the environment he creates for the actor. It may originate from its literal dimension, the tendency to paint the scenes (as presented in *Thesmophoriazousae*), but it extends further to the way Fotopoulos gazes at the object. The way he articulates forms, colours, and materials is such that the 'scenic image functions as a tableau' (VAROPOULOU 2005: 75). The actor is integrated into a world by which he is determined and within which he acts. The composition of the stage space creates an environment that, through its pluralism, manages to cultivate theatricality and drama and is not constrained by an attempt at 'economy of symbols' (VAROPOULOU 2005: 77).

*Barbe bleue* [Blue Beard] is a dance-theatrical performance by Konstantinos Rigos, which consists of a series of images that contain references to 'contemporary post-war art' (KONOMI 2021p), such as the 'works of Bacon' (METZIKOF 2021). These images are dreamlike and harsh within a 'poetic horror' (METZIKOF 2021). A characteristic element of the compositions is the objects, not in this case old and molten, but instead contemporary, with references to both art and literature, which are used to visually mark the work (see Fig. 7). Thus, for example, wheelchairs, chairs, tables, and hanging slaughtered animals, in a way, 'create scenic potential for the actors and the space' (KONOMI 2021p).

*Euripides, Bacchae. Dir.: Thomas Moschopoulos, 2008 – Heterogenous autonomous environment*

I collect in my mind and in my everyday life small objects, even discarded objects. With the aim of reconstructing them, illuminating them, reevaluating them. I adore objects, as long as they have breathed through them, as long as I can grasp their charges. I seek the way of life encapsulated in them. (Fotopoulos quoted in FESSA-EMMANOUIL 1999: 299)

The tragedy is supposed to unfold in the city of Thebes, but in this case, Fotopoulos seems to place the work in a dump, in an 'orgy of shapes, colours, and materials' (PEZANO 2021). Bags, wheels, trash, clown noses, Dionysian vine leaves, it is a mixture of various elements, from which the image of the performance is constructed. The actors perform through/in Fotopoulos' objects, inhabit them, engage in their qualities and hidden dynamics. They create an ecosystem, a 'visual environment' as mentioned by Varopoulou (2005: 77).

Fotopoulos appears to recognise and express himself through everyday objects and materials, whose dynamics are projected 'as autonomous generative stimuli' (KONOMI 2011: 339). Within the everyday, in the retrieved trash, in the scraps, he discerns subterranean worlds, explores cultures and societies (see Fig. 7). He becomes the 'creator of the new world from the materials of the old' (GEORGUSOPOULOS 2005: 14), as he collects the humblest materials, the debris of existing culture, and transforms them, paints them, metamorphoses them into art. Fotopoulos' objects possess expressive power; they are decisive factors that take on the role of the protagonist, not through their beauty, but on the contrary, through their ruggedness, their caustic realism.

## Scenographic spatialities of Patsas and Fotopoulos

The interpretative framework proposed to analyse the scenographic propositions finds a thread that connects the artistic vision of the two scenographers beyond the significant differences found in their works at first glance. Certainly, the limited sample of their work examined in combination with their artistic experimentation increases the difficulty. Also, the fact that issues such as the relationship of the scenographic proposition with the scenic space, the complexity of theatrical production involving collaboration among many contributors, obscures aspects of their work. Finally, as with any historiographical research, certain limitations are inherent. This study relies on images, which inherently reflect the photographer's perspective, and on the memories of interviewees, which always distort the raw experience of a performance.

Patsas' approach is formed as a scenographic writing 'of solidly designed spaces' (VAROPOULOU 2006: 11). He organises the scenic space in such a way, minimal and geometric, with levels and distinct lines, so that pure shapes dominate. In this way, he expressed an interpretation of the text and direction that operated 'implicitly and prospectively' (PEFANIS 2006: 22), creating elliptical universes that repelled closed and

stable meanings. The body, hieratic in its image, is placed at the centre of the strict form and is charged with the transformation of the scenic space, always with the goal that 'the theatre becomes [...] a synecdoche of the world' (PEFANIS 2006: 25).

Fotopoulos' approach is shaped by constantly evolving signs, images, and meanings that interest him. He does not attempt to condense the text; he allows it to flow, to overflow with references, which he later composes into an overall image. The materials he uses, whether selected from the past, worn, or painted and transformed, cause the objects to metamorphose; as Georgousopoulos (2005: 13) claims, he discovers 'a new art: the Mimetic art of matter'. The actor engages in a dialogue with the object; they colour each other, becoming an organic whole of an environment in which properties and dynamics flow between the body and the material. Fotopoulos' scenographic elements are on stage to establish identities, heterogeneous, illogical, and poetic, wandering in such a way that they are so self-sufficient that 'you cannot imagine the performance without its visual argument' (GEORGUSOPOULOS 2005: 24).

For both scenographers, it becomes apparent that their respective scenographic contributions do not maintain a direct correlation with the textual content. Instead, their scenographic endeavours significantly shape the dramaturgical aspects of the performance, intricately moulding the spatial dimensions and visual elements. Both Patsas and Fotopoulos, notwithstanding their portrayal in existing literature as two seemingly contrasting artistic domains, are similar in terms of their unique temperaments and characteristic approaches, as well as their underlying intentions and artistic influences. They certainly represent two distinctive facets within the diverse spectrum of possibilities through which the dynamic spatiality of scenography establishes a profound connection with the textual narrative and the physical presence of the actor. In essence, scenography orchestrates an environment that, within the realm of its inherent qualities, seeks not only to serve as a canvas for storytelling but also to elucidate and guide the course of human actions within its scenic framework.

The scenographic spatialities advocated by Patsas occupy an intermediary space between the starkness of abstraction, the simplicity inherent in a conceptually condensed world, and the ceremonial body that undergoes transformations and reinterpretations. Fotopoulos' spatialities are rooted in a milieu of heterogeneous worlds, each self-contained and distinct, and within fragmented bodies that embody the characteristics of these worlds. The metamorphic nature of scenography signifies their continually evolving identities, transitioning from the realm of space to that of place. This duality of metamorphosis unfolds within the 'actual' world presented to the audience, inhabited by the actors, while concurrently residing in the imaginations of both spectators and performers.

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Nikolas Kanavaris

Scenography as a Living Transformator of the Theatrical Space: The 'On Stage' Spatialities ...

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