

**Aesthetics of Scenography Development**



**Creative and Performing Arts**

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**Abstract**

In human history, languages, cultures, traditions, mingle and overlap. Seeking today to tell the history of the Albanian scenography art track is a task as difficult and fascinating at the same time. Maybe this is the best way to discover the roots of the history of the development of theater through Albanian scenography. Assignment of each researcher of this branch, first of all, is to consider every act to resist the time, which carries this art in this land. Starting from this principle, so from its creation, we must find values, where and how Scenography, in the areas of art, can identify, as a disclosure of a new era of this history. Archival and documentary difficulties are present in almost all researchers and scholars path of this branch in Albania. Such a vacuum of written facts there is found in no other genre of art, no documentation of facts, names and not even any study analysis of this gender of art. Meanwhile the history of theater, fortunately, remained in her documentary image through photographs, which are simultaneously a document of the décor development and progress over the years.

At no point in the history of our country, the relationship between the artist and the state has not been "legally sanctioned", and the cooperation between them was just a simple rapport of employee with employer. The scenographer, in the relationship of the creator and system power, is seen as its servant to the cause and ideology of the time, it has always kept him under censorship, and this for a long time will remain a serious challenge for any researcher of this genre. Through theater, during the period of Socialist Realism, the system sought to understand the phenomenon of the approach of its ideology, the structure of proletariat dictatorship, the class warfare, the new man, the cult of the individual and the reflect of its ideology in people mass. The system of that time understood well the power of speech and vision which this genre conveyed, that's why the censorship was even stronger in this regard. It was used all manners to keep it under a strongly ideological control. However, even under a very strong censorship, Albanian scenography achievements exceed the limits of censorship and emerge over ideology.

The first presentation to the phenomenon of this censure, made me realize the importance of understanding and acknowledging of history to comprehend the present. As the only way to express "gratitude and respect" to all those artists who, even under the pressure of time have given us a very rich and artistic past of the Albanian scenography history.

The lack of the written texts before the '90s of a proper analysis of the genre, so present time, made me go to the extent of the challenge, especially seeing this as a must for generations to come. The aesthetic work and cause of these artists should be part of the study and a periodic review of artists and historians, while these written works transmitted from generation to generation. This national treasure is a moral and professional obligation, not only of the scenographer but especially for the younger generation, who must break down the phenomenon and the act of timeline creation implemented as the historical memory of a nation. This entire heritage, in its viewpoint is the past, and as such an essential way to understand the present. To each new researcher arises the need to "update" time studies, as a moral and professional obligation, because beyond any excuse, every one of us must give the own contribution in meeting the endless mosaic of the science of history. During the period of the communist system, Scenography unceasingly underwent an audit of political censorship much more than other genres, and indeed so was unable to progress and flourish as this development occurred in other countries. A theater performance, where of course the scenographic image is firstly understood, put in a theater should be perceived by some "experts", and everything to pass on these filters, and after being interpreted by them as criticism or any element that appeared as controversial, to be removed or corrected in the opinion of these people who in most cases were not even related to the theater. The spirit of anti-conformism, so ubiquitous in the Western theater and culture in general, couldn't even be contemplated, as an individual such as the

scenographer couldn't be imagined, with his ideas, putting the spectator in thoughtful position, or arouse in them feelings out the political framework of the time.

In the rapport of scenography the theatrical language felt most present in:

- a. figurative processing of the scenic space;
- b. Maximizing functionality of the mise-en-scène;
- c. in finding the correct ethnographic elements of folklore which was written in the piece;
- d. directorial idea visioning through allegory, symbol, detail or metaphorical findings of decor, lighting, etc;
- e. colorist rapports in order to create atmosphere and certain emotional conditions.

In order to enrich the artistic language of the theater in general, it was necessary to particularly enrich the artistic language of scenography. The Albanian theater began to depart from the scenography of the years '50-'60, which was a naturalist one, guided mainly by the principle of identity and physical simulation of ethnographic environment. Symbolic elements used and the most comprehensive use of conventions freed somehow the scenic space from stiffening and overloading of decors and requisites, which didn't express anything. Creating a larger space in the function of the actor's play, as well putting off this space from the overload, made it possible to highlight the actor and created a cleaner mise-en-scène and functional to the theatrical piece. In a way it can be said that this was the first won challenge of the scenographers of the time to the major change on the future of the Albanian theater. By the end of the 80s there has been an attempt to escape the "trap" of schematization, injected by the system of the time toward socialist realism. The principle of architecture and expressive sculpture whether through props, defining elements of constructivism and scenic spot processing combined with a certain directorial idea, the metaphorical and symbolic load details, take place in several performances this time, as: "**Gjaku i Arbrit**" by Shkodra Theatre, "**Përshpirtje në shtëpinë e Matildës**" by Durres Theatre, "**Prometeu**" by National Theatre, "**Sa shumë gjethe të thata atë vjeshtë**" by Elbasan Theatre, etc.. The visuality of the Scenographer's play in the decor set on the stage, are reached with much ingenuity and satisfactory and talented sharpness, to express the revolution in this field of art. Scenographers, with their work, preceded the introduction of modern trends not only in theater but also in the visual arts.

This fantasy cannot be taken to the court of criticism today. It insisted a lot to seek expressive elements of a theater language as much contemporary. Talking about a time when fantasy was scared because the gates of self-censorship get already closed that the phobia appear to cripple it, not allowing it to "fly". There were many outcries of criticisms coming against it, in the form of thesis, quotations, principles, dogmas etc.. Audacious designs of makeup, the stylization of the portrait of actor, hair coloring or their surrealist treatment, the metaphorical disclosers of décor, contemporary cuts in creation of costumes, gluing details of different materials or the cuts into sculptural shapes (the existing wardrobe as well as on certain parts of the décor etc.), were being evidence of the evolution of artistic language in scenography, as a vanguard of the visual arts in general. Afterwards, playing with lights and magic chances thereof; mesmerized the public to unload the prejudice of this art, and created the illusion that brought them into infinity of fascination. And further on and further on...

Director and actor's relationship with the scenographer, at first look, it appears as "external". In fact it is very internal, active, and continuous with mutual influence on the work of each of them. As it is known, dramatic spaces in the theater scene is illusionistic and symbolic. It is illusionistic because in front, in the scenic space, in such elevated part of the scene, there is only an environment defined under conventional circumstances, which arouse and creates in our consciousness the illusion of truth, but not its own truth. The actor, in his process, is clear that the mountain in the scene is not real, and the wall of his room is nothing else but a canvas. But he in his conscience and in what he transmits to the public expresses the artistic conceptual

meaning of the authenticity of the décor, figurative and emotional core of artistic opinion expressed by scenographer.

The relationship of actor and scenographer is concreted through three main functions. Firstly, in the description of the place of action by the dramatic event, secondly, in the visual expressive character and thirdly, (what is directly related to the competencies of the art of acting) in the placement of the actor's movement in scenographic volumes and architecture, so with the *mise-en-scène* arranged on this décor. The importance in this relationship is to respect the concept of the construction style of the show. With a décor realized on a monumental plan, the naturalistic interpretation of the actor would not only be impossible, but would disharmonize, because the décor influences positively or negatively on the whole being of the actor. He evaluates the environment, gets into relation with it, and this environment, directly or indirectly, affects his whole psycho-physical being and behavior and play integrated into the décor.

In the paintings of the play "**Gjenerali i ushtrisë së vdekur**" by the National Theatre with the scenography of Prof. Agim Zajmi, the scenographic solutions are both visual, monumental, but also with practical opportunities for the movement of the actors. To highlight the troubled soul of Nice, in her famous monologue, and to confront the two different and antagonistic worlds, the scenographer Zajmi during the wedding scenery brings the décor in a two-storey. On the upper floor there are the old ladies, among them there is notable the old lady Nica. While, down on the lower floor are placed all the other wedding guests, who are celebrating. At the beginning of the stage, diagonally to old lady Nica, there are located the general and the priest. The creation of this scene this way makes evident visually the two key figures of this scene, where the mostly exalted stands the one of the old lady Nica. The practical and functional side of the *mise-en-scène*, in this case, provided opportunities of constructions and reconstructions of visual and expressive movements, in right rapport to the actor.



View from the décor of Agim Zajmi "Gjenerali i ushtrisë së vdekur"

As in the tableau of the show "*Karnavalet e Korçës*", staged at the Theatre of Skopje, by the scenographer Shaban Hysa, the solution provided, it is not only avant-garde for the time, but with the visual eloquence helps and simultaneously elevates more the idea of materialization of the text with artistic visuality expressed through the décor.

The scenographic element used in the above layout of the scene, shows an innovation in concept and an indication on the advanced scenographic concept of Shaban Hysa for the time when this work was put on stage.

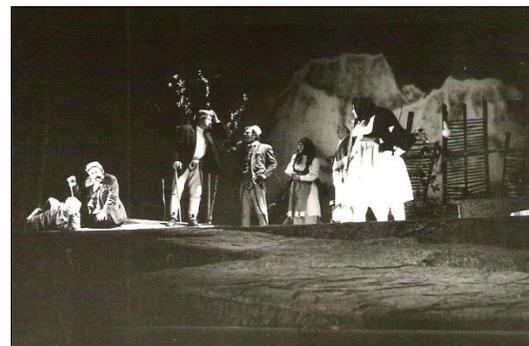
The scenographic element, as seen in the this picture, merges from the top to the edges of the stage and up inside her. Although the decor is created only on one plane, it gives the feeling of a great movement or otherwise called a vortex that draws them into its interior.



View from the décor of Shaban Hysa “Karnavalet e Korçës”

Besides the actor and the author, the directorial thought should be included, fused, and put into service of the scenographic creation of the show. These two components of the theater should be mutual interdependence. Moreover the theater cannot be understood otherwise than as unity in escalation of the author, the director, and this one with the scenographer, actors and musical formulation. In continuation of this process the Albanian scenography has been showing progressive steps on the way of professional qualifications. Realizing architectural composing of the dramatic work, the scenography will never be possible to become a "slave" or "illustrative" component, simple and photographic of the environment where the stage action takes place. It implies in itself the presence of a defined artistic goal, the scenographic visual opinion of the scenographer, which can't be simple. It has no real dimensions of the objective reality, it doesn't describes and draws in a naturalistic way the numerous petty and adequate sides of the life phenomenon, natural environment, etc., but just grab its essence, the core expressive action, generalizing and stereotyping it, so, in a sense, creating an artistic convention.

In the scenography of the show "Cuca e Maleve", on the gray background of the mountains, it is placed an indoor environment with a blackboard, where is written the letter "a". The scenographic opinion tries to say that the light of knowledge and wisdom originates with the recognition of the letter "a", which could not be introduced in the Albanian mountains without great effort. Moreover, against the rough background, it creates "poetry", a kind of inner joy. Of course, the spectator is clear that the mountain is not really as it looks on stage. He even knows how to notice the significance of sensing the décor, to understand the opinion of the painter. The scenography gives the essence of the phenomenon, grab a typical environment, but visual, converted in an artistic convention that reveals something.



The theatre, as any social and collective practice, contains a dual presence, the actor and the spectator. Meeting, merging and exchanging of these two presences is described in space. The art of organizing this space is "scenography".

An essential characteristic of the theater is that of having a function and making an appeal to the imagination of the spectator. A co-existence of this specific in theater, makes the space in which the actors play a place, where participate the reality and the imagination at the same time. In theatre the space concept has at least two interpretations:

- I. The physical space, the performance place, where the actors play
- II. The imagination space, the place where the characters come to life (this is what Vladimir Toporov determines as MITOPOIETICA).

The theatrical place, the actual space of scenic action, can be identified with the theater or any other structure suitable for the expected realization of a work. In case of street theater, it differs. There are the actors and the public to be fitted within a structure that serves for other purposes. Within the theatrical place is obvious the space or the perimeter of the presentation entrusted to the actor's play.

Sometimes, the action space can coincide with the theatrical place. This is the case of the iper-realistic performance, an example is the spectacle "Barboni"<sup>48</sup> by Pippo Delbono, staged in a hallway at the central station in Milan in 1998, in which actors presented themselves, performing in a theatrical action, which coincided with the real place where they could operate every day.

This example comes obvious in several works set in Albania, in the 1990s, when and theater suffered a large opening, and offering itself more to the contemporary one.

Actual cases are few theatrical projects, developed outside scenes, indoors or in old architectural objects, and open space. Their realization is brought in an incidental way to the spectator and somehow conventional. Artists, in these parts, have used for decoration the exterior or the theatrical place untouched as it is in reality and in interior decor it is part of their creative thinking. The symbolic scenography used helps them to communicate even more with the audience.



Anne Surgers in her book "Western theater scenography" says: "The Scenography is a journey that leads from literary vision in an imaginary vision, from reality to fantasy. A trip often eased for the current public

<sup>48</sup> **Barboni** = The vagabonds

by the excessive code between image in perspective and word, impossible to involve one without overlapping the other."<sup>49</sup> But this picture offered by the French researcher tells us that this code is not activated by a long time, but starting from the establishment of the Italian idea of theater and scene. As in the Greek theater in the medieval period or Elizabethan but also French of years 600, an important part of it was left to the imagination of the spectator.

If it is true the expression, as proposed by Surgers that "scenography, is equal to the author, actor and director". Starting from the late years 800 was a necessary figure in theater, there should be recognized the creative power and specific language used by him to various parts of the drama as the one created by Adolphe Appia for melodrama "Vagneriane".

The Scenography should answer two key problems involved in any kind of theatrical practice:

I. How to focus the sight, the listening, and the attention of the spectator over the other group, the one that sets it in motion the imagination?

II. How to invite the spectator to project in the real space of actors, one imaginary piece in order that the fiction works?

The scenography has simultaneously the duty to highlight and decide, significantly and legible, the symbolic limit between fiction and reality, between actor and spectator, in other words between what is hidden and what is displayed, between the visible and invisible.

The scenography is an art means of presenting the world by a certain vision.

And at the end of this very short journey on aesthetics of scenography development, I find it appropriate to close this article with a very wise saying of the great painter Kole Idromeno addressed to Kolec Fishta:

Kolec Fishta - "Mr. Kolë, would you please clarify me what does it mean "to work for one"?"

Kolë Idromeno - "Each profession is an art in itself. Hundred people watch your work or his, but there is one who knows better and appreciates. You should do your most effort so that one to appreciate you, regardless the artist and the master is never satisfied with his achievements."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Anne Surgers Scénographie du théâtre occidental

<sup>i</sup> PAPAGJONI JOSIF, "Kumti që vjen nga trashëgimia teatrore", Publisher: Shtëpia Botuese "Shkenca" (1999), pg. 247

<sup>ii</sup> PAPAGJONI JOSIF, "Aktorët", Publisher: Shtëpia Botuese e Librit Universitar (1999), pg. 208

<sup>iii</sup> PAPAGJONI JOSIF, "Teatri dhe aktori", Publisher: Shtëpia Botuese "Naim Frasheri" (1980), pg. 106-114

<sup>iv</sup> MITOPOIETICA (Greek word that means creation of myth) is a kind of story in modern literature and cinema where is created a fantastic mythology by the author or the director.

<sup>v</sup> KOLEC FISHTA, "Skenografia në Shkoder 1927-1990", Publisher: Camaj-Pipa (2001), pg. 23-24