

## **GALWAY – IFTR 2021**

### **Teaching Scenography in Greece (1958-1976); the Ecology of Stage Design Education**

**THE RESEARCH PROJECT:** Teaching Scenography in Greece (1958-1976); A Research

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The paper explores ‘this constantly shifting eco-system that constitutes theatre’ by focusing on the pedagogy of theatre making and specifically on theatre design education. Stage design education is presented as one extremely crucial albeit largely neglected feature of this scarcely identified ecosystem, interweaving stage and school, profession and training, artistic output and educational process. By examining the ecologies of both education and practice, it attempts to shed light on the relevant artistic and teaching processes as well as on the relationships of this interdependent network of theatre design pedagogues, students and future practicing stage designers and possibly teachers themselves.

The paper focuses on the highlights and setbacks of the as yet unexplored Greek experience of theatre design education during the years of its implementation on a professional level (1958-1976). It compares and contrasts the practice of institutions such as the Athens School of Fine Arts [ASFA], the private Athens Technological Organization [ATI] (headed by architect and urban planner C.A. Doxiadis), the Vakalo School (the first Greek School of Applied Arts headed by the Paris educated stage designer Georges Vakalo, still in operation today as Vakalo Art & Design College) as well as the courses on scenography taught at the Schools of Architecture of both the National Technical University of Athens and the Faculty of Engineering, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki [AuTh]. These institutions cover a wide range of educational frameworks (tertiary education, fine arts academies, technical/vocational colleges), that make apparent the status of stage design in the first years of the period analysed, oscillating between craft and art, albeit a decorative or applied art.

While focusing on the Greek case, the paper does not fail to attempt to place it in the wider European modernist context. Greek theatre design education of the years 1958-1976 appears to be still influenced and modelled, in many ways, in accordance with the western modernist theatre education and practice, which has its roots in E.G. Craig’s School of the Art of the Theatre (Florence, Italy, 1914). Combining practical courses on the arts of the theatre with lectures on the emerging theory and history of theatre and stagecraft, the institutions that followed supported the wide spreading of stage modernism and the establishment of a new scenic language throughout the 20th century on an international level, albeit in many cases, as in Greece, in its less radical and hence more popular manifestation.

The analysis not only discusses the relevant aesthetic principles, but also introduces the pedagogic principles and teaching methodologies underlying the educational process, as well as the content and organization of studies. In short, the set design course followed the studio model, in which practical tasks were often enriched with lectures on theatre design history and theory, complemented with other modules (e.g., drawing). Teaching aimed at liberating the creativity of the apprentice. The assignments were tied to specific theatre plays of classic or modern classic repertoire. Collaborative processes did not include team design work. Students acted as the sole creative mind since there were no professional directors or directors under training involved. Final year's examinations and end of the year exhibitions assessed the students' acquired knowledge and dexterities, and promoted both the work of the school and the students as future professionals respectively. While at the School of Fine Arts the training aimed at the acquisition of professional competence of students and future artists through special training and practice in an applied art, in the Schools of Architecture, the scenography courses (mostly part of a hidden curriculum) offered the opportunity of artistic expression as an exception to the austere technical character of an architect's professional training.

The interrelationship between design education and artistic output as a way to locate and reflect on the practices and interconnections shaping the environments of theatrical event are examined. It is argued that the introduction of scenography courses in Greece was inextricably and decisively linked to the growing professionalisation of theatre production in those same years. Furthermore, a lineage is established since some 1960-1976 alumni of these courses became scenography tutors themselves being informed to a great degree in their teaching by the experiences and assets gained during their studentship.

For the analysis secondary sources, archival material, teaching documents as well as oral testimonies are used. Students of scenography, professional scenographers, and scenography teachers themselves Nikos Politis [ATI student]; Laloula Chrysiopoulou [ATI & ASFA student]; Andreas Sarandopoulos [Vakalo student and present teacher]; Ioanna Manoledaki [AuTh student]; Apostolos Vettas [AuTh student] were eager to share their memories and knowledge.

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