

PROCEEDINGS OF THE PERFORMING SPACE 2023 CONFERENCE

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Performing Architectures

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Performing Architectures A Performative Approach to Space and Design

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Abstract

*Performing Architectures-Andreas Skourtis*¹ is a London-based studio blending architecture and performance design, led by a practitioner and academic (pracademic) whose work extends across urban and rural landscapes, from London's public spaces to an olive grove in Corinthia. Rooted in the practice of active scenography, this approach engages architecture as a live, performative medium, producing both structured and organic narratives. This paper presents select segments from the conference performance lecture, emphasizing its original fragmented, non-linear structure while adapting it to a written format. Through these fragments, the paper examines key projects that employ architectural space and scenographic elements to evoke embodied experiences and foster participation, culminating in a vision for the future of performance design that honours the body as a performative space.

Keywords: performance design, embodied scenography, scenography, embodied design, performing architectures, active design, active scenography

Introduction to Performing Architectures

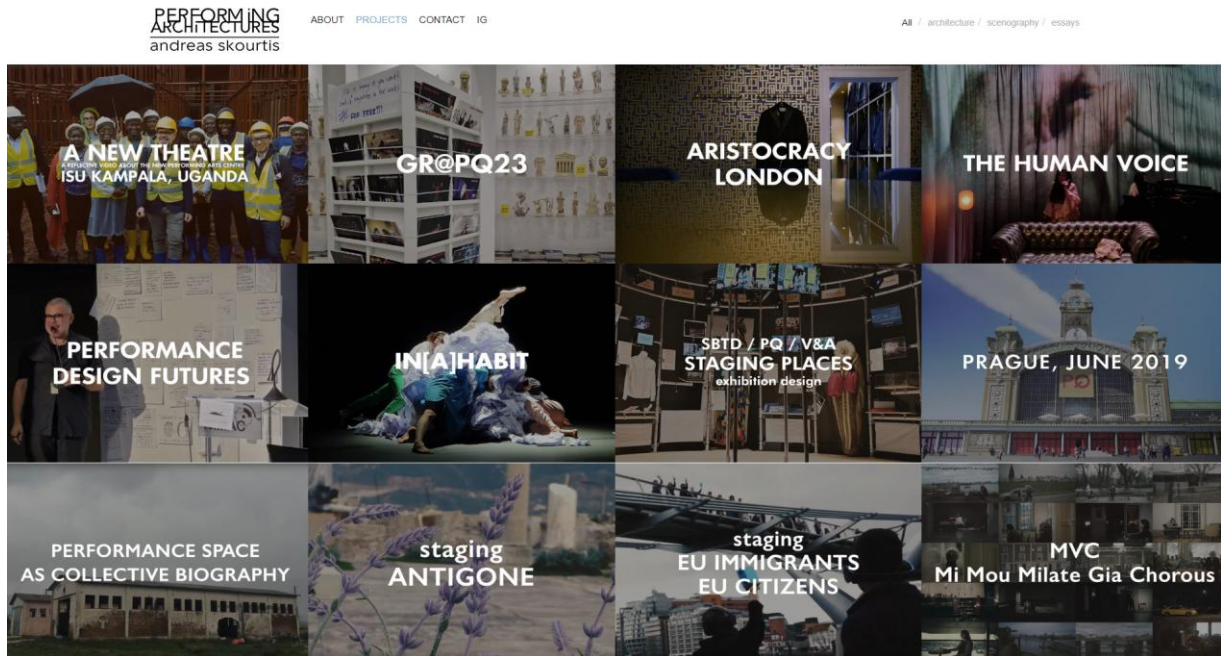
This paper is an adaptation of the presentation delivered in July 2024. While it presents a selection of concepts and projects from the full lecture, it intentionally retains the fragmented, non-linear nature of the original to allow for a reflective reading. Founded in 2014, Performing Architectures-Andreas Skourtis emerged from a desire to integrate purpose-built performance spaces with unconventional, site-specific environments, challenging traditional boundaries in

¹ <https://performingarchitectures.com/>

scenography and the static concept of space as merely functional. Instead, the studio approaches space as an active participant, an element in constant dialogue with the scenographer, performer, and active participants (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Screenshot from the website www.performingarchitectures.com, July 2024.



The studio's evolution reflects the intersection of academic, personal, and spatial inquiries. This is evident in installations across landscapes, both urban and rural, and the physical dialogue between the designer's roots and adopted locations. The examples discussed—from installations in a Corinthian olive grove to projects on London's Millennium Bridge—demonstrate *Performing Architectures* as a laboratory for experiential, embodied scenography. Each project illustrates the studio's characteristic blending of physical and conceptual space, rendering architecture itself as a live, performative medium. This paper argues for performance design as an art form that extends beyond conventional theatre, offering narrative potential within any environment that inspires active engagement.

Core Projects and their Spaces

The following projects have been selected to illustrate *Performing Architectures*' integration of diverse and unconventional spaces to cultivate meaning through site-responsive design. One

example, *02-Academic-Staff: Communi-ty-cation* (2013)², was conceived while the designer was in a Corinthian olive grove, a site that holds significant personal and cultural value for the artist. This performance sought to bridge the spatial and emotional distance between London's Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and the artist's homeland. Through symbolic material, and sensory elements—such as the use of olive oil and the sounds of the site—the installation recreated a sense of place, memory, and embodied identity.

The installation first took place in the olive grove itself, inviting colleagues to connect with the designer's cultural roots. Later, the performance installation was staged in a London gallery³. In each location, natural sounds, images, and olive oil became material conduits, linking the landscapes. Symbols of belonging—the names of academic staff displayed on olive trees—created a link between colleagues and the artist's homeland, offering a sense of shared identity across geographies (Figures 2 and 3).

Figure 2

Photo from 02-Academic Staff: Communi-ty-cation, 2013



² <https://performingarchitectures.com/portfolio/02-academic-staff-communi-ty-cation/>

³ <https://performingarchitectures.com/portfolio/reflecting-olive-grove-se1/>

Figure 3

Photo from *OLIVE GROVE SE1*, 2015



In a different sociopolitical context, *EU IMMIGRANTS EU CITIZENS* (2016)⁴ took shape in three iconic London settings: the Millennium Bridge, the ground floor of the Roundhouse, and a building in Bermondsey. This series of pre-Brexit performances probed themes of citizenship, belonging, and identity. Structured in three chapters, *EU IMMIGRANTS EU CITIZENS—A Bridge, A Space, A Building*—explored the emotional and political dimensions of immigration in the UK. Each chapter represented a unique facet of the immigrant experience, underscoring how scenographic metaphors within existing city spaces prompt reflection on identity in urban spaces.

Collaborating with a multidisciplinary team of EU-born, London-based artists, *Performing Architectures-Andreas Skourtis* layered participatory performance and scenographic techniques to create immersive experiences within each site. The Brexit vote, announced only days after the final performance, underscored the relevance of this artistic dialogue with immigration and identity.

⁴ <https://performingarchitectures.com/portfolio/staging-eu-immigrants-eu-citizens-london/>

Micro-Manifesto: Space as Memory

The histories embedded within a space offer endless potential for exploration. In each project, *Performing Architectures-Andreas Skourtis* invites audiences to interact with space as a vessel of memory, affirming architecture as a mutable, performative partner (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Photo from *EU IMMIGRANTS EU CITIZENS, Chapter 1: A Bridge*, 2016.



Embodied Design and Active Scenography

The concept of *embodied design* lies at the core of *Performing Architectures-Andreas Skourtis*. This approach reflects a reciprocal relationship between the scenographer and space, where bodies—human, material, and architectural—interact to produce active scenographies. Here, the scenographer acts as both architect and performer, engaging their own physicality and movement within the design environment. The performance is not static but lives and breathes with each interaction, bending to the body's weight, touch, and sound.

In the *PaperRoll Scenography*⁵ workshops, for example, plotter paper became a medium for spontaneous creation. By folding, draping, and expanding the paper in response to performer movements, this ephemeral material transformed into a flexible scenographic environment, mirroring the fluidity of live performance. The paper itself became an integral performer, adapting to the bodies around it and serving as both spatial boundary and temporal element, emphasizing the transient beauty of scenography.

IN[a]HABIT (2022)⁶, a later project, further explored the potential of scenography as a flexible, co-created design language. Over several months in Athens, dancers, choreographers, and artists worked together in a continually evolving performance space. This project demonstrated how minimal materials and open-ended design can facilitate the fluidity of live performance, as paper, human movement, and architectural boundaries blended seamlessly. Here, the scenographer and performers together created spatial metaphors, highlighting the relationship between body, material, and space, and reinforcing how physical presence is itself an act of design (Figure 5).

Figure 5

Photo from IN[a]HABIT, 2022



⁵ <https://performingarchitectures.com/portfolio/paperroll-scenography-volume-1/>

⁶ <https://performingarchitectures.com/portfolio/inahabit/>

Micro-Manifesto: The Scenographer as Performer

To perform is to embody space. To design is to recognize that one's body is always part of the environment. In embodied design, the scenographer's role transcends technicality; it demands presence, observation, and interaction as foundational acts of creation.

Reflections and Micro-Manifestos

At the heart of *Performing Architectures-Andreas Skourtis* is the relationship between personal history and the spaces that inspire, shape, and preserve memory. The olive grove in Corinthia, a recurring theme in the practice, epitomizes space as both archive and active participant. Projects like *02-Academic-Staff: Communi-ty-cation* and *Olive Grove SE1* were grounded in the belief that each spatial interaction reaffirms a connection to place, cultivating continuity between the body and its surroundings. Here, the design process is both an expression of collective memory and a bridge linking past and present.

Through this methodology, the designer's own body acts as both creator and receptor of space. The performative engagement with architecture and design highlights the interdependence of spatial awareness, personal identity, and shared experience. This ethos affirms that our bodies inhabit and perform space on every level—from the structural to the sensorial, from the communal to the deeply personal (Figure 6).

Figure 6

Slide from the conference presentation, 2024

**Spaces and bodies come together to create
active scenographies, emphasising the
symbiotic relationship between the physical
environment and the scenographer-performer.**

Micro-Manifesto: The Designer's Body as Archive

Our bodies archive space, recording light, temperature, materiality, and movement, which translate into lasting impressions that shape our perception of design. To design from the body is to honour the unseen narratives inscribed within us (Figure 7).

Figure 7

Slide from the conference presentation, 2024

Embodied responses to experiencing and inhabiting spaces function as primary drivers for the performance design process.

Conclusion – Towards a Performative Future in Design

As *Performing Architectures*-Andreas Skourtis continues to evolve, so does its commitment to a design process that embodies both scenographic principles and architectural intent. By embracing non-traditional, site-specific work, the practice challenges conventional spatial boundaries, revealing the multiplicity of narratives that each site, material, and movement can bring to a performance. This approach encourages a future of performance design that integrates deeply with human experience, treating the body not as an external entity but as a vital, generative space.

In response to my question, “What do you want the future of Performance Design to be?” performance maker Giulio Blason offered a poignant reflection: “The future of performance design lies in the body... as the sole initiator and receptor of the event.” This insight underscores the potential of performance design to act as a bridge between the tangible and intangible, navigating the complexities of identity, memory, and physical presence. The future of performance design thus extends beyond fixed architectures to embrace fluid, evolving spaces, where the body itself is both creator and canvas (Figure 8).

Figure 8

Slide from the conference presentation, 2024

**Performance designers/scenographers
extend their roles beyond traditional
boundaries, acting as authors and initiators of
the processes, thereby shaping the concept of
*Active Scenographic Bodies.***

Micro-Manifesto: We Are Performing Spaces

We inhabit, embody, and animate the spaces around us. As performers, we bring them to life. As designers, we shape them. And as beings, we leave imprints within them. In this interwoven exchange, we affirm that our bodies are not only in space but are, in fact, performing spaces (Figure 9).

Figure 9

Slide from the conference presentation, 2024

We Are Performing Spaces.