

Institution: University of Leeds		
Unit of Assessment: 33B		
Title of case study: Expanding Scenography: changing professional practice and pedagogy in the UK, Europe and North America		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2008-17		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Dr Joslin McKinney	Associate Professor in Scenography	August 2001 - present
Dr Scott Palmer	Lecturer in Performance Design	August 2001 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: August 2013 - May2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>The combined research of Dr Joslin McKinney and Dr Scott Palmer into scenography (the design of setting, light, costume, sound) has led to two principal impacts, evidenced mainly in the UK, Europe and the US: i) developing new approaches in contemporary scenographic professional practice that extend the discipline's boundaries to consider the aesthetic, ethical and political effects on spectators; and ii) influencing HEI approaches to the teaching of a new generation of practitioners. Examining the potential of technology, environment, materiality and audience, their research has centred on a reconsideration and a repositioning of what has traditionally been considered a marginal, craft-based discipline. Instead, they have been central to a shift that has established scenography as a creative and critical practice which is key to a wide range of performance contexts, as 'expanded scenography' both in and beyond the theatre.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>The research that McKinney and Palmer have carried out, both independently and collaboratively over 9 years, has played a formative role in raising the status of scenography as a scholarly subject and in enhancing its capacity to operate as an autonomous creative practice, within and beyond the theatre. Their research explores the dramaturgical, spatial, and temporal contribution that scenography makes to performance, newly identifying the possibilities it offers to shape and create affective, imaginative and transformative experiences for audiences. They have defined the content of a professional and academic book series published by Bloomsbury, for which they are co-editors, that explores scenography in numerous contexts beyond the theatrical and includes architecture, urban space, rural landscape, digital and immersive environments.</p> <p>The insights in McKinney and Butterworth [1] were developed alongside McKinney's practice-led PhD (2008) which investigated how scenography communicates to audiences and developed new frameworks for analysing the visual, spatial and material impact of scenography on spectators. In [1] she articulates how pioneering examples of theatre scenography through the twentieth century demonstrated a reciprocal and reflexive relationship between text and image, extending understanding of how space and technology actively contribute to the ways in which the atmospheric and dramaturgical effects of theatre influence the spectator. She presents a new framework for the analysis of scenography that focuses on spatial and embodied modes of reception, with audiences identified as co-creators of scenography.</p>		

McKinney and **Iball** [2] is the first and, to date, only publication to explore scenographic research methodologies. It scopes the emergence of scenographic research in the twenty-first century and identifies specifically scenographic modes of developing new knowledge, including scenography-as-research and spatial thinking, again positioning the audience as co-creators.

Palmer [3] examines the phenomenal impact of light on performance and the ways in which light is used as a fundamental creative aspect of dramatic presentation - aspects that have been largely ignored in performance scholarship. Using historical sources and contemporary interviews **Palmer** examines light as an aesthetic material rather than focusing on the technical aspects involved in theatrical realisation which characterises previous publications in this field. [3] is the first volume to evaluate the dramaturgical contribution of light, its impact on the development of artistic sensibility and the critical importance of light on the audience experience.

In [4] **McKinney** develops thinking from [1]. She explores the spectator's kinaesthetic and embodied experience of the materials of scenography, reconsidering the designation of visual performance as 'mere' spectacle and emphasising the embodied nature of the reception of scenography. A persistent focus on the *visual* in scenography has underplayed the bodily, phenomenological dimension of theatrical reception and neglected the spatial, temporal and material nature of the staged environment. This article addresses these elements through a case study of spectator responses to an extravagant 3-day street theatre spectacle and a 45-minute performance installation. It considers how the materiality and 'unruliness' of scenographic spectacle stimulates a sensory immersion for spectators, enabling them to *experience* rather than simply witness, opening them up to new encounters with the world and facilitating resistance to hegemonic spectacle.

In [5] **Palmer** reassesses the legacy of lighting theorist Adolphe Appia, debunking established historiographies of his influence purely as an abstract thinker of light and instead exploring his overlooked but critical, formative years as a practitioner in Dresden. Framed as the first scenographic turn, Appia's vision of 'active light' as a material and modulating force is demonstrated to have emerged from an embodied, practical and technical knowledge of the craft of lighting.

In [6] **McKinney** and **Palmer** develop critical perspectives on a new field of practice – 'expanded' scenography – which, in contrast to traditional approaches, recognises scenography's capacity to make significant aesthetic interventions through mainstream and experimental theatre, installation, site-based performance and live art. Although others have referred to scenography's expansion, this research was the first to propose a new analytical framework for expanded scenography and to define it as a critical practice that is related to, but distinct from, other modes of theatre practice. The examples explored range from digital space to the natural and built environment, and from political protest to intimate performance exchanges. The authors' chapter-length introduction defines the characteristics of 21st century scenography and identifies *spectator experience* (rather than designer intention) as the central principle of expanded scenography. Within this, they propose three key concepts; 'relationality', or the way scenography creates spaces of aesthetic encounter; 'affectivity' and how the aesthetic impacts on the individual viewer; and 'materiality' or the properties and capacities of nonhuman things to impact on audience experience. Collectively these concepts demonstrate the ways in which scenography can elicit radically different understandings of the world.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

1. McKinney, J.E. and Butterworth, P. (2009) *The Cambridge Introduction to Scenography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
2. McKinney, J.E. and Iball, H. (2011) 'Researching Scenography'. In Kershaw, B. and Nicholson, H. (eds) *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance* (pp.111-136). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
3. Palmer, S. (2013). *Light: Readings in Theatre Practice*. Readers in Theatre Practice. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

4. McKinney J.E. (2013). 'Scenography, spectacle and the body of the spectator.' *Performance Research: a journal of the performing arts*. 18(3), pp. 63-74.
5. Palmer, S. (2015) 'A 'chorégraphie' of light and space: Adolphe Appia and the first scenographic turn.' *Theatre and Performance Design*. 1.1-2: 31-47.
6. McKinney, J. and Palmer, S. (eds.) (2017). *Scenography Expanded: An Introduction to Contemporary Performance Design* (pp.1-20). 1st. Performance + Design. London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The combined research of **McKinney** and **Palmer** has resulted in two principal impacts: i) developing new approaches in contemporary scenographic professional practice that extend the discipline's boundaries to consider the aesthetic, ethical and political effects on spectators; and ii) influencing HEI teaching of a new generation of practitioners.

i) Developing new approaches in contemporary scenographic professional practice

McKinney and **Palmer**'s research has contributed to innovations in professional practice, expanding international design practitioners' understanding of the potential of their work to shape aesthetic meaning and provide transformative audience experiences.

McKinney's research has influenced the direction of the Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space (PQ), <https://www.pq.cz/>, established in 1967 and now the foremost international gathering in the field of scenographic practice. Until the 2008 edition, PQ was dominated by exhibitions that reinforced a traditional view of scenography as a decorative or technical feature of theatre production serving the play text and the director's vision. The PQ Artistic Director for the period 2008-2015 acknowledged that **McKinney**'s research [1] 'into the experience and perception of scenography and the pivotal role of the spectator was a major influence' on their leadership of the event and, in particular, on a pan-European PQ project, Shared Space (2013-16) [A]. Involving 12 major European theatre organisations, Shared Space introduced to PQ for the first time the 'premise ... that theatre is a shared space of audience and the performance' [A]. Shaped by **McKinney**'s ideas about spectatorship, Shared Space led to PQ redefining contemporary scenography as 'a performative environment that has aesthetic, ethical and political impact on participants' [A]. **McKinney** was appointed by the organising committee to chair the jury of 8 leading international practitioners at PQ 2015, consolidating this new direction, and, as the first academic in this role, bringing renewed theoretical rigour to jury deliberations. The PQ Artistic Director noted that under **McKinney**'s leadership, the PQ 2015 jury 'awarded projects that were ground-breaking, acknowledging both artistic quality and challenging the ideas of what scenography is', going on to observe how this played an important role in 'redefin[ing] the field and hav[ing] impact beyond European practice... The work exhibited at the following quadrennial, PQ 2019, was proof of that' [A].

International practitioners and theorists who participated in PQ 2015 contributed essays to [6] and collaborated with **McKinney** and **Palmer** on its production. This volume, the foundational text for a series dedicated to scenography that is also edited by **McKinney** and **Palmer**, is a valuable resource for professional designers and artists seeking to augment the status of scenography as an autonomous artistic practice both in the theatre and beyond [F]. Other titles in the series highlight the expansion of scenography and its application beyond the realm of the theatrical, including the shopping mall, rural landscapes and digital media.

The influence of **McKinney** and **Palmer**'s research has also been felt amongst practitioners and artists who have used practice-based PhDs to develop and innovate their scenographic work. As researchers and as PhD supervisors, **McKinney** and **Palmer** have guided a new generation of emerging artist-researchers who are developing innovative and influential scenographic practice. Some of these were included in a 2020 University of Leeds international survey [F] distributed to 34 professional scenographers who have completed practice-based PhDs, and were either directly supervised or advised by **McKinney** and **Palmer**. Respondents from the UK, Finland, Greece, Hungary, the Netherlands, Canada, Australia and Mexico participated anonymously

online, reflecting on how **McKinney** and **Palmer**'s research influenced their practice. Citing specific examples from [1-6], their responses revealed that insights into audience and reception, collaboration, and composition in scenography have led to innovations in their own artistic processes and in the work that they make, including: heightened consideration of the creative agency of scenographic materials, such as the ways costume and light work interactively with performer bodies [1, 3, 6], or the potential of light as a palpable material and as 'a kind of performer' [3, 5]; deeper appreciation of the sensory, spatial and material dimension of audience experience leading to more 'open and inclusive' artworks [1, 2, 4, 6]; utilisation of theoretical framing to enable deeper reflection and better articulation of tacit knowledge e.g. in communicating with collaborators and in thinking critically about their own work [2] and extension of their scenographic practice beyond theatre contexts: site-specific performance, installations, participatory art, immersive performance, VR performance, urban performativity, and political and activist scenography [all F].

Artist [David Shearing](#) (PhD Leeds, 2015, supervised by **McKinney** and **Palmer**) observed that familiarisation with their research 'into embodied approaches to scenography and into understanding the potential of scenography to communicate with an audience ha[s] enabled me to create my own unique blend of participant-centred installation performance.' [B] Shearing's work won the Gold award for Installation Design at World Stage Design (Cardiff, September 2013) and a Sky Academy Arts scholarship (2014). **Palmer**'s research into the expressive potential of light [3] influenced Shearing's 'The Weather Machine' (2016), which won the Silver award for Alternative Design at World Stage Design (Taipei, 2017) [B]. Shearing also acknowledged that **McKinney**'s research on the role and experience of the audience in scenography [1, 2] led to 'making performance with participants in the public realm, where reflection can be seen as active strategy for engagement' with a wide range of publics and community groups in various sites in Leeds city centre in 2016 and 2017 [B].

ii) Influencing the teaching of new generations of practitioners

[1, 3, 5, 6] are popular with theatre and performance undergraduate and Masters students across Europe and North America with [5] the most downloaded article in the history of *Theatre and Performance Design* journal (11,409 as of 7.10.20). This research provides theoretical and conceptual underpinning for new ways of thinking about scenography, enabling a more expansive and creative approach to design as a holistic element of performance practice and defining a shift away from the teaching of scenography in theatre departments as a craft-based or technical subject. International postgraduate practitioners who are now teaching in HEIs themselves substantiated this view, for example, in Canada, where [1, 3] are being used with all theatre students, to help to overturn 'dominant hierarchies of practice' and elsewhere 'widening the scope of what is considered to be scenography' [F].

Further examples can be found in the UK and North America. For example, in 2017 the Department of Dance, Drama and Performance at Liverpool Hope University, UK, used [1, 6] to embed scenographic principles across the entire drama and performance studies curriculum [C]. A senior academic in the Department reported that [1] has been valuable in bringing analytical rigour and critical reflection to students' practical exploration while [6] evidences the way scenographic understanding is as relevant to musicians, dancers and theatre makers as to technicians and designers. The introduction of concepts from [1, 6] has deepened student theatre makers' appreciation of how the design space can be an integral or leading aspect of the work they make and led to better understanding of the ways in which performance can communicate with an audience: 'Scenography has become a much larger part of the curriculum, finding synergies with other teaching areas in the School of Creative and Performing Arts. As a result, there has been a significant change in the visual acuity of students' work and students are now more likely to consider the aesthetic choices they make and how an audience will interpret these' [C]. At Liverpool Hope, placing scenography more centrally in the curriculum allows future practitioners to appreciate how the visual, spatial and material dimensions of performance offer powerful ways to engage audiences, a practice that was also evidenced by academics working in other HEIs who responded to the survey [F].

Academics in the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Miami use [1, 3, 6] to provide a pedagogic framework for theatre students exploring the potential of scenographic practice as a mode of cultural and intellectual analysis and practice. The Chair of Department observed: 'The publications have directly impacted on our teaching methods...[providing] a jumping off point to develop or devise work and to think about dramaturgical structures that suited specific audiences, the places and spaces of performance and structures that could speak the visual and spatial languages...These publications have provided complex ideas laid out in a language our novice performance makers could access and probe to gain a deeper understanding of what theatre could be'. Reflecting on the overall impact on graduates from his School, he concluded: 'Research by McKinney and Palmer has legitimized discussions about autonomous scenographic practice, influenced dramaturgical processes and generated ideas to inspire theatre-makers emerging from the University of Miami' [D].

At postgraduate level **McKinney** and **Palmer's** research informs new programmes of study. For example, in 2016 the Prague Theatre Academy, Czech Republic used [1, 4] to directly shape the development of a new Masters programme, Directing Devised and Object Theatre. Its Programme Director noted that specifically, **McKinney's** notion that space, objects and materials can be experienced through bodily empathy has been central to the course and evidenced in work which prioritises the role of materials and the audience as co-creators within the performance space. They confirmed that 'McKinney's research into the agency of materials and embodied spectatorship has underpinned the philosophy of this program.' [A] Graduates from this programme are making work that involves the audience 'as insiders' in the performance. This counteracts mainstream attitudes to audiences as passive spectators and offers a new 'dialogical' and collaborative approach which includes artists, audiences, space and materials in the unfolding dramaturgy of performance [A].

At Concordia University, Montreal, Canada [6] has inspired recent projects, with graduate students for example using scenography to interrogate urban environments [F], while at Aalto University, Finland, [2] has been compulsory reading for Masters level students since 2013. Its Professor of Costume Design noted that [2] has established 'scenography as a space for theoretical thinking' and 'contributed to enriching the research-oriented scope of our course' with increased numbers of students going on to study for PhD. They concluded that for doctoral students [6] is 'a significant resource for theoretical framing for the material, social and political aspects of performance design' and is 'stimulating critical debate' and inspiring 'novel ideas' for future scenographic practice beyond traditional theatre contexts [E].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

A: Testimonial (29.4.20) from PQ Artistic Director 2008 -2015 and Director of MA Directing Devised and Object Theatre at Prague Theatre Academy, Czech Republic.

B: Testimonial (June 2020) from Artist, Director and Lecturer in Performance at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, UK.

C: Testimonial (13.4.20) from Senior Lecturer in Drama and Performance Studies, Liverpool Hope University, UK.

D: Testimonial (29.3.20) from Chair of Department of Theatre Arts, University of Miami, USA.

E: Testimonial (1.6.20) from Professor of Costume Design, Aalto University, Finland.

F: Complete set of 21 responses to online survey 'Impact of Scenographic Research on Practice'. Distributed internationally to 34 professional scenography practitioners. Available online from 15.1.20 – 31.5.20.