

MINIMALITY AND MOBILITY: Excellent collaboration with technology. Scenography as spatial practice, adaptive method, and curatorial thinking¹

Por _ Jeries AbuJaber²

INTRODUCTION _

Hello! My name is Jeries AbuJaber. I am a Palestinian scenographer, theatre maker, performer, and director born and raised in Bethlehem. I am based in Prague, Czechia.

Today I would like to speak about minimality, mobility, and technology not only as practical solutions, but as scenographic ideas. I will argue that this discipline is never just decoration or background; it is a way of organizing space, movement, perception, and relations between bodies, materials, and audiences.

From this perspective, Palestinian scenographic practice can be understood not only as a local response, but also as part of a broader understanding of scenography as a spatial and ideological practice.

SCENOGRAPHY THROUGH GEOGRAPHY _

If we begin from this idea, then space is never neutral. Every scenographic choice, what is present, what is absent, what moves, what remains, what is illuminated, what is hidden, already produces meaning. In this sense, scenography can also be understood as a spatial ideology: a way of shaping how performance is experienced, how bodies meet space, and how audiences enter a relation with place.

The West Bank is not a continuous territory. It is divided into Areas A, B, and C, controlled differently by the Israeli occupation military and the Palestinian

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Authority. Between and across these zones there are over 700 checkpoints and roadblocks.

Consequently, for us as theatre makers, this fragmented geography has direct material consequences: a 20-kilometer journey can take 3 hours or more. A truck carrying set pieces must stop, be inspected, sometimes turned back; actors from Bethlehem need permits to pass through checkpoints to reach Ramallah; and audiences in the West Bank need permissions to enter Jerusalem or in the other occupied Palestinian Territories.

This is precisely why the subject of minimality and mobility can be discussed as a general scenographic concept. Palestine is one strong case, but the larger question concerns how scenography everywhere responds to constraint, instability, material limitation, technological possibility, and the politics of space.

For example: scholar George Potter writes that Palestinian site-specific performance 'functions as a spatial practice that writes and rewrites dominant narratives of place, identity, and history.' Our mobile scenography is exactly this 'a practice of rewriting space through movement, despite restrictions'.

The architectural theorists Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti coined the term 'permanent temporariness' to describe Palestinian infrastructure under occupation.

I would argue our scenography embodies permanent temporariness: every set is temporary, modular, ready to move, because we never know when we will have to disassemble and relocate."

FOCUSING ON MOBILITY _

Let me begin with mobility. In the Palestinian context, movement is never simple. Journeys between cities, rehearsal spaces, performance venues, and audiences are shaped by fragmentation, checkpoints, closed roads, and unpredictability.

For theatre makers, this means that mobility is not only a logistical matter; it becomes part of scenographic thinking itself. How large can a set be? How fast can it be assembled? How easily can it move? What happens when the route changes, when a venue changes, or when arrival is delayed?

This is where Palestinian practice speaks to a general principle in scenography: space is dynamic, not fixed. A scenography that moves is not weaker than a monumental one; it may in fact be more responsive, more alive, and more connected to the realities of performance.

MATERIAL CONTROL _

The second constraint is materials. Import restrictions mean many construction materials cannot enter Palestine (The West Bank), or arrive with

such delays and costs that they become impractical. We operate within a system of triple taxation —comprising Israeli occupation taxes, Palestinian Authority taxes, and customs fees— and often have no choice but to purchase materials from Israeli suppliers, as they are otherwise unavailable to us.

But beyond this local condition, material limitation raises a universal scenographic question. Given these constraints, minimality should not be understood simply as lack. It can also be understood as precision: the careful selection of only what is necessary, meaningful, ethical and mobile.

In this sense, minimality becomes both an aesthetic and an ideology. It rejects excess, privileges adaptability, and allows space itself, the body, and the audience's imagination to become active components of the scenographic event.

This approach is further supported by the 'Liminal Spaces' research project, which examines how checkpoints function as zones where materials and objects are carefully examined, controlled, and made visible to power. Our scenography responds by becoming less visible, less material, more ephemeral.

WE THINK _

What is the lightest version? What can fold? What can we make from what already exists? Can we use a wall that is already there? Can projection replace a built structure? These questions have shaped my practice, leading me to prioritize the discovery and reuse of existing objects and materials over the construction of large-scale stage designs.

A third important point is that theatre is not always centered in fixed institutions. In many contexts, and very strongly in Palestine, theatre becomes mobile in order to reach audiences across different locations.

MOBILE THEATRE INFRASTRUCTURE _

This mobility is not only about transport; it is also a curatorial and scenographic method. It asks how theatre can travel without losing intensity. It asks how performance can adapt to schools, courtyards, streets, cultural centers, and temporary spaces like the old city of Bethlehem, or Nablus, while still remaining theatrically rich.

Seen more broadly, mobile theatre challenges the idea that scenography belongs only to the permanent stage. Instead, it proposes scenography as a portable practice of spatial transformation.

The third force shaping our work is that Palestinian theatre has mostly been mobile. El-Hakawati, the Palestinian National Theatre in Jerusalem, developed a mobile theatre unit specifically to reach audiences who cannot cross checkpoints or afford tickets. They describe it as *'Taking Theater to*

*Palestinians Wherever They Live.'*³

Similarly, Al Harah Theatre in Bethlehem, and The Freedom Theatre in Jenin Refugee Camp, located in one of the most heavily restricted areas of the West Bank, use theatre as cultural resistance, touring despite repeated Israeli military raids all over the West Bank. In Gaza, a group called the Palestine Theatre Entertainment Team created a mobile theatre for children. Twelve volunteers, minimal portable sets, traveling to hospitals and orphanages to bring performances where children cannot leave.

So when I say our theatre is mobile, I don't mean by CHOICE, I mean by necessity. And this necessity has generated an entire aesthetic and methodology.

MINIMALISM _

"HOW DO WE RESPOND? FIRST STRATEGY: MINIMALISM

We use modular elements, small pieces that can be carried by hand, can be assembled in ten minutes, and disassembled in five. We use the space itself as scenography.

One powerful example is "AlHarah Theatre – Bethlehem Festival for Theatre of Place" is an annual festival organized by AlHarah Theatre in Bethlehem, focused on "theatre of place" or mobile theatre performed in nontraditional spaces such as old abandoned houses, markets, squares, and refugee camps.

The nature of the festival, it presents theatrical and performative works that use urban and social spaces as living stages, making the place itself an essential part of the scenography and the audience's experience.

It is a clear example of what I described earlier: mobile theatre that challenges the idea of scenography being tied only to the fixed stage, and turns space, body, and context into active components of the theatrical event. When objects are restricted, the body, the voice, the movement, the breath become the primary materials. The scenography is performed, not merely installed."

TECHNOLOGY AS SUBSTITUTE MATERIAL _

This leads to the role of technology. In my talk, technology is not presented as ornament, and not simply as innovation for its own sake. It is a collaborator. Projection, sound design, digital image, portable lighting, and screen-based scenographic elements -in collaboration with objects and materials- allow a performance to remain visually rich without relying on heavy, immobile or difficult-to-source objects. Technology can therefore

³ Nota del autor incorporada por la editora: The troupe has also traveled and performed widely abroad, especially in Europe. The closure of the occupied West Bank and Gaza, the permit regime, and the Separation Wall have all made it nearly impossible for audiences outside the city to enjoy El-Hakawati shows. In order to overcome this, the theater developed a mobile theater; working with artistic and cultural institutions around Palestine, it takes theater to Palestinians wherever they live in the country. This was after building the discrimination wall and the illegal settlements which started 2002 continuously until today.

function as a substitute for volume, weight, and built scenery, while opening new forms of space, temporality, and atmosphere.

This is why I describe the relation as an excellent collaboration with technology. Technology extends scenographic possibility. It helps transform bare walls, fabrics, and modest spaces into active visual environments. It supports movement, flexibility, and speed. And at the same time, it allows scenography to remain imaginative, layered, and contemporary, and less material and money waste, beside the fact that most of the funds in Palestine are controlled by Europe and the Israeli occupation.

Al-Kasaba Theatre in Ramallah, and Al Hakawati Theatre in Jerusalem, —where I previously worked as a freelancer—, are equipped with what has been described as ‘highly innovative sound, lighting, and projection technologies.’ This is not luxury, but a strategic necessity.

BODY AND MEMORY AS SCENOGRAPHIC MATERIALS _

When material means are reduced, the body becomes even more central. Gesture, rhythm, voice, positioning, and movement begin to carry scenographic weight. The performer does not simply stand inside the scenography; the performer helps produce it.

This connects with site-specific and spatial performance theories that understand performance as a way of rewriting place through embodied presence. The body activates memory, and memory activates space. In this way, minimality does not create emptiness; it creates concentration.

Technology, then, does not replace the body. Rather, body and technology collaborate: the body brings memory, scale, and presence; technology brings extension, transformation, and multiplicity. Together they create an expanded scenographic field.

When we cannot bring objects, we bring stories. When we cannot build structures, we build presence. Palestinian performance scholar George Potter writes that Palestinian bodies in performance ‘inscribe themselves into a shared narrative,’ creating what he calls a ‘politics of place making.’

The symposium brief asks us to think about ‘living archives’ and ‘exhibition practices beyond the human’, the intersection of human body and digital technology. Our work sits exactly here: the body carries memory, technology amplifies and extends it, and the scenography emerges from this collaboration.

Ultimately, we are not documenting occupation, we are making scenography with occupation as a material, as a constraint that generates form.

TOWARDS A GENERAL MODEL _

At this point, I would like to shift from the Palestinian example to a more general proposal. I believe that minimality, mobility, and technology can be

understood as a contemporary scenographic model beyond any specific geography.

This model is increasingly relevant in many places: where artists work with more limited budgets everyday, unstable venues, touring formats, interdisciplinary collaboration, digital media, and changing audiences. In all these cases, scenography is no longer only the art of building worlds through stable objects. It is also the art of composing relations through lightweight structures, adaptable systems, recycling materials, digital tools, and embodied action.

Thus, Palestine does not stand outside general theory. Rather, it helps reveal something essential about scenography today: that space is relational, scenography is performative, and limitation can generate new artistic intelligence.

CONCLUSIÓN _

To conclude, minimalism and mobility are not simply signs of reduction. They are creative principles. They ask how little is needed to create intensity, how space can remain active while traveling, and how technology can collaborate with scenography rather than dominate it.

Through this lens, scenography appears not as static decoration (only), but as an active practice of organizing space, bodies, materials, and perception. The Palestinian context makes this especially visible, but the concept reaches much further. It speaks to a wider contemporary condition in which artists everywhere are rethinking how performance can remain mobile, adaptive, and spatially intelligent.

From our fundamental reality, constraint is not only deficit. constraint generates form. The conditions of occupation, restricted mobility, controlled materials, fragmented audiences, have shaped a scenographic practice that is now, I would argue, a model for how performance can respond to unfolding, displacement, and crisis anywhere in the world, including the inspiring artists in Gaza with the ongoing genocide.

Palestinian scenography is mobile because it must be. It is minimal because it must be. It is technological because it must be. Yet in being these things, it has also become innovative, resilient, and deeply meaningful.

THANK YOU!