

imitating the dog:

Screens, Bodies and Stories: Technology as Scenography

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Why technology is never just decoration

From the beginning, imitating the dog has had an unusual relationship with the technology we use in our work. Projected images, live camera feeds, and real-time film editing are never simply backdrop or added spectacle. They are always part of the meaning of the piece, always carrying an idea.

This matters because projected images work differently from other things we put on stage. A chair is a chair. But a projected image inevitably reminds audiences of cinema, television, and the internet – all of the other screens we encounter every day. When you place a live performer alongside a projected image, something interesting happens: two very different kinds of presence come into contact. The live body is there, breathing, in the room. The image on screen exists differently: processed.

We have always been fascinated by this tension. We live in a world saturated with screens. The philosopher Jean Baudrillard argued that the modern world has become so dominated by media images that we can sometimes struggle to distinguish between the image of something and the thing itself (his most influential statement of this idea is in *Simulacra and Simulation*, 1981). Our work takes this idea seriously, not as a theoretical exercise but because it connects directly to the stories we want to tell. Placing live bodies and screen images side by side, and asking what the relationship between them might mean, turns out to be a remarkably productive way of exploring questions about history, memory, power, and identity.

History through a lens: The Zero Hour (2012)

Set in Berlin in May 1945, *The Zero Hour* placed performers in front of projected digital backgrounds, animated versions of the bomb-damaged city drawn partly from computer game environments. Two camera crews filmed the performers live on stage, and that footage was edited in real time and projected onto a second, larger screen at the front of the stage. The audience watched both simultaneously: the live bodies on stage, and the processed, cinematic version of those same bodies appearing on screen moments later.



The Zero Hour (2012)

The camera crews were Chinese, and they spoke Mandarin, a deliberate choice that placed the filming of European historical events in the hands of people outside that specific history, as though these events were being recorded for a future or foreign audience who might make of them what they wished.

One of the central discoveries of the production was simple but powerful: two performers standing apart from each other on a bare stage – which looks artificial and unconvincing to a live audience – could, when filmed and edited together, appear completely believable on screen: sitting side by side in a car, sharing a meal, inhabiting the same moment. The camera tidied up the messy reality of the theatre and replaced it with a smoother, more "cinematic" version that felt more real precisely because it resembled what we are used to seeing on screens.

This gap between the live moment and its screened version became the production's central metaphor. Just as a filmmaker selects and frames footage – deciding what counts as the story, what gets left out, whose perspective dominates – historians select and shape events into particular narratives about the past. The camera in *The Zero Hour* was an argument: that history is not simply discovered but constructed, and that those who control the frame control what we understand to be true.

Reading and imagining: A Farewell to Arms (2014)

Our adaptation of Hemingway's 1929 novel opened with the company appearing to break into a derelict hospital to make a film version of the story, as though the audience were watching the beginning of a film shoot. The camera crews moved in and out of the action throughout, sometimes operating as technicians, sometimes stepping into a role closer to that of a Greek chorus: observing events, commenting on them, always seeming to occupy a privileged position just outside the worst of what was happening.



A Farewell to Arms (2014)

While creating our adaptation we were thinking about the experience of reading. When you read Hemingway's novel, you never encounter it in isolation. You bring everything with you – memories of the films made from it, photographs from the First World War, other romantic stories, the particular weight the word "hospital" already carries. The projections in *A Farewell to Arms* tried to recreate that experience: the hospital was always physically present, solid and real, but the images constantly shifting across its surfaces layered it with other meanings, other associations, other times.

There is one moment in the production where the cameras withdraw completely. It is the section of the novel in which the two main characters find temporary sanctuary in Switzerland – from the war, from history, from everything propelling them toward a painful ending. Something about that private human experience seemed to resist being filmed. Removing the cameras was our way of acknowledging that not everything can or should be captured; that some experiences sit at the edge of what representation can reach.

Witches with cameras: Macbeth (2023)

Working with only five performers, we needed a way to give each a clear, distinct role. The solution was to make the three witches the camera operators. Throughout the production, they followed Macbeth and Lady Macbeth with their cameras, filming close-ups that exposed the protagonists' inner lives – the fear in Lady Macbeth's eyes, the trembling of Macbeth's hands after the murder – while the Macbeths themselves remained entirely unaware of being watched.



Macbeth (2023): the witches operating cameras

The witches also spoke directly to the audience – commenting on the action, explaining the adaptation's choices – in a way associated with the techniques of playwright and director Bertolt Brecht, who regularly used direct address to remind audiences that they were watching a constructed piece of theatre with a deliberate point of view, rather than a seamless slice of life.

The logic was this: the witches set the tragedy in motion through their prophecies; through their cameras, they also controlled how we witnessed it unfold. Fate and the camera were the same thing, an unseen, irresistible force that shaped the story while its subjects remained oblivious to its operation.

A dying man's imagination: War of the Worlds (2026)

Our adaptation of *War of the Worlds* centres on Will Travers, a man dying in hospital after an accident at a far-right political rally. As he loses consciousness, he constructs a hallucinatory version of H.G. Wells' alien invasion from the materials around him – the hospital equipment, the doctors, the monitoring machines – which become the cast and scenography of his imagined world.



War of the Worlds (2026)

The audience can see exactly how the illusions are built, through the cameras, the props and the live editing. Will cannot. This is a Brechtian choice: we wanted to make the mechanism visible, to show how a particular version of reality is constructed, because Will's imagined world is itself built from ideology. The fantasy of the far right is, in this sense, another kind of constructed fiction, one shaped by hidden assumptions and distorted perspectives. As Will's grip on consciousness weakens, that world falls apart in front of the audience, piece by piece.

Why cinema matters to us

Across all the productions that have used live cameras and projected images, the influence of cinema has been constant. For those of us who grew up before the internet, film and television were the primary windows onto a wider world. We became fascinated not just by what films showed us, but by how they worked: their visual language, and the ways in which editing and framing shaped meaning and emotion.

The American novelist Don DeLillo put it well in his 1982 novel *The Names*: "Film is more than twentieth-century art. It's another part of the twentieth-century mind. It's the world seen from the inside." Cinema has not simply reflected the way we think; it has helped to form it. The way we understand storytelling, cause and effect, the relationship between a close-up and an emotion, has been shaped in part by a century of moving images.

When we bring cinematic techniques into the theatre space, we are not conducting a formal experiment for its own sake. We are trying to understand something about how we experience the contemporary world, and to make work that honestly engages with that experience rather than pretending the screen doesn't exist.



Macbeth (2023)

Questions for discussion and analysis

When watching an ITD production, or when making work influenced by our methods, consider:

What is the technology doing? Is it serving a storytelling function, helping us understand character, plot, or theme, or does it feel decorative? Is there a difference between technology that illustrates what is already happening on stage and technology that adds a new layer of meaning?

What is the technology a metaphor for? In *The Zero Hour*, the camera represents the construction of historical narrative. In *Macbeth*, it represents fate and surveillance. Can you identify what the technology represents in a specific production? Does it carry a political dimension?

Who controls the camera, and what does that mean? In several ITD productions, certain characters operate the cameras while others are unaware that they are being filmed. What is the significance of that asymmetry? What does it mean for a character to be oblivious to the apparatus through which their story is being told?

Live body versus screened image When watching an ITD production, does your attention move between the live performers and the projected images? Do you find one more compelling than the other at different moments? Does the production seem to suggest that one is more "real" or more "true" than the other?

› To explore these questions practically, see the exercises in Three Worlds: Understanding Theatrical Form in ITD's Work (Section 2) and Adaptation and imitating the dog: Practical Exercises (Section 4). For how the camera, projection and sound systems are actually wired together, see the technical plans in Section 3: Video Design and Projection Mapping – Technical Plan, Lighting Design – Technical Plan and Music and Sound Design – Technical Plan.

Key terms

Scenography: The combined visual and spatial design of a production, encompassing set, lighting, costume, projection and sound, treated as a unified whole. In ITD's work, scenography is conceptually motivated from the earliest stages of making rather than being added to a finished piece of theatre. Each element carries meaning, not just atmosphere.

Intermedial: Performance that combines more than one medium, for example live theatre and film. ITD's productions are intermedial because they place live performance and projected moving image in a direct, active relationship.

Mediation: A mediated image is one that has been processed and transmitted through a medium (a camera, a screen) rather than experienced directly. ITD's productions frequently place the live, unmediated body alongside the mediated image, and ask what the difference between them reveals.

Brechtian: Relating to the methods of German playwright and director Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956), who wanted audiences to think critically rather than simply becoming absorbed in a story. Brecht made the construction of theatre visible, reminding audiences that they were watching something made, with a point of view. ITD's work shares this concern with exposing the mechanism.

Published 2026 as part of imitating the dog's learning resources (Section 2: How We Think). For how ITD's process developed, see A Story of Devising, Adaptation and Collaboration (Section 1). For the rules that hold each production together, see The Rules of the Game: How ITD Builds Its Worlds (Section 2).

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Photography of *The Zero Hour, A Farewell to Arms, Macbeth* and *War of the Worlds*: Ed Waring.