**The Scenographic Exchange: *Homesick***

Scenography involves the manipulation of the visual and spatial environment of a performance. It is an attempt to evoke (or provoke) through the interplay of bodies, space, objects, movement, time and space, certain ideas and feelings. But, crucially, it is in the imagination of the audience that these images are completed. Members of an audience not only receive and register images, but assimilate them and develop them through the faculty of their own imagination. The aim this research is to investigate the nature of the communication which occurs between scenography and its audiences.

Using my own scenographic practice as the foundation for performances I am attempting to track the ways in which scenography is perceived by its audiences and the extent to which the experience and impact of performance images can be articulated. Furthermore, I am developing methods of eliciting audience response which are appropriate and effective for scenography. Key questions are: How do members of an audience experience scenography? How can audiences’ responses to scenography be gathered? What kinds of impact or significance are attributed to scenographic images? How does a phenomenological experience of an image develop and resonate? In what ways do audience members extend or re-imagine scenographic statements?

*Homesick* was the second of a planned series of three scenographic performances. Each is part of a cycle of iterative development towards the investigation of the scenographic exchange. In the first cycle, I identified two distinct areas for investigation: processes of composition (in my own development of the scenographic performance) and processes of reception (as experienced by the audience). The first performance, *The General’s Daughter* consisted of a series of evolving tableaux which employed shifting layers of metonymic and metaphoric imagery. Audiences responded through written responses and recorded small group discussions. A key insight was the realisation that composition and reception are intertwined. The composition of the performance is constantly evaluated within the frame of my own reception and my judgement of the potential for reception in others and, likewise, the process of the audience reception is guided by their evolving sense of the composition, structure or concerns of the performance.

In *Homesick* I set about creating a performance which would engage audience more directly through immersion in scenography; a sensory experience, a spatial experience. I aimed to heighten audience awareness of space, scale and objects in the performance and also in their own experience and memory. I also asked audiences to respond through making their own images. Drawings are organised through similar means to scenography (colour, scale, composition) and can access responses which are about feeling, sensation and memory as demonstrated by these responses:

*A figure with one arm raised, top hand much larger and distorted like a goblin with long distorted fingers in a book from my childhood. In contrast the lower hand is smaller, like a child’s… It was an unnerving image which reoccurred as female puppet wiped hands after murder (Image 1)*

*I drew an eye to show a sense of being watched by other audience and by the performers. It is an old eye, an experienced eye (Image 2)*

*An impression of whiteness, diffused light, traces of things happening beyond the light, things in the past, like a brass rubbing (Image 3)*

*I drew a girl’s face with a cage over it…a typically pretty girl with blond hair and blue eyes, but she can’t speak. It is called ‘Sweetheart’… It made me think of the hermaphrodite, Herculine Barbin… It felt Victorian, a particular class, a feminine experience, re-lived, repeated (Image 4)*

*The drawing is a tunnel with solid walls but leading to a lighted opening ‘something’ at the end (Image 5)*

The third cycle of this research will focus on the notion of exchange and attempt to incorporate audience response as part of the performance.

The scenographic process is, as Alan Read suggests of theatre, a transaction of symbolic exchange[[1]](#footnote-1). The images it seeks to evoke are drawn from the material of the everyday and projected through manipulations of space, form, movement and colour. The action of images is as likely to be as a visceral response to the material qualities, the phenomena, of the performance as it is to the network of signs which it produces. Luigi Prestinenza Puglisi’s consideration of the ‘projective relations’ of art and reality, can be applied to scenography and configured as a series of projections in a never ending game of reflections where translation, conceptualisation, metaphorisation of an object into another medium ‘assumes new connotations and interpretative openings’ [[2]](#footnote-2).

This research concerns itself with the inter-relatedness of the subjective and the social in the making and in the consumption of scenography. Phenomenology and the intersection of experiences (Merleau-Ponty [[3]](#footnote-3)) and theories on the production of space, in particular ‘third space’ (Lefebvre [[4]](#footnote-4), Soja [[5]](#footnote-5)) have been influential in the development this ongoing research into the scenographic exchange.

1. Alan Read, *Theatre and Everyday Life: An ethics of performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 5-15 and 63-66 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Luigi Prestinenza Puglisi, *Hyper Architecture: Spaces in the Electronic Age* trans. Lucinda Byatt (Basel, Boston and Berlin: Birkhäuser, 1999) 40 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Merleau-Ponty (1962) *Phenomenology of Perception* trans. Colin Smith, London and New York: Routledge [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Lefebvre, Henri (1991) *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, Malden, Oxford and Carlton: Blackwell [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Soja, Edward (2000) ‘Thirdspace: expanding the scope of the geographical imagination.’ In Alan Read (ed) *Architecturally Speaking*, London and New York: Routledge, pp.13-30 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)