Audience Immersion and the Experience of Scenography

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Abstract

This study sits at the intersection of two fields of academic enquiry into performance practice: audience reception of scenography and the rise of 'immersive' theatre. Using my own scenographic practice as a tool, I illuminate the understanding of audience experience of scenography in environmental performance and question how scenography might act as an agent for audience immersion. I examine the nature of sensory and imaginative engagement in the context of performance installations in black-box studio spaces where audiences are central to the composition.

This practice-based study is composed of two parts: the presentation and development of a series of three performance installations (*VOID/ROOM*, *If anyone wonders why rocks breakdown*, *and it all comes down to this…*) and this supporting written thesis.

In this thesis I present an original model of audience immersion that elucidates how audiences might become entwined with the scenography of performance. My three-part model of audience immersion consists of interlinking concepts expressed as Immersion as Landscape, Immersion as Weather and Immersion as Journey. The main theoretical perspectives have been developed through my readings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Drew Leder and Tim Ingold. As part of my findings, I explain how 'mindfulness/awareness' developed through Ellen Langer, Eleanor Rosch, Evan Thompson and Francisco Varela can act as a mode of audience engagement that might afford deeper relational encounters between the participant and design material.

Documentation of Practice

The outcomes of the practice-based component to this thesis are presented on the USB drive. Viewing of this material is recommended at the start of PART TWO of this written commentary. The documentation on the USB drive is presented as an offline website and can be assessed by clicking the **'Index.html'** file on the USB device. The USB drive also contains the ethesis (digital version of this written commentary) as a PDF file.

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The author has taken all documentation images and video used within this thesis.

PART ONE (Context and Method)

INTRODUCTION

Research Journey and Practice

My journey in examining audience immersion and the experience of scenography has been inspired by my own practical experience within both an art-based and performance context. Having worked for the Southbank Centre (2007–2009), during a key transformative period, I facilitated a number of projects by other artists, that engaged audiences in playful and multisensory modes of engagement with art. This experience inspired me to look more deeply at the impact these spatial and sensory modes of engagement were having on audiences.

I have a background in performance-making, having completed an undergraduate degree in performing arts at the University of Winchester (2002–2005) and a master's degree in performance design and practice (2008–2009) at Central Saint Martins, where I began exploring the construction of design materials to immerse audiences. As a scenographer, I am interested in how materials can be used to establish meaningful connections and relations between people and their environments. I use high technologies such as wireless headphones, video projection and surround sound, but I am also interested in the creative potentials of light and low-tech materials, such as theatrical haze, paper and everyday objects. Often I work without a live performer, where audiences are encouraged to explore and negotiate the performance environment. I classify this type of experience as 'one-on-none' performance.

It was the combination of my practical knowledge and my experience in facilitating audience experience of other installation artworks, together with a focus on performance, that placed me in a unique position to undertake this practice-led enquiry. Through my practice, the research aim is to examine the construction, experience and the sensation of immersion in performance.

This research project has two overarching questions:

1. **How do audiences engage with scenography in performance events that place the body as central to their reception?**

2. **How might audience immersion in performance be modelled?**

I will provide an outline of my methodology and research questions shortly (see page 41). First, I document the rise in immersive events and outline how audiences might come to experience these works; this also helps me place concepts of immersion within a scenographic context. I then offer a research context outlining three theoretical perspectives on immersion in scenography: Spatial, Bodily/Sensory and Cognitive/Imaginative.

The Rise of Immersive Events

The term 'immersive' has been applied to a diverse range of performance and art practices including promenade, site-specific, one-on-one, audio walks, installation artwork and the construction of total theatrical worlds inside found spaces and black-box studios. These practices, particularly since the 1990s, have formed part of a growing trend in which audiences are invited to participate, interact and encounter performance 'spatially, and sometimes through touch or more vigorous participation' (Harvie 2013: 1). Over the course of this research (2009–2015), the rise and

application of the term have become widespread within theatre culture and subsequently academic discourse. What is distinct about this emergent field is the ways in which audiences are required through bodily and cognitive engagement to encounter the spatial and scenographic elements of the performance or artwork. This research examines the nature of audience immersion, with the specific aims of investigating the role and function of scenography and the ways in which design material might be experienced. Through this investigation I seek to illuminate the role scenography plays in the construction of audience immersion.

My use of the term 'immersive events' is an attempt to embrace a range of practice that is not only concerned with the act of watching or listening; I include within this heading artworks that afford embodied and sensorial modes of engagement with design materials. These events, as with my own performance practice, encourage audiences to be active in their participation with an art environment or process. This research, therefore, spans both art-based and performance contexts, with the specific focus on spatial, sensorial and bodily modes of audience reception. Before discussing the problematic use of the term 'immersive', I shall first map the rise in immersive experiences and identify some characteristics in order to help define my study within a scenographic context.

Immersion in Art

Over the past decade, the Tate Modern has been instrumental in curating large-scale art events. The Unilever Series (2000–2012) invited artists to respond to the Turbine Hall's cavernous space. Perhaps as a by-product of the vast nature of the space, the artworks produced engaged audiences in a physical negotiation of the work, often drawing attention to an audience's own sense of scale in relation to the surrounding environment. Olafur Eliasson's *The Weather Project* (2003) saw the creation of a giant sun, constructed of mono-frequency lights that illuminated the space in a brilliant yellow colour. In this piece, the haze-filled room provided a unifying atmosphere in which participants engaged in acts of social play, initiated via their mirrored reflections on the ceiling. What materialised in the experience was a relational encounter between bodies and a stimulation of the audience's senses through light and haze. *The Weather Project* operated at a junction between individual perceptual processes and social play. More recently, in the same space, Tino Sehgal presented *These Associations* (2012). In this provocative piece, performers were choreographed into action, movement and conversation with each other and members of the public. The line between performer, participant and audience became blurred. Depending on whether the audience member chose or was invited to engage with the performers, the audience become participants through their action in the work, or they remained present to the work as spectators having a distant and reflective position on it. Sehgal's project straddled a threshold where action might become an immersion *in* an encounter with the work.

The Hayward Gallery has also presented a series of 'immersive' exhibitions that witnessed record visitor numbers. From 2005 to 2009 the Southbank Centre

undertook a large-scale refurbishment of the Royal Festival Hall and the 21-acre site in which the Hayward Gallery is situated. The aim was to return the site to its cultural roots of the 1951 Festival of Britain; the intention was to foster a permanent festival through public engagement in free and spontaneous events. There was a strategic organisational attempt to engage audiences through different modes of participation. One of the opening events was Antony Gormley's *Blind Light* (2007) exhibit, which enveloped audiences in a glass box filled with water vapour that formed a dense cloud. In this work, as audience members entered the bright white vapour their figures were lost against the haze-filled background. Like the figures under Eliasson's giant sun, the audience's image was folded into the artwork. *Blind Light* immersed the audience in a sensory and perceptual relationship with the design materials to such an extent that their bodies become part of the art experience.

In the collective exhibition *Psycho Buildings* (2008), artists were invited to transform the Hayward Gallery spaces. Mike Nelson, in his installation *To the memory of H.P. Lovecraft* (2008), violently hacked at the walls of the gallery providing the impression of a space ravaged by a rabid beast (see FIGURE 1).

FIGURE 1: Mike Nelson, '*To the memory of H.P. Lovecraft* (2008), Hayward Gallery, http://www.theartsdesk.com/visual-arts/mike-nelson-represent-britain-venice-biennale

The impression for me, as an attendant to the work, was both a physical and psychological positioning inside Cthulhu's lair (a fictional deity in Lovecraft's writing). The result was an unnerving experience as I became entwined with the world that Nelson had created; the psychic operation (of becoming the subject of the space) and the physical objects and architecture were all brought into relation. This experience was not a heightened mode of participation with other bodies, nor was it interactive, but arguably it was a sensory and cognitive immersion in the relational encounters that it fostered. In Nelson's work, the audience's embodied position activates the art experience.

Immersion in Performance

Over the past decade, audiences to performance have increasingly been brought into close proximity with performers and scenographic materials. The difference between performance and installation artwork is the emphasis on dramaturgy and narrative, which might offer further experiences of immersion via the performance text. The most significant and culturally dominant performance company that explores spatial dramaturgy is Punchdrunk, who use classic texts for their inspiration for its epic free-to-roam performances. In Punchdrunk's *The Drowned Man: A Hollywood Fable* (2013), the audience – wearing masks – are left free to roam the multiple floors of intricately designed sets representing hyper-real worlds. As the audience journey through the space they piece together elements of the text through isolated scenes, dances and one-on-one encounters. The fragmented text and individual navigation of the space leads to multiple subjective experiences of the performance. The audience actively construct narratives through their individual journeys, which is a distinct trope of theatrical immersion.

Josephine Machon (2013) offers the first published monograph on the subject of immersion in performance and seeks to claim the territory with some distinctive definitions. Machon suggests that immersive experiences 'combine the act of immersion – being submerged in an alternative medium where all the senses are engaged and manipulated – with a deep involvement in the activity within that medium' (2013: 21-22). Punchdrunk's use of space provides the audience with an 'alternative medium' through the construction of a performance world. There are a number of other companies creating work in this way including dreamthinkspeak, WildWorks, Slung Low, Blast Theory, Shunt, Rotozaza, Janet Cardiff,

Sound&Fury, and David Rosenberg, all of whom have been referred to under the ever-expanding label 'immersive'.

These companies and artists, to varying degrees, position the audience as central to the theatrical exchange. This includes allowing audiences to freely navigate the performance space, often involving multisensory engagement. Embodied modes of engagement are encouraged, such as journeying, fostering intimacy and activating attentive listening strategies. Not all performance companies aim to create distinct worlds: many artists working within an immersive context utilise pervasive technologies to augment sensory experience. The application of wireless headphones in many of these companies' works (Slung Low, Rotozaza, Janet Cardiff and David Rosenberg) provides the possibility of instant transportation to different aural environments. In these headphone-based experiences, the scenography enables the possibility of multiple spatial shifts and the layering of experience. Any model of audience immersion therefore needs to be understood as a plural concept that accounts for multiple possible immersions in an aesthetic experience.

Immersive practice might best be described as a range of art events that are constituted upon (and at times exploitative of) the participants' relationship with the materials of performance. In this thesis, immersion is not considered a goal or destination, but a process that might materialise in the relational encounters between participant and scenographic materials.

Relational Aesthetics

Current debates surrounding relational encounters in artistic practice have been developed through Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* (2002). In his theoretical project, Bourriaud articulates an evolution of artistic practice that no longer wishes to form 'imaginary and utopian realties' but to be 'actual ways of living and models of action within the existing real' (2002: 13). In this context, the artwork operates as a relational device, 'taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space' (2002: 14). From Bourriaud's perspective, a relational artwork establishes intersubjective encounters, where meaning can be formed collectively rather than individually. The relational encounter is important, as the audience becomes the central locus of meaning-making and forms part of the art experience; immersion in this sense might be thought of as a specific type of encounter.

Analysis surrounding relational artwork has been predominantly concerned with notions of participation. Claire Bishop (2012) expands upon Bourriaud's realm of intersubjective encounters by exploring the politics of participation. Bishop similarly acknowledges a trend, developing from the 1990s, of an artistic orientation toward the social with a 'shared set of desires to overturn the traditional relationship between the art object, the artist and the audience' (2012: 2). However, Bishop is critical of Bourriaud, suggesting that his relational aesthetics is more concerned with structure than with subject matter (2004: 64), and she proposes her own theory of the 'social turn' (2012).

Bishop chooses to question the quality of relational encounters. She proposes the next logical question for the theory of relational aesthetics is to ask 'what *type* of relations are being produced, for whom, and why?' (Bishop 2004: 65 emphasis in original).

Within theatre scholarship, Jen Harvie (2013) extends Bishop's concern with the social, but seeks to pay attention to the conditions of participation, such as class and wealth (2013: 10). Her aim is to consider the broader social and material contexts, to question not just the qualitative experiences, but how those opportunities of participation are 'affected by the practices' social and material context' (2013: 10). As the focus for Harvie is on the social forms of participation in cultural events, she alternates between art practice and theatre, expanding the field of the immersive events to including theatrical encounters, such as Kate Bond and Morgan Lloyd's *You Me Bum Bum Train*. Relational aesthetics, for Harvie, provides a link between art practice and immersion in theatre experience:

> [v]isual, sculptural and aural art that immerses its audience in similar ways is generally installation art that sometimes produces relational aesthetics. Installation art is not simply composed of an object or objects but produces an environment which, as in immersive theatre, surrounds and contextualizes the audience.
>
> (Harvie 2013: 31–32)

The relational encounters fostered in the works listed above (Eliasson, Gormley, Nelson, Punchdrunk) encourage different encounters with scenography, including in the construction of performance worlds, sensory augmentation and social play. My research and practice is situated within a relational field, where the environment for performance contextualises the audience.

The Problems of Immersion

Participation and sensory engagement in performance is not new, but the recent rise in immersive practice has demonstrated distinct modes of embodied engagement. However, the term 'immersion' in aesthetic experience shows itself to be a contradictory concept, as I shall explain.

The body is not an isolated object and is always understood against a background or structure; as phenomenological philosopher Dermot Moran (2000) notes, 'stimuli are always perceived and interpreted in a rich and complex environment' (2000: 393). Any understanding of immersion in performance should take into account the 'rich and complex environment' that the body exists in and against. In being in the world we are bound up with it, as Merleau-Ponty insisted: '[t]he world is not an object such that I have in my possession the law of its making; it is the natural setting of, and field for, all my thoughts and all my explicit perception' (2002: xi – xii). The term 'immersive' has the danger of presenting the idea of a homogenous medium in which a body is saturated or engrossed; however, it would better to consider immersion as a heterogeneous concept (Ingold 2014). The sensation of feeling when immersed in the rain, for example, would depend on the fluctuating forces of the wind or the size of the raindrops; it is their distance, force and speed that give way to particular feelings and emotions. A heterogeneous immersion is the subjective experience of a set of specific conditions. What is needed in current discourse on immersive practice is a more nuanced understanding of how a participant body is situated and bound up within a rich complex performance environment.

Ross Brown (2010a) (2010b) details the complex sonic environments in which we hear and highlights a paradigm shift in the promotion of immersion in theatre sound towards the end of the last millennium. Brown cites semiotician Theo van Leeuwen who states that the 'aural perspective […] had been challenged […] by new forms and new technologies of listening which aim at immersion and participation rather than at concentrated listening and imaginary identification' (van Leeuwen, cited in Brown 2010b: 1). Van Leeuwen's critique is that there has been a distinct focus *towards* the subject, rather than through concentrated or attentive listening *from* the subject *to* the sound. Brown's argument is that the notion of immersion, in aural experience, is something of a cliché, seeking to drown out external noise (such as traffic or ambient sound in the auditorium) and thereby positioning noise as an unwanted problem of the theatre space. The development of an all-encompassing immersion in surround sound, according to Brown, can be seen as just another version of the same ideological notion of silence in the theatrical auditorium. The 'demonising of noise' as Brown puts it, 'seemed […] to stultify theatre with its nervousness that any extraneousness – including that of any overt theatricality – might distract the audience from purer, abstract, intellectual edification' (Brown 2011: 10). Similarly, Jonathan Crary (2001) identifies that attention/inattention throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century forms part of a capitalist modernity where inattention began to be treated as a danger or serious problem (2001: 13). Brown suggests that the 'negotiation of noise is part of the process of establishing meaning in sound (or of any signal perceived in an immersive aural field)' (2010a: 132). He puts forward the notion that there is an active engagement on behalf of the participant to focus, select and make sense of sound through continual background noise (traffic or conversation,

for example). Any notion of an immersion in performance needs to consider the dialectic between attention and distraction – between noise and meaningful agitation – as an active part of our being-in-the-world. It is within this perceptual framework that my research experiments were constructed. My research is a study of the relations between the body and the environment; it does not seek to present an idealised concept of immersion as something that is acted upon the body. It is more useful to consider 'audience immersion', rather than 'immersive performance', as this places an emphasis on an active multisensory and imaginative negotiation between the body and performance environment.

Active Scenography

This research contributes to a field of knowledge surrounding scenographic construction and its reception. The nature and operation of scenography is the main focus of this study. Scenography is a term used to express the overall operation and manipulation of the design elements of performance. The examples above articulate how contemporary practice is driven through design-led approaches, in which the spatial functions and scenographic elements (space, light, sound and objects) inspire audience engagement.

Whilst there has been a rise in immersive practices, theoretical perspectives on the shifting participant/space and participant/design relationships have remained largely underdeveloped. At the Prague Quadrennial (PQ) (2011) – an international exhibition of theatre design – an expanded scenographic field incorporated art practice that engaged spatial design with active mobile spectatorship. PQ2011 demonstrated how the current climate of design-led practice is occupying an intersection between performance, fine art and architecture. It is

precisely this intersection in which both my own practice as a scenographer and this research is positioned. Arnold Aronson (2012) asserts that 'the language of scenography is changing' (2012: 9), and as our understanding of what constitutes scenography develops, so too does the need to consider scenographic research within an expanded theoretical framework. In the introduction to *Performance Research*, 'On Scenography' (2013), Sodja Lotker and Richard Gough inform us that '[w]hat is important is that scenographies are environments that not only determine the context of performative actions, but inspire us to act and that directly form our actions. So how do scenographies make us?' (2013: 3–4). This identifies a need to re-evaluate contemporary approaches to scenography and consider how scenography might act as an agent for participation.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

The following research context outlines multiple perspectives on immersion through a scenographic lens; to date, little research has been conducted into how a sense of immersion might manifest in an audience's experience of performance. This study researches the role and impact of scenography in the construction of relational encounters. The research concerns for this project are twofold: to conceptualise and model possible modes of immersion, and to understand the nature of audience experience of scenography from a position of spatial centrality.

Expanded Scenography

Until recently scenography has mainly been understood through professional practice rather than through academic or research frameworks. Joslin McKinney and Philip Butterworth (2009) provide the most comprehensive scholarly overview of scenography, asserting a developed conception of scenography as 'the manipulation and orchestration of the performance environment' (2009: 4). This usefully accounts for the temporal, rhythmic and architectonic structures of design. Traditional elements of scenography – nominally, setting, costume, light, sound, space and more recently projection – are brought into synthesis with dramaturgical and perceptual processes.

Christopher Baugh (2005) maps twentieth-century pioneers such as Adolphe Appia (1862–1928), Edward Gordon Craig (1872–1966) and Czech scenography Josef Svoboda (1920–2002), all of whom developed new techniques of scenographic expression, elevating scenography from its static representations of place and setting. Baugh shows how technology and spectacle are historically

inseparable from theatre and performance – arguing against the essentialist assertion that theatre is all about the living actor. Baugh's framing of scenography is useful to my study as he considers how design can be used dynamically to express mood, create atmosphere and ultimately be a tool for creative expression. Recent academic approaches to scenography have focused upon the individual elements of design, such as sound (Brown 2010b) and light (Palmer 2013). Scott Palmer offers significant insights into historical developments of technologies and their applications. He explores the role of light in relation to the body and space, drawing particular attention to both Craig and Appia. Brown (2010b) is predominantly concerned with the body and does not fully account for sound as part of a holistic understanding of scenography. Sound, often marginalised in analyses of scenography, can create equally impactful relations with other design materials as part of an overall orchestration. Theoretical approaches to the experience of scenography, in which the audience is central to its 'orchestration' (McKinney and Butterworth 2009: 4), and where the elements of design are experienced *as* performance, remain largely underdeveloped.

Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre* (2006) marks a significant contribution to the understanding of contemporary performance in its construction and reception. Lehmann offers some useful insights that can be applied to scenography and to the reception of immersive performance. He articulates how visual dramaturgy does not mean 'an exclusively visually organised dramaturgy but rather one that is not subordinated to the text and can therefore freely develop its own logic' (Lehmann 2006: 93). Whereas Svoboda sought to 'draw inspiration from the play' (Burian 1971: 20), a postdramatic perspective allows for a 'theatre

of scenography' (Lehmann 2006: 93, my emphasis). Lehmann argues that theatre is still catching up with the aesthetic developments of other arts forms (2006: 94). Indeed, immersive theatre that affords an opportunity for alternative modes of reception has only recently been more widely embraced by mainstream theatre establishments, for example, Punchdrunk's collaborations with the National Theatre (*The Drowned Man: A Hollywood Fable,* 2013–14) and English National Opera (*The Duchess of Malfi,* 2010). Lehmann proposes that theatre has demanded newly changed attitudes from its spectators (2006: 94). The relatively recent focus on alternative modes of engagement has been further reinforced with the emergence of design-led experience, where audiences are coming into closer contact with scenography, and where design is used as the central component of the theatrical orchestration of a performance event. Audiences are feeling, touching and engaging with scenography and its environments through active multisensory participation – creating and experiencing new dramaturgies.

Over the past decade, scenography has emerged as a significant area of academic and research-driven enquiry. McKinney's (2008) PhD research offers significant insights into the ways in which scenography communicates with an audience. McKinney outlines a taxonomy of scenography (2008: 25–26) based upon interacting levels of scenographic operation. My research builds upon the theoretical concepts outlined by McKinney; these include processes of attention and distraction (2008: 41–50) and the phenomenological dimension of scenographic reception (2008: 59–61). Furthermore, McKinney's research provides a methodological template through the creation of original practice and in

eliciting and analysing audience response. I extend and develop these strategies, which are outlined in the methodology chapter.

The scope of recent developments in academic understanding of scenography and its reach is captured in *Expanding Scenography* (2011) where Brejzek informs us:

> Scenography […] as a transdisciplinary practice of the design of performative spaces can no longer be assigned to a singular genre – set design comes to mind – and a singular author. It is rather its fluid articulation of staging spaces between the disciplines of theatre, exhibition, installation, media, and architecture that renders it particularly suitable to formulate speculative spaces of potentiality.

> (Brejzek, 2011: 8)

As scenographic practice has expanded, a new gap has formed in the theorisation of the reception/experience of scenography in an expanded performance/ installation territory. The experience of scenography and its potential to offer immersive experiences remains an underdeveloped but rich field of study that my research contributes to.

Perspectives on Immersion

In the following section, I outline three perspectives on audience immersion that I have identified whilst conducting this research: space and the environment of performance, bodily (sensory), and cognitive (imaginative) modes of engagement. In presenting these distinct lenses, I seek to identify how certain practices place an emphasis on specific modes of audience engagement with design. Between these perspectives there are overlaps in approach. The focus of my research is on the experience of live performance within a black-box theatre studio; however, aspects of

virtual reality are presented to identify cognitive approaches and illuminate thinking, even though this is not the territory or focus of my project.

1. IMMERSIVE PERSPECTIVES: Space

I shall first focus on a spatial perspective of immersion. My 'spatial' perspective separates live practice from virtual reality contexts that have come to define and dominate the immersive discourse throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, as in Ryan (2001), Grau (2003) and Davies (2005).

Environmental Theatre (Relations and Transactions)

One useful way to define immersive theatre is by the spatial organisation of the event. Immersive experiences often take place in found spaces, galleries and theatres; they often utilise the total environment as part of their formal composition. 'Environmental theatre' is a broad term that describes the active usage of space(s), people and production elements to create and sustain performative actions. Developed by Richard Schechner (1973, 1994), it is a useful concept through which to consider the relational encounters between audience and the performance event. Schechner, through his work with *The Performance Group* (1967–1980), developed environmental theatre from Allan Kaprow's 1950s and 1960s Happenings. Happenings saw assemblages of objects, people and spaces coordinated around set scores of action. Schechner drew upon these spontaneous acts to form his conception of an environmental theatre that he presents through a series of 'transactions and exchanges' (1994: x). It is within an environmental frame, inside a black-box studio, that my research is positioned. The environment is what surrounds, sustains, envelops, contains and nests these theatrical exchanges (1994: x). In the environmental tradition, the production elements no longer need to support a performance, nor are they to be subordinated to a theatrical text, and

can, in some situations, be more important than the performers (1994: xxv), marking environmental theatre as inherently scenographic.

Schechner considers the holistic view of the overall operation and experience of attending an event and the potential impact this operation has on audience reception. He suggests that all facets, including the lobby, box office and administrative offices, form part of the 'performance environment' (1994: x). Acknowledging these multiple spatial frames helps me to consider the overall journey and experience of an audience and how these might impact upon the event's reception. Schechner argues that all spaces are active players in a complex theatrical system; '[a]n environmental performance is one in which *all the elements or parts* making up the performance are recognized as alive' (Schechner 1994: x, emphasis in original). Susan Bennett (1997) also acknowledges the complex systems of transformation involved in theatrical reception. Bennett reflects on the social implications of theatre spaces and the impact they have on determining collective and individual status (1997: 133). The reception and sense-making process can be considered through individual subjective processes and through shared and collective interpretation. Furthermore, Bennett makes a brief reference to the impact of promotional material in establishing 'possible interpretive strategies' (1997: 136). Promotional material in immersive performance has increasingly been used to frame expectations and to position the audience in a relationship with the art experience before the physical attendance to it – an environmental frame includes marketing, foyer and box office spaces as part of the multiple spatial frames of the performance.

The audience body is considered a significant axiom of environmental theatre; participants are as much active players as the performers and production elements –

participants become 'scene-makers' as well as 'scene-watchers' (1994: xxvi). In environmental theatre, participants are folded into the performance image, becoming active parts of its reception. In environmental theatre, spatial relationships between audience and performer, audience and audience, and audience and design are reordered, forming alternative modes of sensory and imaginative engagement.

Aronson (1981), a leading proponent of environmental scenography, maps a historical but mainly architectural lineage of the term. Aronson explicitly focuses on the term 'scenography', which he defines through the spatial framing of spectators and the extent to which they are able to perceive themselves 'surrounded by the elements of the setting' (1981: 8), as well as other definitions such the shared space between performers and actors and the degree to which the audience move about the space. Aronson outlines the diverse range of practitioners and artistic movements that have explored the possibilities of having an audience situated within the performance space, such as the Futurists (nominally the period 1909–1916), Antonin Artaud (1896–1948) and Jerzy Grotowski (1933–1999). In discussing the relationships between audience and performance, Grotowski notes the essential concern 'is finding the proper spectator-actor relationship for each type of show and embodying the decision in physical arrangement' (1981: 186). Environmental scenography is where the audience–space relationship is reformed depending on the specific nature of the theatrical production, a process I adopt in this research. Aronson and Schechner give little attention to audience experience and the reception of scenography, particularly where the audience inhabit the shared space of the scenography.

Defining Spatial Immersion

Immersion is often identified via its spatial operation, commonly by presenting a world or medium into which a participant physically enters. Alison Griffiths (2008) offers a definition of immersion in cultural events defined via a spatial and bodily positioning. She articulates immersion as

> [t]he sensation of entering a space that immediately identifies itself as somehow separate from the world and that eschews conventional modes of spectatorship in favour of a more bodily participation in the experience, including allowing the spectator to move freely around the viewing space.

> (Griffiths 2008: 2)

For Griffiths, immersion is a spatial engagement in which the spectator has autonomy over her/his own bodily position and movement through a space. Griffiths' approach is historical. She considers wider cultural contexts, such as museums and cathedrals, but not aesthetic performance experience. Her definition helpfully identifies two key components of spatial immersion: first, that the space presents itself separately from the world, by operating within its own demarcated or contained arena, and second, that alternative bodily modes of spectatorship are encouraged. For Griffiths, conventional modes of spectatorship are the more usual ways of attending a cultural or artistic experience, for example, cinema versus the more unusual IMAX experience that encloses the field of vision. Despite the wider proliferation of participatory experience in recent times, the more usual mode of attending the theatre remains dominant: the audience engage through looking from seated positions, rather than through free bodily movement. Whilst free bodily movement is certainly a characteristic of immersive theatre, it is not always the most defining feature.

In Sound&Fury's *Going Dark* (2012), audience members remained seated as they were plunged in darkness and bathed in surround sound. In this experience the

body is mobilised into a multisensory affective experience of the performance, even though the audience members are seated.

Machon (2013) takes a similar spatial stance to Griffiths by suggesting that the spatial framing of an event partly constitutes its immersive nature. Her emphasis on immersion in an 'alternative medium' (2013: 21–22) is similar to Griffiths as it presents the event separately from our day-to-day environment. Machon identifies how immersive theatre involves presenting 'worlds' that exist on their own terms (2013: 93). Machon leaves some unanswered questions as to how audiences might come to be sustained within these worlds. Rather than merely presenting a world *to* an audience we need to also consider audience relations *with* an environment and to what extent the audience might inhabit that world. This gap in understanding offers a core research focus to my project, where I investigate the nature of the relationship between audiences and the performance world in order to understand the extent to which audiences might really be considered as 'immersed' in performance works.

Virtual reality theorist Michael Heim questions how a world exists *as* a world. He proposes:

> [a] world is not a collection of fragments, nor even an amalgam of pieces. It is a felt totality or whole. You cannot make a world by patching together this part and that part and the other, because the wholeness, not so much its particulars, makes the world exist […] The world is not a collection of things but an active usage that relates things to each other that links them […] World makes a web-like totality […] World is a total environment or surround space.

> (Heim 1998: 89-91)

Heim's virtual reality perspective can be expanded to include performance worlds where the experience of a performance world operates as dynamic relational process – as a web-like structure. The participant forms an active relationship with objects, be

they people or 'things', and this helps to construct and sustain a world. It is the encounters that create an 'immersive' experience, not the mere presentation of an alternative performance world.

In Punchdrunk's works, the construction of a world is the most immediate defining feature. Punchdrunk's performance events are 'postdramatic' (Lehmann, 2006: 85), as the performance text is reconfigured and activated via the participants movement, spatial situation and social field as they journey through the performance space (2006: 85). Lehmann proposes the performance text in postdramatic theatre is akin to texture, a fabric made out of threads (2006: 85). In the spatially immersive environment of Punchdrunk, the world is formed through threads; web-like relations are created as the participant weaves through the performance space making links between individual objects, spaces and situations. In this way, the performance

> becomes more presence than representation, more shared than communicated experience, more process than product, more manifestation than signification, more energetic impulse than information.
>
> (Lehmann 2006: 85)

This is an immersion via the construction of a web-like experience, a process, a spatial weaving and threading of the performance text as the participant journeys or moves from space to space.

Journeying Through Space

In order to further understand audience experience as a form of journey, mobility studies offers perspective into the spatial and cognitive processes of movement. Fiona Wilkie (2012) investigates the mobility turn in relation to site-specificity and performance. Wilkie argues that site-specific audiences are often required to engage

with a 'different kind of mobility' (Wilkie 2012: 208); this argument also applies to environmental performances, which also require the audience to engage with new modes of physical and imaginative spectatorship. Geographer Tim Cresswell, a leading figure in the mobility turn, suggests that mobility is the act of moving between locations: '[t]hese locations may be towns or cities, or they may be points a few centimetres apart. This is the simplest understanding of mobility as it appears on maps of movement' (Cresswell 2006: 2). Whilst it is clear that my own practice does not fit established definitions of site-specific performance, the environmental frame invites the audience to engage in mobile encounters within the black-box studio. Although the space of the black-box theatre points towards an immobile site, the mobile audience and movement of scenography offer an altogether more complex 'activity-in-motion' (Wilkie 2012: 208). Further questions are to be asked here of mobile audiences in environmental contexts; most pressingly, for my practice, the key questions in relation to mobility are: in what ways might participants navigate and journey through performance; and how does scenography operate to provide a place of encounter and exchange? John Urry (2007) helps me consider the new fluidities between communication and physical travel when applied to headphone experiences.

Keith Tester (1994) and Walter Benjamin's (1999) descriptions of the flâneur help me to articulate how an audience may encounter free-to-roam performances. I apply the concepts around the act of flânerie in the creation of my practice as well as to audience experience in their attendance to it. The flâneur and the act of flânerie are rooted in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century literature, traditionally located within the city of Paris and its arcades. In this traditional articulation, the flâneur is a gendered concept – both because the word is a masculine

noun in the original French, and because it was used to describe male practices of the city. The comparative freedom the male had in walking the Parisian arcades meant the flâneur was associated with a dominant male perspective. My conception of the audience-flâneur is non-gendered. My focus is on the experiential rather than social-discursive aspects of the city[1]. I am concerned with the act of flânerie 'walking' or 'strolling', and I use it to describe audience engagement, rather than to refer to a gendered subject within a city environment. However, in reference to the historical roots of the term, I will refer to the non-gendered flâneur as 'he'. The flâneur is a useful concept in order to help understand audience experience through a part-imaginative and part-physical journey through space.

2. IMMERSIVE PERSPECTIVES: Bodily/Sensory

Rosemary Klich and Edward Scheer (2012) outline sensory and cognitive approaches to participant immersion in multimedia performance. Multimedia performance is identified as work that 'creatively utilises media technologies as an integral component of the overall work, with the media significantly contributing to the content of the production' (2012: 17). A multimedia lens is applicable to my study, in terms of both the application of technology, such as video, wireless headphones, and multi-speaker sound environments, and also the role of technology in forging relational encounters between participants and the performance environment. Klich and Scheer propose that 'an emphasis on visceral immersion in multimedia performance is creating new modes of reception,

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[1] For a discursive unpacking of the gendered flâneur and the city, see Wolff (1994), Wilson (1992) and Kuppers (1999).

embodiment, and contemplation' (2012: 127). These 'new modes of reception' identify a need to understand the nature of these experiences within a scenographic context.

Sensory approaches to immersion place an emphasis on the bodily here-and-now; this might involve direct sensory stimulation or augmentation of the senses via technology. This type of sensory immersion will alter how the body orientates itself to its surroundings. Multimedia performance operates differently to the otherwise isolated 'world' of spatial immersion, as our usual everyday environments provide the context for performative action. According to Klich and Scheer,

> [i]n post-dramatic theatre, where there is no clearly demarcated alternative reality, there is still potential for the audience to experience a high degree of immersion, not immersion in an alternative world, but immersion in the spatial 'here and now', an enhanced state of being in relation to the surrounding space and responding to immediate stimuli.

> (Klich and Scheer 2012: 131)

The augmentation of the sense of hearing, through the use of headphones, for example, creates an immediate perceptual shift in spectatorship. In such works the audience might be invited to question their own sensory engagement with the physical here-and-now. For example, in Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller's audio walk *Her Long Black Hair* (2004), participants wearing headphones navigated the nineteenth-century pathways of New York's Central Park. In this walking project, participants were provided with a pack of photographs and invited to directly engage with the world about them by reflecting upon the relationship between the fictional

images and physical space. The binaural recording[2] layered two perceptual sound fields, the recorded sounds of the performance (fictional cityscape, narration, sound effects), and the actual sounds of the city, which merged into a seamless aural milieu. Merging the two sound fields opens up a space of playful perceptual ambiguity, between actual and presentational sound. The impact of this, according to Stephen Di Benedetto, is that we come to live within the moment 'paying attention to every detail that we hear and see as if it were significant. They [Cardiff and Miller] have led us into a situation where paying attention to our senses is the means by which we will make sense of the event' (2010: 157). Without live performers, it is through the bodily engagement with the photos and sound materials that the work becomes an act of theatre. The participant is immersed in an attentive perceptual juggling of sonic material through direct sensory augmentation in the hear-and-now.

The Production of Affect

In multimedia performance the whole body is often mobilised into multisensory participation through an emphasis on the production of 'affect' – performance that is felt, activating preconscious physiological and emotional responses in participants. Martin Welton discusses the affective potential of theatre in *Feeling Theatre* (2012). Welton builds upon a perceptual framework outlined by Gibson (1979) and Merleau-Ponty (2002) to articulate how theatre darkness and the air within the performance the space and auditorium can form part of intended and unintended theatrical reception. Both darkness and the atmospheric conditions of

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[2] Binaural recording captures the spatial qualities of sound through stereo left and right channels. Sound material is recorded using microphones positioned inside the ear canals or dummy head. The sound is then played back directly into the ears, recreating the volume, depth and spatiality of the environment in which it was recorded.

the 'air' are identified as materials that are experienced as bodily and conceptual phenomena, external/objective and felt within/subjective. An example of this is different manifestations of *affect* and *effect* of weather in theatrical experience. For Welton, the weather is conceptualised as a general conditioning of audience experience and is seen predominantly as 'total perspective' (2012: 128). The weather is not 'a thing we see, feel or hear but a medium which we are in' (2012: 128); it is affective because there is a correspondence between the surrounding atmospheric conditions and the body: 'it has grown colder, because I have grown colder' (2012: 150). Understanding scenography through the weather offers a distinct frame through which to further understand Machon's articulation of 'an alternative medium' (2013: 21–22), a world or atmospheric medium of performance such as the air or darkness. I ask further questions as to which specific scenographic orchestrations might foster a multisensory immersion, and how scenography might act as a medium of experience.

James Jerome Gibson (1979) provides a core understanding of how individuals make sense of their environment through the flow of information as they move through space. Gibson's ecological approach to visual perception identifies the 'medium' (air) as part of a triadic framework of 'substances' (objects and furniture of the earth: wood, metals, soil) and 'surfaces' (which persist insofar as substances persist, light is absorbed and reflected at their surface) (Gibson 1979: 16–32) in which humans perceive their environment. Gibson's ecological approach is useful in considering audience perception of environmental performance as the participant and the scenography create movement thorough space. Expanding on Gibson's ecological approach, Tim Ingold's (2000, 2005, 2010, 2011, 2013) prolific writing and

theorisation of anthropology, archaeology, art and architecture provide an explanation of how humans are intimately entwined with their environments by focusing particularly on daily experiences of landscape and weather. Ingold considers humans as beings that move through space and engage in multisensory gestures with materials. He outlines how individuals are to be thought of not as observers, but as immersed, with the 'whole of our being in the currents of a world-in-formation' (2011: 129). Making similar observations to Welton, Ingold articulates how the weather and the medium, or air, are the conditions for our being-in-the-world. He suggests that:

> [r]ather than thinking of ourselves only as observers, picking our way around the objects lying about on the ground of a ready-formed world, we must imagine ourselves in the first place as participants, each immersed with the whole of our being in the currents of a world-in-formation: in the sunlight we see in, the rain we hear in and the wind we feel in. Participation is not opposed to observation but is a condition for it, just as light is a condition for seeing things, sound for hearing them, and feeling for touching them.

> (Ingold 2011: 129)

In the analysis of my practice, I consider how participation – in Ingold's conception – can be applied in environmental performance, as the condition of the audience's being in that world. Ingold's perspective on weather helps unravel specific formations of our being in a world through the examination of materials and objects in daily life.

(Syn)aesthetics

In order to bridge the gap between bodily sensory simulation and cognitive modes of engagement with performance, I turn to Machon's (2009) concept of '(syn)aesthetics' to further grasp multisensory approaches to performance reception. Machon's compound term '(syn)aesthetics' derives from the historical Greek term of *syn*, meaning 'together', and *aisthesis*, meaning 'sensation' or 'perception' (Machon 2009:

13). It derived from the contemporary medical and scientific theory of 'synaesthesia', which is a neurological phenomenon in which the stimulation of one sensory or cognitive pathway creates an automatic response in a secondary pathway, allowing for a 'multisensory evaluation' (Cytowic cited in Machon 2009: 17). Machon fuses this with the subjective, experiential realm of artistic practice 'aesthetics'. The term refers to a double meaning of the word *sense*, as both semantic meaning-making and feeling, both sensation and emotion (2009: 14). '(Syn)aesthetics' foregrounds the fused nature of the somatic/semantic sense-making process of theatrical reception. In applying the scientific term synaesthesia, there resides the notion that individuals may reconnect to a (latent) synaesthetic potential (2009: 16), which is useful to help consider how an individual might desire other sensory stimulation. The significance for audience reception of scenography is the potential to fuse scenographic materials, such as light and sound, in order to form one somatic/semantic experience of both elements.

A '(syn)aesthetic' framework fuses imagination, memory and sensory response to 'induce changes in somatic process' and disrupt 'the boundary between the real and imaginary' (Luria cited in Machon 2005: 17). Juhani Pallasmaa (2005) examines the nature of the senses in the experience of architecture, addressing slippages between the sensory, real and imaginary. He proposes that the senses are united through the surface of the skin, arguing that '[a]ll the senses, including vision, can be regarded as extensions of the sense of touch – as specialisations of the skin. They define the interface of the body and the exteriority of the world' (2005: 42). Pallasmaa's writing has both inspired the creation of my practice, particularly his reflections on 'acoustic intimacy' (2005: 49), and influenced my theoretical thinking as to how space is experienced through the body. Yvon Bonenfant (2011) extends Pallasmaa's concepts

of a haptic architecture to consider how, in performance, voice and light might cooperate to engage with our bodily desire to reach towards them. I apply ideas in my analysis as to how sound and haptic imagery might work together, to consider how audiences might engage in a form of bodily reaching toward scenography through the desire of touch.

3. IMMERSIVE PERSPECTIVES: Cognitive/Imaginative

Cognitive approaches to immersion are concerned with mentally attentive processes, as exemplified in the experience of virtual reality (VR) environments, or when captivated by a work of literary fiction. Immersion in this sense has been well documented by Ryan (2001), Grau (2003) and Morie (2007). Ryan identifies three distinct types of immersion in literary fiction: spatial, temporal and emotional (2001: 140–162), which does not account for the sensory here-and-now experience of performance. Ryan's observations help me to further understand immersion as plural concept by offering possible and interlinked *immersions* in literature.

> Grau (2003) summaries a cognitive approach to immersion suggesting that

> [i]mmersion can be an intellectually stimulating process; however, in the present as in the past, in most cases immersion is mentally absorbing and a process, a change, a passage from one mental state to another. It is characterized by diminishing critical distance to what is shown and increasing emotional involvement in what is happening.

> (Grau 2003: 13)

Grau's assertion of 'a process, a change, a passage' positions immersion not as a fixed mode of engagement but as a transition, a displacement between emotional involvement on the one hand and critical distance on the other. Much like the

physical passage or transition into an alternative medium, immersion in a cognitive sense can be thought of as a process, a shifting between mental states. A cognitive immersion is primarily a temporal immersion set against our usual concern with the world. Further questions emerge here for my practice as to how scenography might act to intervene in the creation of passage from critical distance to emotional involvement through shifts in design. Grau suggests that immersion is characterised by a 'diminishing critical distance', which is evident of a purely cognitive approach to immersion and is firmly situated within a virtual reality context. Performance, however, engages a complex synthesis of bodily and cognitive modalities through space and time. In performance, it is more apt to think about emotion and critical distance as a continuous cycling – where critical distance might facilitate deeper processes of immersion and where emotion might then enable reflection and deeper understanding.

Attention and Distraction

Crary (2001) discusses how attention in the second half of the nineteenth century becomes a fundamentally new object due to the modernisation of subjectivity. His perspectives on attention are useful to consider normative modes of engagement with art. In his historical mapping, Crary outlines attention as

> a subjective conception of vision: attention is the means by which an individual observer can transcend those subjective limitations, and make perception *its own*, and attention is at the same time a means by which a perceiver becomes open to control and annexation by external agencies.

> (Crary 2001: 5, emphasis in original)

As an example, Crary highlights how Édouard Manet's *The Balcony* (1868) (FIGURE 2) 'delineates a new psychic permeability and mobility, where attentiveness becomes a fluctuating membrane, a delicately tuned pattern of folding and unfolding onto the world' (2001: 88).

Image removed

FIGURE 2: *The Balcony* (1868), by Édouard Manet, http://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/works-in-focus/search/commentaire_id/the-balcony-7199.html

In the painting, three figures are presented in a tableau. They are on a balcony looking outwards, their gazes disconnected and roaming. Behind the figures lingers the dark black void of the room; the front view is obscured by the perspective of the painter and viewer. Between these voids, the painting takes the viewer 'outside of a stable circuit of visuality' (2001: 87). Crary argues that there is a threshold in viewing this painting where attentiveness folds into 'unbounded self-absorption' (2001: 87). The

localised gaze engulfs both the figures in the painting and the viewer. This experience appears as a cyclical exchange; as Crary puts it: 'the unmeasurable but tangible pulse of a suspended moment hovering between a functional operation of vision and the atemporal undulations of reverie' (2001: 88). This cognitive engagement differs from the fictional absorption in a literary text outlined by Ryan, due to the fact that a space of reverie is opened up. McKinney (2008) applies this to her own scenographic analysis suggesting that 'prolonged attention […] might induce a productive reverie where spectators are open to associations which are significant to them alone' (McKinney 2008: 84). McKinney identifies this as a scenographic transaction of material and imaginative possibilities, as a 'speculative and exploratory process' of spectatorship (2005: 133). Rather than diminished critical ability, as suggested by Grau, attention captured in *The Balcony* delineates a sense of 'repetitive and nonlinear temporality' (Crary 2001: 88). The subject is caught in a rhythmic opening and closing, illustrated in Manet's painting through its composition and objects (fan, shutters and umbrella); the composition and psychic interpretation provide a useful insight into possible scenographic compositions for performance.

Immediacy and Hypermediacy

Klich and Scheer (2012) reflect upon the possibility of intellectual and reflective modes of engagement in multimedia work. They extend Ryan's immersive topology of the 'spatial, temporal and emotional' (2001: 140–162) to include a corporeal relation:

immersion in dramatic theatre presupposes the audience's relationship to the fictional universe, which in theatre is not merely imagined but is brought into being via the stage. The fictional world is performed, which means that it is conveyed not only through the literary text, but also through the 'performance text'. This dimension of the 'performance text' opens up the potential for different manifestations of immersion in theatre, immersion that is not merely cognitive but corporeal.

(Klich and Scheer 2012: 130)

By presenting a fictional world, performance opens up a multitude of possible cognitive and sensory connections to the performance text. The performance text is not just read but felt as the participant directly encounters the sound, light and objects of design, activating a corporeal and cognitive reception.

Furthermore, in order to align cognitive and sensory modes of engagement, Klich and Scheer apply Bolter and Grusin's (2000) concepts of 'immediacy' and 'hypermediacy', noting essentially that theatre is a 'hypermedium' that reminds the viewer of the medium of performance. They assert that the 'hypermedium will draw attention to itself and its distinct form of mediation' (Klich and Scheer 2012: 134). This framework takes account of performance or installation artworks where there is often no demarcation between the physical and the virtual experience.

In Klich and Scheer's analysis of Janet Cardiff's sound installation *40 Part Motet* (2001), they acknowledge there is a sense of the audience being *within* the work, but this is not achieved through a process of mental projection, where the 'disembodied mind escapes into the world of the imagery' (2012: 151). It is, rather, by a recognition that the scenographic material 'unfolds as a phenomenon within the real world' (2012: 151). The implication is that the participants are prompted to 'contemplate the ontology of the body and the subjectivity of their sensory awareness.

Contemplation evoked by these works is an immersive embodied process of intuitive reflection' (2012: 151). Klich and Scheer's approach helps me to articulate how an imaginative projection might, at one level, invite a sense of immediacy and, on another level, draw attention to how performance mediates sensory experience (hypermediacy). Immersion in performance can be experienced as a process of both immediacy and hypermediacy. This simultaneous process is similar to Crary's position of attention, which he situates on a continuum with distraction 'in which the two ceaselessly flow into one another, as part of a social field in which the same imperatives and forces incite one and the other' (Crary, 2001: 51). The sensation of being immersed can, therefore, be an act of harbouring multiple simultaneous mental and sensory processes; it 'is more than physical bombardment […] immersion is both embodied and mindful' (2012: 151), brought about through a participant's contemplation of the work.

Mindfulness

Mindful experience in my study offers an original perspective in understanding audience engagement with scenography as a corporeal experience. Mindfulness is the alignment of cognitive and sensory modalities in the here-and-now. Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch (1991) use 'mindfulness/awareness' as a term and method to draw together cognitive science and human experience. Their approach is based upon Buddhist meditative practice and embodiment through Merleau-Ponty – situating 'mindfulness/awareness' within a Western context. Ellen Langer's (1989) extensive physiological experiments into mindfulness are based upon Western models of physiological trials. Langer provides an evidence-based approach through the structuring of research experiments with various

groups. Langer's approach is predominately to assess mindlessness in everyday and ritualised behaviour in order to reveal the impact of mindfulness in everyday life. Through her research, she has come to outline key concepts of mindfulness, such as awareness of arising thoughts, suspending desire for meaning and forming new categories of possibility. Langer offers concepts that can be applied to audience experience of scenography in which individuals, for example, are invited to contemplate their own automatic behaviour when interacting with their environment (1989: 16). 'Mindfulness' in this thesis refers to an alignment of body/mind that, as Varela et al. identify, are in daily life often disconnected through action. Despite a growing interest in the application of mindfulness, such as in narrative writing in psychology (Brody and Park 2004) and in orchestral playing and listening to music (Langer *et al*. 2009), the application of mindfulness to audience experience of performance remains underdeveloped.

Defining Immersion

In order to provide a definition of immersion for the initial stages of this research and practice, I have adopted a spatial definition borrowing from both Griffiths' and Schechner's spatial and environmental perspectives. I propose that spatial immersion is the positioning of the audience body as physically central to the reception of the event. The scenography seeks to encourage sensorimotor action and locomotion through free bodily motility, where all elements and spaces making up the performance event are active players in its reception. A spatial approach to immersion sits more comfortably with my own style of practice and allows for the multiple sensorial and cognitive modes of engagement that might be experienced within a performance event.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My research questions have emerged out of the need to offer a more nuanced understanding of how scenography is experienced in environmental spaces. My research questions aim to provide insights into how the space of performance can open up an exchange of human relations, the web-like engagements that mean an audience might become immersed in a set of relational transactions. I seek to question the role of scenography in facilitating these exchanges.

This project has two overarching research questions:

1. **How do audiences engage with scenography in performance events that place the body as central to their reception?**

2. **How might audience immersion in performance be modelled?**

Question one explicitly addresses how scenography might be experienced from a position of spatial centrality. This larger question accounts for the multisensory ways in which audiences might experience design in performance. Given the rise in embodied receptions of performance, there is a need to further understand how design materials might bring about an 'intuitive reflection' (Klich and Scheer 2012: 151) and to assess the impact of this on audience immersion. Furthermore, I have identified a need to understand '(syn)aesthetic' approaches to design materials, that might disrupt 'the boundary between the real and imaginary' (Luria cited in Machon 2005: 17).

Question one enables a clear frame in which to structure the overall practice-led nature of this study and has enabled me to address research question two, as to the nature of audience immersion. For each practice component, a further sub-question was formed under question one. Allowing questions to emerge throughout the process

has enabled me to explore a range of different compositional strategies of performance design. The sub-questions for each project are presented in PART TWO of this thesis, in order to keep these within their context as they developed throughout my research journey.

I have already identified immersion as a distinct combination of spatial, sensory and cogitative engagements of performance. Question two asks whether it might be possible to model audience immersion, in order to outline useful theoretical approaches to audience immersion. The actual feeling of immersion, as Klich and Scheer suggest, 'is a subjective process, so it is difficult to generalise about the nature of immersive experience' (2012: 150). I am careful not to present a catch-all model of immersion but to consider multiple subjective experiences in order to draw conclusions as to how scenography might operate in the construction of immersion. This thesis presents multiple ways in which immersion might be experienced as a process of exchange, as connection, and as a set of relational transactions between audience and scenography.

METHODOLOGY

The main methodological approach of this investigation was to use performance as a tool to examine audience immersion. Using my own experience as a scenographer and theatre maker, I created three cycles of practice, each cycle deploying its own research strategy within the overarching practice-led research methodology. In PART TWO of this thesis, I document this process and provide a written outline each of these cycles, where I present their individual research questions and examine the methods deployed for each research experiment. Below, I detail the overarching research methodology.

Practice-led Research

As 'research-practitioner' (Nelson 2013: 29), I have been able to position myself within the creation and construction of the immersive event. This has afforded me a unique position from which to offer new insights into the experience of scenography. Throughout this process I was able to construct a series of research experiments that examined specific modes of engagement in distinct scenographic compositions. Using my own practice and experience has helped me to bring into view 'particularities of lived experience that reflect alternative realties that are either marginalised or not yet recognised in established theory and practice' (Barrett 2010: 143). Unlike other recent analyses of immersive theatre (Nield 2008, White 2012, Alston 2013, Machon 2013), which does not directly engage with audiences, my practice-led approach builds upon McKinney's (2008) research to offer a unique perspective on the construction, application and reception of scenographic materials in an immersive context. McKinney's research offers the most comprehensive approach to understanding audience experience of scenography and has not only provided me with a theoretical framework (outlined earlier), but also sets out methods for dealing with audience

response to scenography, a project I seek to build upon. McKinney offers methods for structuring the research and in eliciting and analysing audience response that I apply and adapt in my study. These methods are detailed below.

My praxis has been built upon an established model of practice-led research, an iterative process of 'doing-reflecting-reading-articulating-doing' (Nelson 2013: 32), where, throughout, I responded and developed the practice in response to emergent theoretical ideas. I have presented the commentary and the practice at conferences, in publication, research seminars and exhibitions, and in dialogue with members of the public and academic audiences – a schedule of these can be found in Appendix A. Presenting and articulating the emergent theory and the practice throughout this study has enabled me to reflect upon and develop this research enquiry.

Action-Reflection: Cycles and Iterations

Melissa Trimingham illustrates a model for practice as research that is hermeneutic, in that the questions asked throughout the process ultimately determine the answer (Trimingham 2002: 22). My method follows and adopts a similar process of doing and reflecting. Estelle Barrett suggests this process 'starts from one's own lived experience' (Barrett 2007: 5); entering a cycle based on my own lived experience through my engagement with my surroundings was central to my research process. Throughout, I was able to reflect upon my doing by forming new questions; this creates a spiral of knowledge that 'constantly returns us to our original point of entry but with renewed understanding' (Trimingham 2002: 56). McKinney (2008) adopted this iterative spiral as a method for exploring scenography, and this offered an

appropriate model for my own investigation. For my research, I created three cycles of performance driven by unfolding lines of inquiry; a broad outline is listed below:

- **Cycle One: '*VOID/ROOM*'** focused on how scenography can alter spatial experience through shifts in scenographic design, particularly light and sound.

- **Cycle Two: '*If anyone wonders why rocks breakdown*'** sought to investigate the impact of audience sensorimotor action on reception.

- **Cycle Three: '*and it all comes down to this…*'** examined audience experience of scenography through time and considered the dramaturgical position and individual journeys of the audience.

Throughout the process I introduced the principle of 'iterations' of practice (see FIGURE 3: Cycles and Iterations). The process of conducting iterations has enabled me to refine my methods. By conducting repeat versions and reinventions of the practice, it has enabled me to explore and learn from each cycle in different contexts, spatial formations and with different audience types. For example, during Cycle One, I presented the main research experiment in a large black-box studio over two days in July 2010, to thirty individual participants. Following this, I took the decision to present the same project at the '*Digital Resources in Humanities and Arts: Sensual Technologies: Collaborative Practices of Interdisciplinary*' conference, Brunel University (5–8 September 2010). However, by presenting this work in a different space, more akin to a rehearsal space, the experience altered significantly. The small size of the room and the white walls changed the audience's impression of the piece. It was after this experience that I took the decision to situate all the practical experiments within a black-box theatre studio. The studio space offered a controlled container for the presentation of scenographic material as opposed to adopting a site-

specific approach. Although black-box theatre spaces are loaded with their own social and historical codes of engagement, conducting the practice within these spaces enables a more consistent approach, meaning responses between cycles were more comparable.

In a further iteration of Cycle One, I reinvented the project into a similar but spatially different experience called *VOID* – altering the piece from an individual experience to a thirty-person event. Altering the number of participants changed the spatial aspects significantly and thus the reception of the event. I have chosen not to include the two further iterations of *VOID/ROOM* in my analysis, as altering the piece from an individual to group experience would have affected the audience response significantly, thereby making comparative analysis between participants inconsistent. The process of restaging cycles has, however, enabled to me reflect as a practitioner on the nature of audience engagement, to collect further general comments and explore different compositional strategies to employ in subsequent cycles, some of which are discussed in PART TWO.

For Cycle Two, I staged two iterations of the project, ten months apart. By conducting these iterations, in similar conditions, it enabled me to engage with a larger audience demographic, who had more time to dedicate to the reflection process. It also enabled me to make subtle shifts in how I was approaching the audience engagement in performance – these developments are also outlined in PART TWO.

FIGURE 3: Cycles and Iterations

CYCLE ONE

VOID/ROOM

Iteration 1: Two-day event, one participant at a time, thirty participants total, individual audience interviews. stage@leeds, (21–22 July 2010). **Main research piece**. Ten-minute performance.

(30 responses)

Iteration 2: Repetition of first iteration: One-day event, no interviews, correspondence with audience and collection of written responses. '*Digital Resources in Humanities and Arts: Sensual Technologies: Collaborative Practices of Interdisciplinarity*, Brunel University (5–8 September 2010). Not included in audience analysis.

Iteration 3: Reinvention for thirty participants, open audience response, written comments. *Light Night,* Leeds, stage@leeds (8 October 2010). Not included in audience analysis.

CYCLE TWO

IF ANYONE WONDERS WHY ROCKS BREAKDOWN

Iteration 1: Four-hour showing, six participants at a time, written and Twitter responses encouraged and shared publicly. *Light Night*, Leeds, stage@leeds (4 October 2011), twelve-minute looped installation.

Iteration 2: Six-hour event, six participants at a time, written responses displayed publicly, conversing with audience members. '*Performance Studies International 18: Performance, Culture, Industry*', University of Leeds (27 June–1 July 2012).

(68 responses total)

CYCLE THREE

AND IT ALL COMES DOWN TO THIS…

Iteration 1: Twelve participants at a time, written responses displayed publicly. 45-minute performance event. stage@leeds (27–29 September 2012)

(64 responses)

Research Framework and Journey

When I started this research I was already engaged in artistic work that dealt with my own immersion in the world about me in day-to-day life. I sought to examine creatively my relations, connections and correspondence with my surroundings and to use this immediate experience to construct performance. As part of my scenographic practice, I documented my experience as I walked the streets, parks and landscapes of the unfamiliar city of Leeds that I found myself within to conduct this research. I captured though video, sound recordings, sketches and written material the sounds that caught my attention, the lights on the horizon, the movement of traffic and passing conversations overheard in the streets. I eventually edited this material into a short film *Lines of Flight* (2010), which was presented at a public screening at stage@leeds (2010), which is documented here on the USB drive for reference.

Whilst this film is not presented as one of the formal research experiments, this exploratory stage enabled me to discover a process where I creatively captured my body caught up in the materials around me. For each cycle of practice, I returned to this same process, revealing more about my perceptual and imaginative engagement with my surroundings.

The editing of the film challenged me to question how I could represent my own immersion in a visual and aural form. One significant insight from this process came in the editing stage. As I was editing, I began to notice how the headphones became a tool to manipulate my attention, switching focus between immediate and distant sounds that I had captured. From this insight, I began to research theoretical concepts around the perceptual experience of sound, which fed back into the creative

process for the first formal cycle of practice and subsequently led me to use wireless headphones in all three cycles of practice. This intuitive process taught to me embrace the open-ended nature of my inquiry, to discover through doing, reflect upon it, and then fold this into the subsequent cycles.

Throughout the research, I adopted Robin Nelson's triangulation model for practice as research (2009, revised 2013), which provided a conceptual framework in which to situate my thinking. Nelson's model embraces an institutive doing 'know-how', but cross-references this with other 'know-what' forms of knowledge production – together this triangulation forms the research project or 'arts praxis' (2013:37). FIGURE 4 shows how I have mapped Nelson's concepts to the specific concerns of my research project.

Practitioner knowledge – know-how

*Tacit and embodied scenographic knowledge
(Development of three cycles of practice)*

**Research
project**
(Arts praxis)

Critical Reflection
Know-what
(The tacit made explicit through
critical reflection)

*Audience research:
Gathering audience response and
analysis. Reflecting upon
practitioner experience.*

Conceptual Framework
Know-that
('Outsider' distant knowledge)

*Theoretical knowledge:
(Spatial, Bodily/Sensory and
Cognitive/Imaginative
Perspectives), as outlined in
research context.*

FIGURE 4: My research strands mapped to Nelson's triangulation model, additions in red and italics.

Nelson's model is 'dynamic' (2009: 127), constructed through a triangulation of research methodologies. Nelson cites Leonard and Sensiper who propose that knowledge exists on a spectrum between the tacit and the codified (Leonard and Sensiper, cited in Nelson 2013: 38). This approach acknowledges the more fluid conditions for knowledge production; it accounts for the subjective, tacit understanding of the practitioner and brings it into dialogue with wider theoretical concepts. In order to uncover the audience's subjective experience of immersion, I needed to deal directly with audience research. To make the tacit explicit, I reflect upon audience experience in relation to my own practitioner insights and built upon wider theoretical frameworks around spatial, sensory and cogitative immersion that I have already outlined in the research context. Below, I expand upon 'Practitioner Knowledge' and 'Critical Reflection' in order to situate my research within this model and to further outline my methodology.

Practitioner Knowledge

As a practitioner, I have engaged with the creation and development of installation and performance for over fourteen years. During this research, I have continued to develop my practice and to articulate this knowing through my learning and teaching *with* students on the undergraduate courses at the University of Leeds (2009–2015). My engagement with the practice of making and teaching of immersive experiences helps position myself as a practitioner actively working *with* my field of study. Ingold (2013) explores his teaching experience as part of his research process and suggests this approach is a form of 'knowing from the inside' (2013: 1-15). Ingold's argument is that theory is not isolated from what is going on in the world, but seeks to 'join with people' (2013: 4) by opening up a space for 'generous, open-ended, comparatively

critical inquiry into the conditions and potentials of human life' (2013: 4). My knowledge of immersion in performance has come from being in a position within the field of critical and creative inquiry.

My pursuit in understanding the nature of audience immersion has been driven through my own subjective practitioner perspective. By working *with* rather than studying *from* my environment, I can be seen to 'correspond' (Ingold 2013: 7) with it. This correspondence is a conduct of thought that continually answers to what Ingold calls 'the fluxes and flows of the materials with which we work' (2013: 6). In PART THREE, I offer reflective accounts of my process in order to provide insights into the creative process and to illuminate my correspondence with my surroundings. I bring this practitioner knowledge into dialogue with audience responses, in a process of mutual understanding.

In this practitioner-led inquiry, I do not directly examine other performance companies and artists. However, my extensive experiences of these companies and their practices have informed my conceptualisation and wider understanding. Where relevant I have made reference to these practices throughout.

Critical Reflection – Audience Response

As immersion 'is a subjective process' (Klich and Scheer 2012: 150), and in order to surface the audiences' subjective experiences, I decided to utilise audience reflection and response as a core research method. Matthew Reason (2010) discusses the nature of qualitative audience response, suggesting that it 'sets out to uncover, analyse and present, richly detailed descriptions of how audiences experience live

performance' (Reason 2010: 15). In their chapter on *Research Methods in Scenography* (2011), McKinney and Helen Iball state that

> [p]ost-hoc reflection on the shared experience helps explicate tacit understanding and feeds back into further iterations of the practice, contributing to developing insights about knowledge which is embodied.
>
> (2011: 123).

My aim is to surface the 'know-what' experience of the audience, to enable me as practitioner-researcher to 'dislocate habitual ways of seeing' (Nelson, 2013: 45) as I conduct my practice. Eliciting audience response can take place through a number of forms including talk-based methods, such as group discussions or interviews. In this research project, I have applied processes of interviews, video recordings of performance and written audience reflections in order to gain insights into the audience experience. I have chosen a range of methods for inviting audiences to reflect upon their experience. Predominately these have been written and interview-based processes, partly due to the 'one-on-none' nature of the practice and partly to inspire further creative expressions of participants. There are issues with qualitative audience research, particularly interviews or written responses, because audiences often lack the vocabulary to explain their embodied experience (Reason 2010: 17). Reason proposes the need to reconsider methods of reflection, suggesting that the post-performance experience can also be considered 'embodied, kinaesthetic, intuitive' (2010: 28). In approaching audience reflection I aimed to consider how reflection could be seen as part of the practice. I sought to use reflection as an active sense-making element of the experience. Initially, I began by conducting interviews (which I shall detail shortly), and then in subsequent cycles I extended my strategy to include alternative methods such as allowing participants to draw or respond in a

poetic form; this sought to 'deepen' and 'extend' audience reflection (Reason 2010: 15). My approach developed throughout the process, and I discuss this in more detail in each section of PART TWO.

After each cycle of practice, I reflected upon the audience comments in order to assess the emergent phenomena and adjusted my method accordingly. A discovery made after the first cycle was how important this reflective process was to the overall sense-making process for the audience. As an outcome of this process, I began to think of the reflection as part of a creative process – rather than a process of harvesting responses – engaged with 'the multi memories, connotations, reflections and afterlives which take place in audiences' social and imaginative lives' (Reason 2010: 26). As I had adopted an environmental frame in which to create my practice, I sought to consider all the spaces of performance as active players in theatrical reception, which included the foyer areas and virtual spaces such as website and social media. The intention was to continue the dialogue with participants after the event; specific methods are discussed in PART TWO.

My approach to audience response has been based on McKinney's (2008) methods; this includes offering the audience an opportunity to express their experience creatively through drawing or writing. Another original method developed by McKinney was to invite participants to act as co-creators in a 'scenographic exchange', enabling participants to make sense of their experience through a spatial encounter so that they might explore the scenographic materials and their properties (2008: 18). In Cycle Two of my research, I invited audiences to engage in both an individual and collective shaping of the experience.

The audience reflections yielded insightful and expressive responses to the performance, which enabled me to triangulate my thinking between audience reflection, my practitioner knowledge and theoretical perspectives. One of the issues involving the analysis of audience response is that it relies on my interpretations of the audience experience. Whilst I use audience reflection to help inform my thinking, I do not seek to create a single universal account of these experiences, nor do I intend to offer a concrete analysis of each response.

One implication of my strategy is that, although the majority of audience members were invited to respond post-performance, not all came forward – some participants left without taking part, presumably those that might not have found a connection with the performance, but whose response would nevertheless have proved useful. In order to encourage audiences to offer insightful written responses to their experience, open and creative questions were posed, allowing audiences to write as much or as little as they felt necessary. As collecting audience comments involved human participants, University of Leeds ethical approval (LTPCI-003, LTPCI-009) was sought and granted.

The Audience

In order to gather a range of different audience perspectives, my strategy was to invite a mixture of students, academic staff and general public to my event. The intention was to foster insights from those engaged in the arts and as well as those who might not have experienced this type of work in the past. This, I hoped, would provide both intuitive feeling-based interpretations alongside more extended critical reflections. In

Cycle One, I took the decision to work with a small audience in order to facilitate effective feedback processes; this continued throughout the study. The number of participants who engaged with the project ranged from one to twelve at any one time, with a collective overall engagement of over 300 participants.

PART TWO (Outline of Practice)

Viewing of Documentation

I now advise that you refer to the documentation of practice, presented as a website on the USB drive. The USB drive contains a link to the website, which can be accessed through the **index.html** file. This will load in an Internet browser (access to the Internet is not necessary) where you will be able to navigate through each cycle of practice. Viewing of the written commentary and practice submission is intended to be done side-by-side throughout this section at the start of each cycle of practice.

I have chosen different styles of documentation depending on the nature of the practice and to best represent the complex spatial arrangements for each performance. Each cycle on the website contains a video: Cycle One is a narrated video combined with images, Cycle Two is a montage of video, image and screen projection capturing one full loop of the experience, and Cycle Three is an edited video to give an impression of each section of the experience. All three cycles presented on the website contain an image gallery and associated documents such as audience feedback and written text.

Outline of USB Contents

All files used on the website have been additionally logged as separate files in the Raw Data folder as follows:

FOLDER: Cycle One	**CYCLEONEVIDEO.mp4** (Edited narrated video outline, 5:48) **Interview Transcripts.docx** **Postcard Response.pdf** **CYCLEONESOUND.mp3** (Full-length audio recording)
FOLDER: Cycle Two	**CYCLETWOVIDEO.mp4** (Full-length video recording of one loop of the installation. 13:11) **Cycle Two Audience Response.pdf** **If anyone wonders TEXT.pdf**
FOLDER: Cycle Three	**CYCLETHREEVIDEO.mp4** (Edited video of each section, 8:23) **Cycle Three Audience Response.pdf** **and it all TEXT.pdf**
FOLDER: Lines of Flight	**LINESOFFLIGHT.mp4** (8:31)

Should there be any technical errors with the website, notability the playback of videos on a PC, please see associated video files in the Raw Data folder. Videos in this folder been converted to mp4 format for compatibility.

Technical Information

The website will work on both PC and Mac; however, video playback is optimised to run on a Mac using Yosemite and Safari 8.0.4.

MAC:
Mac mini (late 2014), Macbook Pro (late 2012) – tested
OS X Yosemite
Safari 8.0.4
Firefox 36.0.1

Chrome does not support video on Mac (64-bit).

PC: You will need QuickTime or QuickTime extensions to run the video on the website. Please accept extensions in your browser (Internet Explorer, Firefox or Chrome 32-bit) when prompted in order to play. If needed, you will be able to play back the raw mp4 video files in standard media players such as VLC Player.

VIDEOS CAN TAKE UP TO 30 SECONDS TO LOAD AND WILL START AUTOMATICALLY. PLEASE WAIT.

CYCLE ONE: *VOID/ROOM*

Aims

As described previously, all three cycles of practice were designed to address the main research question:

1. **How do audiences engage with scenography in performance events that place the body as central to their reception?**

The aim of *VOID/ROOM* was to explore how shifts in scenographic design can alter or change audience reception of space. A further sub-question helped focus the scenographic explorations and was specific to Cycle One:

1.A **In what ways can altering the proximity and the diffusion of sound and light in space change the experience of performance?**

Description

VOID/ROOM was a ten-minute performance installation designed to be experienced by one participant at a time. Wearing headphones, the participant entered the performance space, which comprised a ten-channel multiple-speaker sound system. The resulting experience created two simultaneous and interconnected sound fields that represented both an internal living room and an outside environment. The piece was composed of three scenes that aimed to shift the audience experience of the space. Each scene altered the spatial proximity of sound and light in relation to the participant's body in order to give the impression of different spaces and rooms.

I decided to use wireless headphones in the performance to offer an additional layer of sound, to create both a sense of intimacy (predominately through sounds of a

typewriter and dripping water) and distance (environmental sounds presented via speakers: traffic, ambient noise). The overall intention was to consider the spatial proximity of sound and light in relation to the body, to create sonic and visual shifts with the intention to reform spatial experience by creating a sense of intimacy (internal space; see FIGURE 5) and distance (external space; see FIGURE 6); scene three was a self-reflective space in near darkness.

The piece examined how listening is part of our spatial experience. I layered the shifting of sound with the manipulation of light, in order to create the sense of internal and external spaces.

FIGURE 5: *VOID/ROOM*: Scene one, external space, represented through street lamp light.

FIGURE 6: *VOID/ROOM*: Scene two, internal space, illuminated by focused and internal light sources.

I aimed to provoke the audience's listening strategies by providing a sense of sonic depth, encouraging listening to the outer reaches of the room and beyond. Through this I sought to inspire the participants to assess the difference between potentially meaningful sound and noises of the external environment. In using the headphones, I did not want to isolate participants; rather, I wanted them to listen through the headphones out into the wider space. Through a spatialised composition of sound, I hoped to invigorate the audience's bodily perception, as Di Benedetto proposes:

> [t]he act of listening is a means to provoke the embodied mind and invigorate the sensorial perception. As we listen and focus our attention on the aural stimulation, we allow our body to feel emotion and respond preconsciously.

(Di Benedetto 2010: 131)

Using various technological devices such as the wireless headphones, surround sound speakers and sound objects (a television and radio), I shifted the sound and light by altering their proximity toward the participant throughout the duration of the experience.

Aesthetic Influences and Research Intentions

> We are in danger of forgetting the language which all things and events speak without metaphor, which alone is copious and standard. Much is published, but little printed. The rays which stream through the shutter will be no longer remembered when the shutter is wholly removed.

> (Thoreau 1886: 109)

Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1886) was an inspirational reference for the project. His chapters on 'Solitude' and 'Sounds' in particular were conceptually adapted as a starting point for the project, where an extract from *Walden* was spoken via a disembodied voice in the performance. Thoreau's reflections on individual experience are profound and form part of the intended reception of *VOID/ROOM* in two important ways. First, Thoreau expresses the notion of a single, unified sense of perception, as opposed to a perception that is fragmented by the concept of (nominally five) individual 'senses'. He wrote: 'this is a delicious evening, when the whole body is one sense, and imbibes delight through every pore' (1886: 126). The senses for Thoreau are unified in our experience of the world, and this unified process is explored in *VOID/ROOM* by shifting the weight of auditory and visual perception. At times, light illuminated the whole space; at others, darkness surrounded the participant, shifting sensory receptions between the aural and the visual. Second, Thoreau places considerable value upon unmediated experience; this led me to the

creation of a space in which light and sound were experienced for their unique lived qualities as a phenomenological reception. Vilhelm Hammershøi's paintings of *Sunbeams* (1900) and *Quiet Room* (1906) (see FIGURE 7) capture the qualitative experience that I sought to express in *VOID/ROOM*. Seemingly bland, the peaceful nature of Hammershøi's work is equally disturbing – the images linger with a sense of emptiness and absence.

Image removed

David Shearing,
VOID (2010)
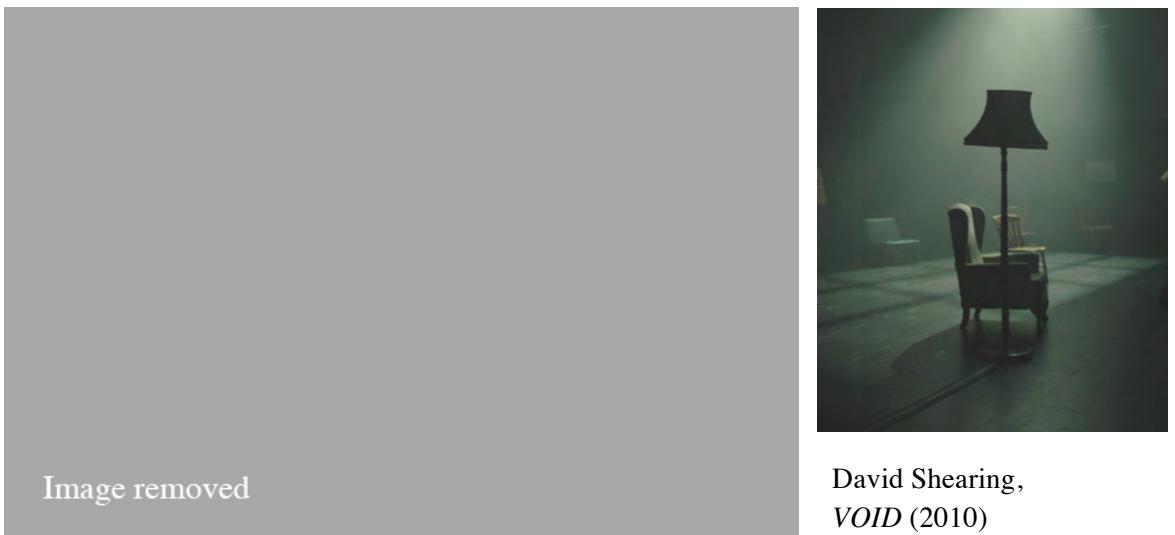
FIGURE 7: Hammershøi's painting and an image taken from the *VOID* iteration (similar imagery was explored in *VOID/ROOM* but not documented).

The overall experience of *VOID/ROOM* was a spatial composition of light, sound and object. These scenographic elements operated as performance signifiers in the construction of meaning, but they were also intended to speak in their own right. The standard lamp, for instance, contributes to the construction of meaning if we interpret it as part of a 'living room' space, but it also serves, in and of itself, to provide a very particular quality of light within the space. My intention was to explore Thoreau's insistence that 'much is published' in the world by drawing attention to lived experience of scenography in the here-and-now moment of performance.

In shifting aural and visual modes of perception, I aimed to continually reform the participant's imaginative and sensory experience, forming new spatial experiences without physically moving the audience. Spatial experience, according to Barry Blesser and Linda-Ruth Salter, is composed of a total relationship between sensory modalities, and this determines the resulting experience of space (Blesser and Salter 2007: 181). Despite Pallasmaa's argument that the senses are one extended form of touch (2005: 41–46), he makes a distinction between our different sense modalities, suggesting that '[t]he sense of sight implies exteriority, but sound creates an experience of interiority. I regard an object, but sound approaches me; the eye reaches but the ear receives' (2005: 49). By shifting the weight between sense modalities, distant and far, diffused and direct, I hoped to alter the resulting experience of space. In doing so, I sought to set about untangling sensation. I wanted to take the audience through a process where they might come to be more precise in their physical responses and their conscious understanding of the event (Di Benedetto 2010: 152). Shifts in scenography were intended to make the audience alert and aware of changes in sensory engagement.

The intention for the structure of the performance – in three parts – was to create a space in the final section that might encourage an open-ended space of scenographic reception; this was developed from McKinney's research (2008). McKinney identifies how the instability and interruption of attention towards a scenographic image might produce a productive space for meaning-making (McKinney 2008: 84). The restrictions of sensorial stimuli in section three of *VOID/ROOM* aimed to position the audience in a reflective state, in which they could be open to their own associations with the material. To do this, I focused my approach through sound, to create what

Pallasmaa calls an 'acoustic intimacy' (Pallasmaa 2005: 50). In his writing around the power of sound to sculpt images directly in the interior of the mind, Pallasmaa wrote:

> [a]nyone who has become entranced by the sound of dripping water in the darkness of a ruin can attest to the extraordinary capacity of the ear to carve a volume into the void of darkness. The space traced by the ear in the darkness becomes a cavity sculpted directly in the interior of the mind.
>
> (Pallasmaa 2005: 50)

The constant ticking of a clock and the sound of a drip in a bucket in low light levels sought to bring about an acoustic intimacy, opening up an internal space for imaginative production. Peter Brown likens internal passive states, such as daydream or reverie, to 'the workshop of unfinished social and emotional concerns' (quoted in Crary, 2001: 101). Such internal states are natural, important and regular processes, shaping how we experience and make sense of the world. I hoped section three of the performance would provide a space for the audience to make sense of their experience, opening them up to possible subjective interpretations.

Method

VOID/ROOM was performed at stage@leeds over two days in July 2010, where thirty participants took part. The piece was advertised via emails sent to local University of Leeds networks and wider Leeds-based mailing lists. A website with detailed project information helped promote the event. It was advertised as both a sound installation and research event. An online booking system (a screenshot is presented as Appendix B) was created in which participants could select individual time slots or 'rooms' in order to book their place. This design decision aimed to position the audience in a

relation to the work before they arrived, to begin developing 'possible interpretive strategies' (Bennett 1997: 136) around the event as a solo experience.

I greeted all audience members by welcoming them to the foyer before the piece started. I aimed to provide a welcoming experience for the audience and wanted to make them feel comfortable with me as the researcher. This relationship was important, as I was to conduct post-performance interviews with each participant.
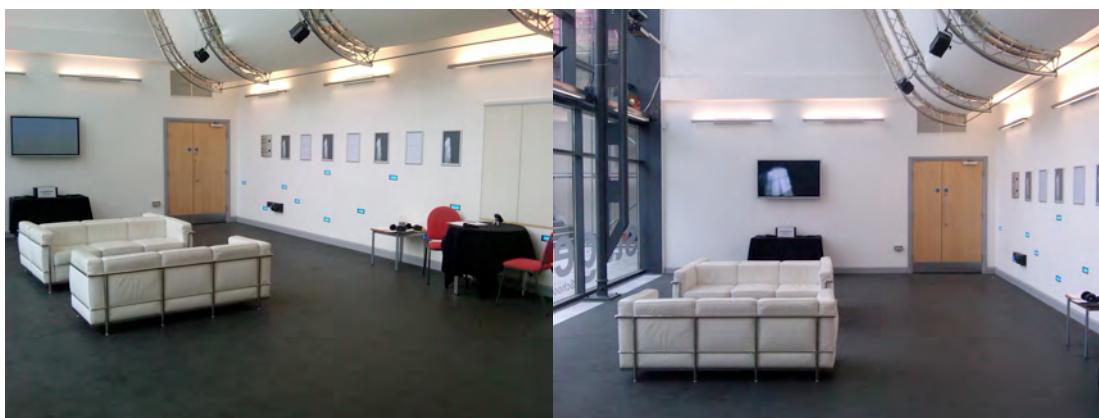
FIGURE 8: *VOID/ROOM*, foyer space with interview table.

Due to the first cycle being a solo experience, I decided to conduct ten-minute interviews with each participant that allowed for a detailed discussion. Participants were informed that the interview would be recorded, and consent was obtained prior to taking part in the event (see Appendix C). I provided verbal and written outlines of data being collected and how I intended to use it. I confirmed that responses would be transcribed and anonymised and this was agreed in writing with each participant. The interview was structured around a series of open questions relating to the participant's experience:

- What was your main or overall impression of the piece?
- How would you describe the experience?
- How did it make you feel?
- How would you say you made sense of the piece? Was there any logic for you?
- Was there anything that made a particular impression on you?

Further to this, depending on how the interview developed, I encouraged participants to reflect upon their role within the work by asking them to consider their relationship to the scenography. When necessary, I prompted with the following additional questions:

- How did you make sense of the objects in the space?
- How would you describe your role or position within the piece?
- How did your experience change over time?

Following the interview process, a small, blank, stamped and addressed postcard was given to each participant. They were required to respond within 24 hours of the experience if they had any further thoughts or reflections in the moments/hours after the event. Twenty-four hours offered a defined window that was still close to the experience of the event. The aim was to see how the scenography might impact upon the participant after the event. As this was an individual experience, I decided to number the participants in order to link the interview to the postcards as part of a continued process of reflection. Numbering allows the reader of this commentary to refer back to the full transcript of each interview if required. The interviews are presented in full in the digital documentation.

CYCLE ONE: Reflection

Reflection on Audience Response

The interview process yielded a significant amount of detailed comments. The open-ended discursive nature of the interviews encouraged large amounts of description, where a majority of participants recounted, in detail, the step-by-step processes of their engagement. In these descriptions, some participants appeared to switch verb tense, as if they were still in the experience – suggesting how the interview process was aiding in their sense-making. The interview responses, whilst insightful, were predominantly descriptive, dealing with what happened rather than what they felt, thought or how they were connecting with the scenography.

During the interviews and in my review after, themes and patterns between the participants emerged. I will detail the significant comments in relation to immersion in the analysis section; however, some comments informed my thinking as to my research methods and my creative approach, which fed into the construction of Cycle Two. Some participants revealed how much control the scenographer (me) had over their experience, feeling as if they were being watched in a research experiment. Other participants were distracted by the setup of the interview and thought they might be asked questions about what they had noticed. Two participants in particular were so unnerved by the darkness that their sense of fear seemed to override any deeper reflective connections to the scenographic material and responses given in the interview.

Reflection on Practice and Method

Rather than provide a full written account of each proposed development for Cycle Two, I have chosen to detail the main observations on the interview as a method for audience response:

Strengths	Weaknesses
The interviews offered dense descriptions and accounts of experience.	Some participants felt as though they were in an experiment. The formal setup of the performance gave the impression of a test. This heightened the participants' awareness of attending a research event rather than a performance event.
As researcher I was able to follow up on lines of inquiry that proved insightful.	The resulting data was vast and took a significant amount of time to process.
I was able to establish a relationship with the audience and encourage participants to respond with written postcards that encouraged further personal correspondence.	Audience comments were focused largely on the overall operation and mechanics of the event at the expense of more imaginative or creative impressions with how the scenography was operating.
The interviews allowed me to gain tacit understanding of the emotional context and disposition of the participant.	

The postcards yielded a 53% rate of return. The majority of these comments appeared to duplicate the experiences already shared in the interview process and did not offer significant new information. However, one participant wrote a letter detailing their experience that further clarified their thinking. The letter offered an insight into how the participant questioned their relation to objects in their day-to-day life; this is discussed in the analysis. Informal verbal feedback from participants was also valuable. I gathered a strong desire from individuals that they wanted to connect with others and share their experience after the performance. Individuals felt they had missed out on the collective interpretative strategies of post-performance conversation

with other audience members that Bennett (1997: 133) discusses; this is an area I sought to address in Cycle Two.

Although I have chosen not to include audience responses from the two further iterations of Cycle One for parity between cycles, the process of restaging this event informed my thinking as to how audiences might respond. In the weeks following *VOID* – the public thirty-participant iteration – two participants offered unsolicited poems in response to their experience, and these are printed with permission (Appendix D). The two poems expressed a deep emotional response to the scenographic material, which the interview process appeared to suppress. The poems captured feelings of loneliness and painted vivid pictures composed of the scenographic materials that I had used in the performance, borrowing language and images in order to offer their own artistic creations. The concise nature of the poems inspired me to research poetry writing as a method of eliciting audience response in Cycle Two. The poem offered by Kamal Hussain inspired me to collaborate with him as a writer in subsequent cycles of practice.

The participants in *VOID/ROOM* were confined to a small, demarcated performance area where the performance appeared to happen *to* the participant, aiding in the sense of feeling as if they were part of an experiment. It became clear to me that further questions were to be asked as to how audiences might engage more physically with scenography, bringing their bodies into a much greater involvement with the space. I wanted to question how physical engagement might offer a greater sense of agency for the participant.

In summary of the learning from Cycle One, the following considerations were brought forward into the design aims of Cycle Two:

- To consider a more concise method for capturing audience engagement, taking into account the emotional, feeling-based experience of the audience.

- To encourage free bodily motility in space and to assess its impact upon audience reception.

- To provide distance between the audience and me as researcher during the feedback stage, so participants felt they could be honest with their experiences.

- To offer greater agency to participants by enabling them to determine their own durational experience. Feedback suggested participants wanted a longer experience and were aware of the time limits imposed upon the experience.

- To afford the audience a deeper sense of intimacy and connection with the scenography through direct engagement/contact with materials in order to reveal more significant associations.

- To consider methods in presenting the text to enable greater comprehension.

CYCLE TWO: *If anyone wonders why rocks breakdown*

Aims

If anyone wonders why rocks breakdown (If anyone wonders…) aimed to consider audience bodily participation and motility and to assess the impact of this on audience reception. Under question one a second sub-question was formed:

> **1.B**   **In what ways does physical engagement with scenography alter performance reception?**

Description

If anyone wonders… was an installation presented in a black-box studio, designed for a small audience of six on a one-in one-out basis and structured as a continuous loop of twelve minutes in length. Two projection screens enclosed the space, and a terrain of hundreds of tiny 1:50 scale model human figures covered the entire floor space. Shafts of torchlight created areas of focus and shadow and illuminated the figures.

On entering the space, the audience were given a booklet of the textual score, a set of headphones and their own model figure, which they were invited to place within the landscape. As the audience entered the space, they were required to move through the terrain, treading carefully so as not to harm or disturb the figures.

FIGURE 9: *If anyone wonders…,* outside the studio space PSI#18, headphones, textual score, model figures and feedback clipboards

FIGURE 10: *If anyone wonders…,* view of performance space without audience, panoramic projection screen, torch lighting and model figures

FIGURE 11: *If anyone wonders…,* close-up image of the model figures

The perimeter of the space was surrounded by six evenly spaced speakers which diffused a soundtrack composed of found and processed sounds of the city and layered with a light piano score. The sound experience was augmented using headphones that delivered spoken word directly into the ears of the participant; the audio was delicately balanced using semi-porous headphones that enabled the participant to still hear the external environment. The sound diffusion system sought to encourage physical exploration, as different sounds could be heard depending on the proximity between the participant and loudspeaker.

The two panoramic screens on opposite sides of the space displayed hazy footage of panoramic views of a city. Each minute of this video was timed to fit with a different hour of the day, which was presented as two simultaneous times but intended to be read as twelve hours apart: AM and PM/light and dark. Drawn from personal

experience, each hour was expressive of the different moods and routines experienced at those times of day that were both simultaneous and different, for example, sending emails at 7am and 7pm. A loose thematic dramaturgy was formed around miscommunication: snippets of phone conversations, a lost message at 2:44, a description of a bedroom at 4:48, a strong cup of coffee at 9:01, a relationship breakup, a journey home, the beginning and ending of the day. The sequence repeated on a loop.

The average amount of time audience members spent in the installation ranged between fifteen and twenty minutes with some participants remaining in the space for over an hour. I documented the experience in two ways: with a static video camera, filming one hour of continuous footage, and through written responses. Due to the continuous nature and flow of the installation, it is not possible to align written responses with video recordings; the two processes act as independent methods.

Audience members behaved in a variety of ways. Some were hesitant not to disturb the figures; some took a long time to place their figure within the space. Others explored the light, manipulating torches and animating the figures by casting shadows. Some tweeted and took photos – in one moment I spotted a participant kicking the figures when they thought they were alone. I observed in comments an overriding sense of peace – meditative states and feelings of being submerged in water. Mostly, participants took their time, reading and listening to the text and manoeuvring the figures into new formations where mini narratives emerged.

FIGURE 12: *If anyone wonders…,* audience wearing headphones, navigating the space and video

FIGURE 13: *If anyone wonders…,* audience members standing in the centre of the environment

Aesthetic Influences and Research Intentions

One concern arising from Cycle One was to consider free bodily motility, as opposed to an environment shifting around the body. Anna Fenemore notes that 'we perceive as spectators in performance through a combination of sensorimotor and conceptual understanding' (2011: 41), and I sought to actively question the impact of sensorimotor action on the reception of the work. Leder details the function of motility in the process of perception by suggesting that:

> I touch by reaching out and running my hand over the surface of an object. To see, I turn my head and let my eyes scan the landscape. Perception is itself a motor activity. Moreover, that which is perceived is always saturated by the implicit presence of motility. The spatial depth of the perceived world, the experience of objects as *there*, near or far from my body, is only possible for a being that moves through space.
>
> (Leder 1990: 17)

To perceive an environment the body needs to activate multi-motor functions. Moreover, an environment is not an inactive entity. The presence of objects within the audience space affords the possibility of active engagement: 'we see chairs that offer up the prospect of rest. Food that may be eaten, a cold rain that bids us to stay inside' (Leder 1990: 17); objects invite motility. For me, a question arises here: in what way does audience motor activity impact upon the reception of scenography? However, as Fenemore suggests, sensorimotor activity is only one part of the overall matrix of performance reception; conceptual understanding also forms part of this equation. Yi-Fu Tuan expresses the need to consider a range of different modes of experience (sensorimotor, tactile, visual, conceptual) when interpreting space and place (1977

[2008]: 6-7). My intention was to consider a nuanced relationship between the tactile, visual and conceptual modes of understanding through the explicit encouragement of sensorimotor activity.

A creative starting point for the piece was the phrase 'between a rock and a hard place' printed on Richard Long's image *A Four Day Walk on Dartmoor* (2009) (see FIGURE 14).
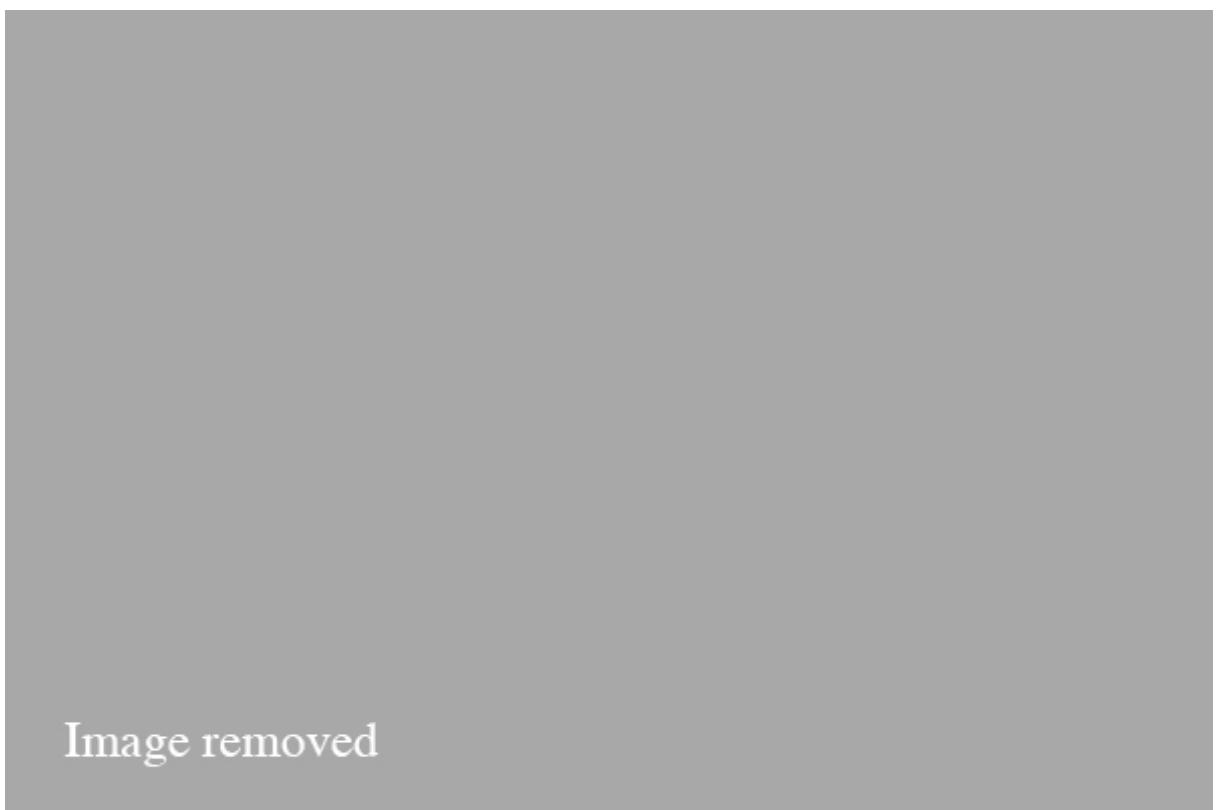
FIGURE 14: Richard Long's image, *'A Four Day Walk on Dartmoor'* (2009)

The image presents a mist-infused terrain in which the horizon line blurs with the sky, and text is layered over the landscape. *If anyone wonders…* considered the dualistic nature of being caught between two points; in choosing one course of action we miss out on another. I sought to represent multiple binaries: the micro and macro, the individual and collective, the near and distant, the figure and the landscape. I did

this by presenting a number of subtle physical dilemmas that the audience needed to navigate. These included negotiating the tiny model figures underfoot; being 'caught' between two screens and in the sightlines of other participants; deciding whether to follow the booklet or simply to listen to the spoken word; and whether to lie down, sit or stand in the space. The intention was to provide an open space for free bodily motility, to encourage shifts in perspective and to allow participants to determine their own durational experience. I hoped to offer agency to each participant, to allow them to discover and shape their own methods of engagement – to make subtle, reflective and personal choices.

Method

If anyone wonders… was presented twice, once as part of *Light Night*, Leeds (4 October 2011), open to the general public, and once at *Performance Studies International #18: Performance, Culture, Industry*, University of Leeds (27 June–1 July 2012), open to academic delegates and practitioners. In both iterations, participants were welcomed directly into the installation or asked to briefly queue. In Cycle Two, I altered my method for eliciting audience response by pursuing a more concise strategy through written comment, with the aim of encouraging a more 'poetic' response. What compelled me about the written letters and poetry sent in response to Cycle One was the willingness of participants to extend the dialogue, to be in correspondence with the work and me as the scenographer. For Cycle Two, I aimed to position the audience as an integral part of the work, to consider them as 'co-creators' (McKinney 2008: 76–80).

In responding to Cycle One, I aimed to incorporate a sharing strategy into the post-performance reflection. On the outside of the performance space, in the foyer and corridor, I invited participants to reflect upon their experience by completing a small postcard-sized form (FIGURE 15):
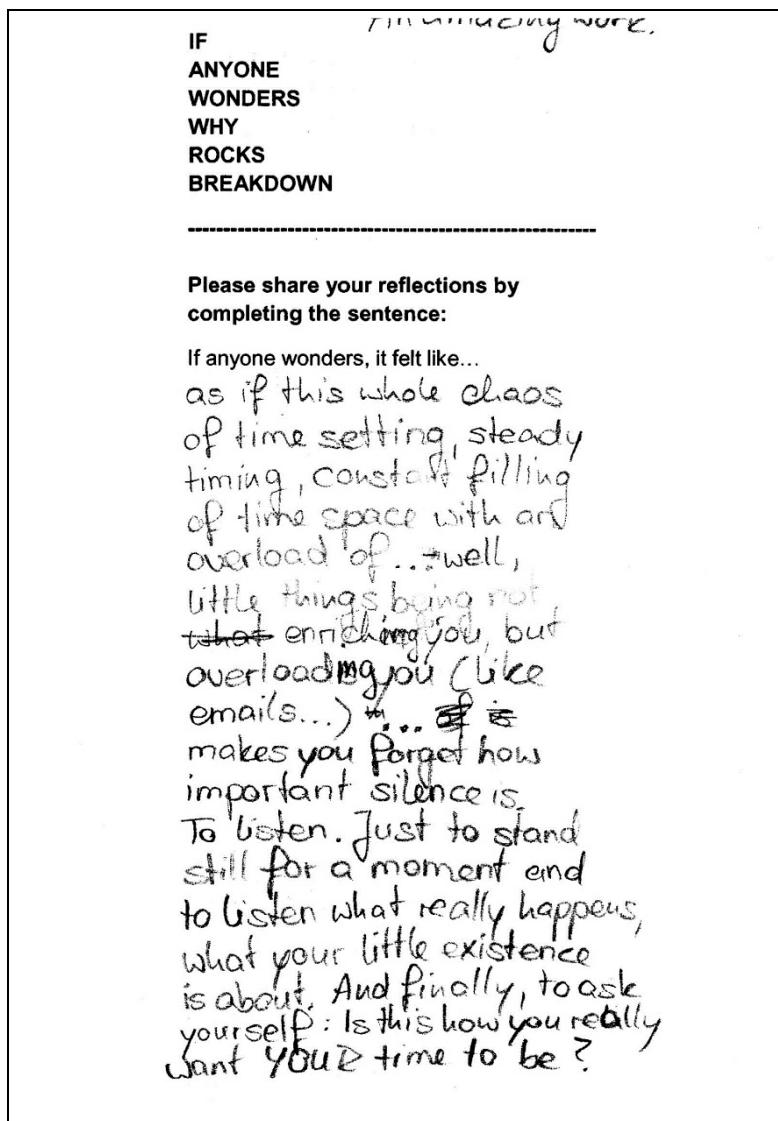
FIGURE 15: *If anyone wonders…*postcard feedback form, sample taken from the *Light Night*, Leeds event, Participant B22 (2011)

Written on the small piece of paper, in order for participants to be concise, was the sentence **'If anyone wonders, it felt like…'**. The phrase sought to elicit emotive

responses, by encouraging participants to focus upon their feelings toward the piece. Starting with the more abstract line 'if anyone wonders…' I hoped to foster poetic and metaphorical responses. I was inspired by my readings of Patricia Leavy, who discusses poetry as a research method in art practice and highlights the expressive and reflective potential of poetry to 'present a porthole onto an experience' (Leavy 2009: 68)**.** Leavy suggests that poetry is

> [m]ore than a window onto an aspect of social life, poetry places a *magnifying glass* in front of that reality, where the experience is even bolder than in everyday life. In short, poems can create *a vivid* and *sensory scene* that compels the reader, teaching him or her something about a particular aspect of social experience.

(Leavy 2009: 68)

Whilst an immediate impulsive response might not yield well-crafted poetry, I was intrigued as to how participants might respond using word and space, to see how they might create vivid sensory scenes through the use of language, rhythm and composition that I hoped would reveal insights into the nature of their experience. Leavy suggests 'poems are highly attentive to space (which includes breath and pauses), using words sparsely in order to paint what I term a *feeling-picture'* (2009: 64 emphasis in original). Poetry is an emotional and conceptual compositional process that shares imaginative processes with performance reception. Gary Knowles and Ardra Cole explore the rich potential of poetry as a qualitative method for artistic inquiry, suggesting that

> poetry creates textual spaces that invite and create ways of knowing and becoming in the world. Poetry invites interactive responses - intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and aesthetic responses.

(Knowles and Cole 2008: 167)

The postcards were displayed in the foyer for others to read, with the aim of fostering a sense of shared public interpretation.

In the first iteration of *If anyone wonders…*, I used a Twitter hashtag (#ifanyonewonders) to explore how condensing and limiting the response to 140 characters might contain or expose the essence of a participant's experience. Despite a handful of responses, including the one seen in FIGURE 16, the majority of tweets were used to inform others about the event, rather than those offering reflection. In order to include those who might not have access to Twitter, the public were provided with access via a laptop, although the majority of those who shared reflections chose the card and pen option.

FIGURE 16: Screen shot of a participant tweet using #ifanyonewonders

In reviewing the video footage from the first iteration of Cycle Two, it was clear that participants were hesitant to interfere with the figures and torches; most watched from the perimeter or sat carefully in the space only making minor adjustments. In the second iteration, I made a subtle shift in my approach by offering participants a model figure before they entered the space. This gesture appeared to make an impact as responses indicated a much greater sense of connection with the model figure and their engagement with the piece. Iterations, in this case, provided the opportunity to make reflective decisions on the method.

CYCLE TWO: Reflection

Refection on Audience Response

It was clear from the language used by participants in their responses that they were engaged in a dialogue with the work. Participants borrowed and adopted the sonic and visual language of the performance into their own poetic creations. Reflections incorporated scenographic images (descriptions of cities and night skies), phrases and specific moments that caught their attention. This helped me understand their sensory and emotional responses and to gain an insight into what materials inspired connections with the audience.

Participants took time to read through other comments, often before completing their own; I believe this offered space for participants to understand their own experience before committing to paper. My own presence in the vicinity of the comments also helped extended a dialogue with the audiences. The responses were more varied than those offered in Cycle One, and I was able to identify how specific scenographic design decisions, such as the playful use of scale and how light operated in relation to participant bodies, impacted upon audiences.

Reflection on Practice and Method

Audience comments demonstrated high levels of self-awareness, such as how individuals placed themselves in the environment in relation to others. Participants appeared to negotiate a series of relational encounters within the experience, reflecting on themselves as well as the scenography. Self-reflection emerged as a distinct strategy for engagement within Cycle Two (I shall discuss this further in PART THREE of this thesis). Despite responses suggesting that participants felt more

engrossed with the scenographic materials, as compared with Cycle One, it became apparent that a third cycle of practice could explore a richer combination of reflection and participation and construct a more sustained dramaturgical journey for the audience through time.

Due to the durational length of *If anyone wonders…* and its relative darkness, video footage was only helpful in observing larger gestures and general movement of bodies in the space. I have, therefore, predominantly used written responses in my analysis. In summary of the learning from Cycle Two, the following considerations were brought forward into Cycle Three:

- To focus the feedback question in order to encourage more precise insights.
- To explore the audience journey through time and to assess the impact of journey on possible sensations of immersion.
- To further question the role of the audience in relation to the dramaturgy of the performance and to consider how the audience might become part of the performance text.
- To further examine 'absolute poetry' (Lehmann 2006: 110) through the spatialisation of text in performance.
- To consider a space for audiences to extend a dialogue post-performance with each other.
- To consider how self-reflection might become an active strategy for engagement during the experience.

CYCLE THREE: *and it all comes down to this…*

Aims

The aim of *and it all comes down to this… (and it all…)* was to construct a more directed and sustained dramaturgical journey in order to assess what impact this might have on audience immersion. I sought to build upon the imaginative and physical experiences explored in the previous two cycles by forging a dynamic experience comprising of physical movement, scenographic movement and self-reflection – a combination of Cycles One and Two. Cycle Three aimed to address the following two sub-questions:

    1.C   How might a shifting between physical and cognitive experience of scenography impact upon audience reception?

    1.D   How might journey be used to aid the experience of immersion?

Description

and it all comes down to this… was a 45-minute performance designed for twelve participants. The space was designed to operate as a total environment that aimed to consider earth, sky and figures (audience) within an evolving scenographic ecology. The terrain was shaped using 2,500 glass vessels composed of jars and wine glasses. Surrounding the space were eight loudspeakers on stands; two further speakers were placed in the gantry for the playback of birdsong in the final scene. At the centre of the space were twelve deckchairs, each with a low-hanging pendant light bulb close enough to touch; on the chairs were headphones placed on top of a handmade book.

FIGURE 17: *and it all…,* documentation image of space without participants.

FIGURE 18: *and it all…,* [left] chair with headphones, [right] gift box with book

Underneath the deckchairs was a box, tied with string and with a note attached that read 'Not yet! When I say…'. Three large portrait screens were suspended from the gantry that divided the space; each projection was one-third of a larger 16:9 landscape image – the aim was to position the audience inside the image rather than present a single pictorial perspective.
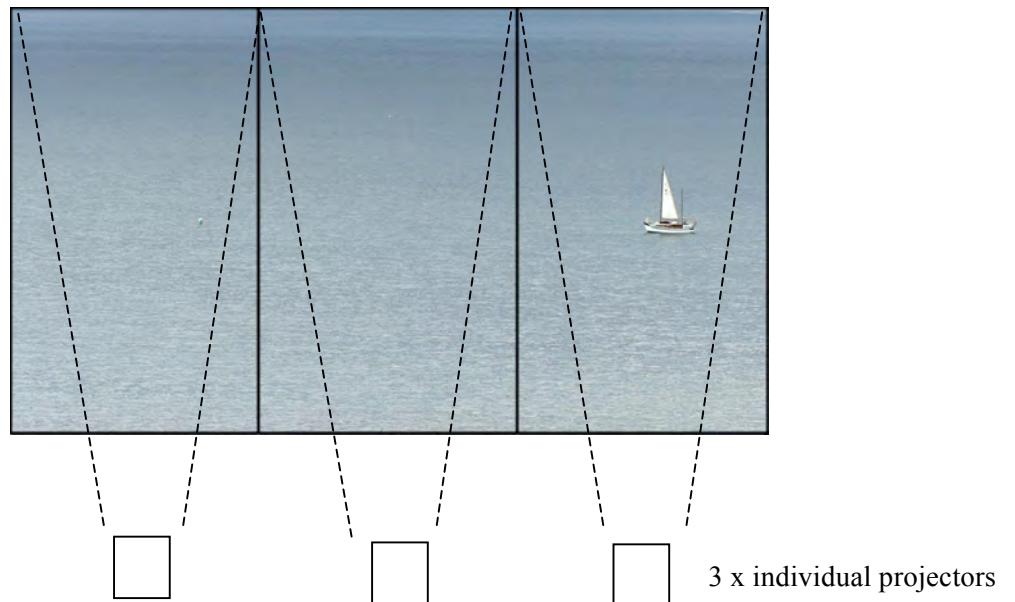
FIGURE 19: *and it all…,* spatialisation of single landscape image across three screens

FIGURE 20: *and it all…,* spatialised screens layout, with double-sided projection

Three birdhouses were positioned into openings of the glass terrain with an adjacent hanging bird box. The hanging bird boxes acted as mini lighthouses, each illuminated by a bulb inside to signal the arrival of spoken text in the box. The freestanding birdhouse structures each contained a large glass jar. Inside the jar was a miniature world depicting a scene from the text, drowned in murky water. Nested in the roof of the birdhouses were speakers that emitted spoken words.

FIGURE 21: *and it all…* , [left] murky scene inside birdhouse, [right] birdhouse and illuminated bird box.

Above the central space were over a thousand paper birds, made from pages of old books, suspended in mid-flight. Towards the end of the piece, the birds were lit from above, causing the light to pass through the paper onto the audience below. Through this effect I aimed to create a dynamic plastic space that utilised the movement of the haze to create shafts of dappled light upon the audience and space below.

FIGURE 22: *and it all…,* end sequence, paper birds with duo-tone light effect.

The structure of the performance was designed around a series of temperaments, or moods. Each section aimed to encourage different modes of physical and imaginative engagement, therefore creating shifts in experience.

The content of the piece was based on an original story written by Kamal Hussain about a boy and his kite. At first, the story was fragmented and presented in the space via spoken word emanating from the birdhouses and through hidden pages of text nested in the glass jars. As the performance progressed the audience were taken on an audio journey through the headphones, with the handmade book as a guide. The text aimed to be dynamic, continuously being rewritten; language was crossed out and reordered so that there was a gradual switching between third- and first-person

perspectives. Ultimately, the intention was to include the audience as part of the dramaturgy, so that the story of the boy became the story of the audience, who were gradually taken on an experience of contemplation, acceptance and release.

Aesthetic Influences and Research Intentions

During the creation of *and it all…* there were simultaneous creative and theoretical lines of inquiry. In developing a more structured journey for the audience, I initially mapped an emotional outline of the performance:

- Scene 1 – Discovery: confusion and the physical exploration of the space.

- Scene 2 – Maelstrom: dilemma, darkness and introspection.

- Scene 3 – Reflection: light, distance and contemplation.

- Scene 4 – Release: looking up, moving the body and connecting with light.

The journey was intended to be emotionally and perceptually engaging, with design decisions aimed to alter sensory engagement throughout. Strategies included physical exploration of space, peering and looking, listening in darkness, reflecting on experience by writing, having a moment of a direct encounter with others and touching light.

In the creation of all three cycles of practice, I have been fascinated by the nature of solitude and reflection presented in various paintings by Edward Hopper. Hopper's obsession with nature and the increased domestication of machines set the tone for my early explorations. I explored in practice how the audience might become figures in the space. In the creation of *and it all…*, I was captivated by Hopper's

painting *People in the Sun* (1960). This work served as the main inspiration for the piece.
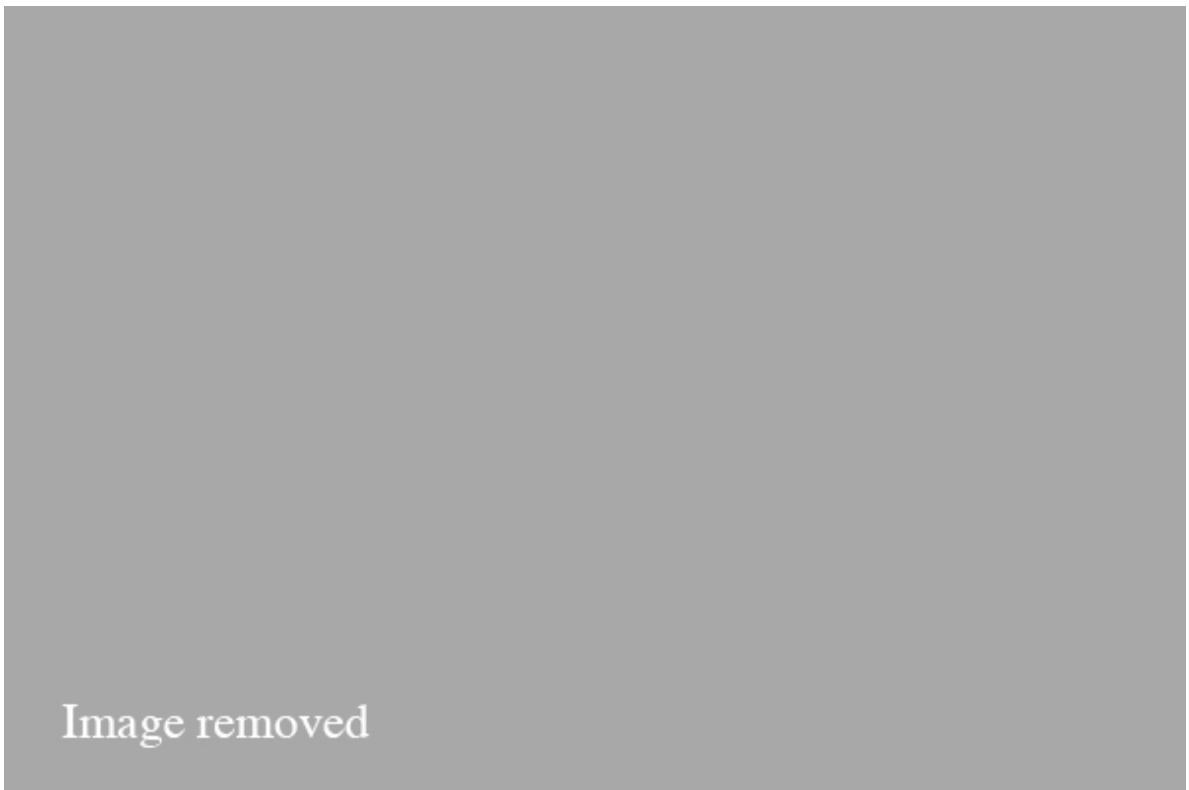
FIGURE 23: Edward Hopper, *People in the Sun* (1960),
http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=10762

I was fascinated by the overriding sense of solitude that permeates the image; the sense of loneliness whilst in the company of others; how the position of the chair affects the posture of its inhabitants; the engrossed view of the front row and the inattentive but absorbed figure at the back.

The construction of personal distance, apparent in many of Hopper's paintings and sketches, creates an imaginative depth that I wanted to explore with my audience. Hopper skilfully composes the land, sky and figure into a total world-like ecology; a unified spatial composition. Ingold notes that the success of landscape painting is often dependent on this ecology: '[t]he painter depicting a world of both earth and

sky, recognising full well that in the play of colour, light and shade, one could not exist without the other' (Ingold 2011: 127). In Cycle Two, the sky and the horizon had become an increasingly detailed element of my compositions. I was intrigued as to how the 'hemispheres' (1979: 66), as Gibson puts it, of earth and sky cooperate in the experience of scenography. I sought to explore the experience of a sky in performance, in order to uncover how an audience might experience the air within space as part of an intended scenographic reception.

In my analysis of *If anyone wonders…* I had become interested in walking practices and the relationship between body, movement and environment. During this time I was introduced to Rebecca Solnit, a prolific writer who engages deeply with her surroundings. In *A field guide to getting lost* (2006), Solnit discusses the perceptual ambiguity of the colour blue, ageing and the surfaces and distance inherent in our environments. She constructs an analogy around the distance gained as a child matures in to adulthood, of our bodily relationship with distance, environment and the blue of the sky:

> There is no distance in childhood: for a baby, a mother in the other room is gone forever, for a child the time until a birthday is endless. Whatever is absent is impossible, irretrievable, unreachable. Their mental landscape is like that of medieval paintings: a foreground full of vivid things and then a wall. The blue of distance comes with time, with the discovery of melancholy, of loss, the textures of longing, of the complexity of the terrain we traverse and with the years of travel.

> (Solnit 2006: 39)

Solnit exposes a deep melancholy within the blue light of the horizon; blue is the light, the colour that is forever dispersing and fragmenting. The light at the blue end of the spectrum disperses among the molecules of air and water (2006: 29); where the light

travelling from the horizon does not make it the whole distance, 'it is the light that gets lost' (2006: 29), she proclaims.

In Hopper's image, the horizon line appears a vivid blue that conceals the texture of the mountains. Hopper brings about solitude not only through the representation of people, but also through a composition of environment, space and colour. The distance here is also partly represented through the ageing of figures, with the most elderly looking out into the distance, while the more youthful remain caught up in their own immediate experience. Through the composition of the figures and the blue of the horizon, a melancholy unfolds in the gulf between the figure and ground. The aesthetic intention of *and it all…* was to explore distance through colour, reflection and duration. The performance presented a loose journey of a boy into adulthood, a process of discovery into reflection, and then finally a moment of acceptance and letting go.

Method

and it all comes down to this… was presented at stage@leeds (University of Leeds) on 27ˉ29 September 2012 with three showings per evening at 6pm, 7pm and 8pm. Due to the scale of the project, no further iterations were possible; however, the extended run allowed for 85 participants in total. The project was advertised as a public event within the stage@leeds season programme and was attended by general public, academics and students.

I continued the creative feedback strategy by inviting participants to reflect upon their experience in written form. In order to focus the reflections further, I posed two questions, the first continuing the approach established in Cycle Two

(**'It felt like…'**) and the second relating to the audience journey (**'What sense can you make of *your* journey through this experience?'**).** These were then displayed in the foyer of the venue.
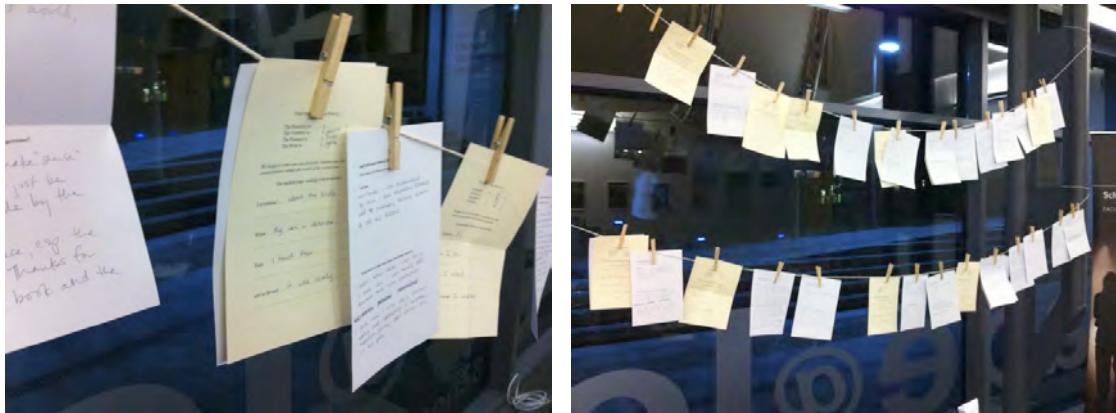
FIGURE 24: Images of participant reflections shared in foyer space.

In order to provide some distance between me as the performance maker and researcher and not to influence the comments, I briefed assistants to aid in facilitating this part of the experience. As part of the strategy to entice participants to reflect, tea, coffee and cake were provided in order to encourage participants to dwell and take their time with responses. As the researcher, I observed from the balcony of the venue, making notes on the nature of the participant engagement during the event.

CYCLE THREE: Reflection

Reflection on Audience Response

As with Cycle Two, the reflections combined a mixture of creative and descriptive impressions. One overall observation was that the participants understood the experience as a form of therapy, with many comments drawing attention towards a space of self-contemplation. As well as the poetic responses, the open method allowed space for those who found the experience more challenging. It enabled some to

respond with comments that suggested feelings of vulnerability, isolation and a lack of confidence. For example, one participant reflected how they were not in the mood for the experience. Whilst it is possible to make some general assumptions as to why participants might not have engaged with the work – such as general mood, unfamiliarity with the theatrical form, content not offering invitations to engage or not understanding the rules of engagement – it is difficult to attribute these comments to specific scenographic processes.

Reflection on Practice and Method

The practice achieved the original aim of presenting a performance experiment that explored a more structured sensory and emotional journey through the creation of different scenes and performance moments. In section three of the piece, I had devised an element that aimed to encourage audience members to reflect on their experience from within the work. Participants were invited to complete a page of the book they were given; I asked them to respond to particular scenographic elements and to consider their own interpretations of the weather in the piece. I hoped this might encourage reflection as a tactic of engagement; however, the comments from this section appeared short, often just one-word responses or nothing at all. I deemed these comments insignificant to the analysis as the one-word answers revealed little information.

Overall the project aimed to lead the audience through different modes of engagement: reading, listening, discovering, sharing and reflecting. In contrast to the otherwise more static design of Cycle Two. I was intrigued as to how continual shifts may disrupt or support a sense of immersion, to explore more fully Grau's notion that

immersion is 'a process, a change, passage from one mental state to another' (Grau 2003: 13). In comparison to Cycle Two – where a sense of being in a bubble persisted – reflections on Cycle Three exposed sensations of being drawn in and out of the experience. In summary of the learning from Cycle Three, the following observations were made:

- Focusing the feedback question to include a specific element about the audience journey allowed for more detailed responses.

- The foyer space fostered a space in which audiences could converse after, with some audience members dwelling between shows.

- It was difficult to track or respond to participants who struggled to find connections with the performance.

- Offering a space of reflection during the performance did not create substantial insights into the experience.

In total, over all the three cycles of practice, I collected 162 individual reflections and comments. The development of the practice, over the course of this study, arrived at the point where I felt there were significant insights available to address the research questions and conduct a detailed analysis. No further cycles of practice were conducted.

Sub-question Summary

For clarity, I have identified each of the questions for the practice components below, which form part of research question one:

1   **How do audiences engage with scenography in performance events that place the body as central to their reception?**

Cycle One: *VOID/ROOM*

    1.A   In what ways can altering proximity and the diffusion of sound and light in space alter the experience of performance?

Cycle Two: *If anyone wonders why rocks breakdown*

    1.B   In what ways does physical engagement with scenography alter scenographic reception?

Cycle Three: *and it all comes down to this…*

    1.C   How might a shifting between physical and cognitive experience of scenography impact upon audience reception?

    1.D   How might journey be used to aid the experience of immersion?

For transparency and traceability, each participant response has been numbered and linked to each cycle of practice as follows:

A = Cycle One: *VOID/ROOM*

B = Cycle Two: *If anyone wonders why rocks breakdown*

C = Cycle Three: *and it all comes down to this…*

Each response is followed by a number, such as 'participant A1, B1 or C1' in order to identify to which cycle of practice the individual participant is referring. Transcripts of audience interviews and reflections are presented as part of documentation on the USB drive. I have chosen to leave spelling and grammatical errors as written in the audience responses.

PART THREE (Analysis and Modelling Audience Immersion)

Approaching the Analysis

As outlined in my methodology, my approach to analysis has been a continual reflective process, composed of cycles of 'doing-reflecting-reading-articulating-doing' (Nelson, 2013: 31). I engaged with audience reflections throughout the research, and audience comments have formed part of the development of my ongoing practice. In responding to emergent themes, the practice was created with the intention of encouraging different types of behaviour and engagement with scenography. The findings are representative of this emergent process and therefore have a level of specificity attached. However, I have not chosen to conduct an analysis of each cycle of practice individually; I have pulled insights together into overarching concepts of Landscape, Weather and Journey (I shall expand upon these below).

In the post-practice analysis of audience responses, I adapted a phenomenological strategy outlined by Richard Hycner (1985). Hycner systematically lists a detailed template for the researcher to enable him or her to be 'responsive to the phenomenon' in question (Hycner 1985: 280). Hycner identifies fifteen steps in approaching interview data – not all of which are appropriate for this study. Hycner's system is a tiered system in which the data is slowly broken down in general units of meaning, their significance to the research question and then clustered into relevant groups of meaning. After all three cycles of practice were complete, I undertook a larger review of the responses by 'clustering' (1985: 287) data into units of relevant meaning. I clustered data relating to the overall research project, specific research

questions, and coherent units of expression. I also made general notes and observations about the participant.

Through my analysis I present an argument towards a sense of audience immersion and examine how scenography operates as an agent for activating relational encounters. Where a sense of failure or disconnect emerged in the audience responses, I have included these as part of the analysis in order to help reveal reception processes. It is important to note when approaching audience responses that they 'cannot be exclusively attributed to causes' (McKinney 2008: 32). I am mindful that I am unable to establish an objective position; however, my analysis is formed through my interpretations of the audience experience, my practitioner knowledge and how I have situated these within a critical discourse. McKinney notes how the process of interpreting scenography is modified through performance, suggesting there is 'no clear line between the experience of the performance and the subsequent describing and analysing of it' (2008: 33). The individual audience responses I collected consisted of a mixture of specific 'moments' that participants had identified as significant, and more general 'impressions' or 'feelings'. I clustered responses with similar language and content, such as 'Empowerment and Agency', 'Feeling Distant' and 'Transportation', which helped provide rigour to my approach as I related and connected responses, drawing out collective concerns.

A core insight that emerged throughout the process and which has aided my general approach and thinking was the expression of self-reflective, self-aware behaviours of the audience. The self-reflective responses, or 'mindful' responses, as I have clustered them, permeated in the responses to all three cycles of practice. I was first aware of the possibility of mindful practice – as a strategy for audience

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engagement – after the interview process of Cycle One: *VOID/ROOM*. In the interview with participant A30, they described their process of engaging with the installation as a form of 'meditative practice'. This observation was based upon the participant's own regular skilled practice of meditation that they applied as a strategy to cope with their experience of the performance. Participant A30 described this as a process of 's*hutting down all the external mental chatter and stimulus and being very focused on one thing'* (A30). Following the interview with participant A30, as I developed Cycle Two, I worked intuitively with the aim of offering much greater agency to the participants, to provide a space that encouraged their own strategies of self-reflective engagement. I took the decision to explore self-reflective experience as part of my scenographic environments, which lead to a rise in reflective and meditative responses from audiences in subsequent cycles.

Throughout the analysis I formulated a series of headings that related to ideas of self-reflection and self-awareness, which included: **Meditation and Presence** (the sensation of being present with the work), **Perceived Active and Passive Participation** (feelings of being in control of their engagement), **Contemplation and Reflexivity** (self-awareness) and **Losing the Body** (feelings of a disappearance of the body or sensory saturation). I considered each of these clusters as a broader concern that I have identified as expressions of 'audience mindfulness'. The term 'audience mindfulness' refers to a mode of embodied expression that captures the implicit and explicit levels of self-awareness of a participant's own bodily and cognitive engagement with design. In many of the responses, participants did not respond directly to specific scenographic material; the responses were expressive of an overarching mode of engagement across all three cycle of practice, particularly in

Cycles Two and Three. Mindfulness, as discussed earlier, is a process that enables the harbouring of multiple simultaneous mental and sensory processes. I present mindfulness here as a method of corporeal engagement with scenography – an overarching mode of audience engagement. I propose that through processes of mindfulness, participants might forge deeper relations and connections with scenography.

AUDIENCE MINDFULNESS

Mapping Mindfulness

I shall return to the comments offered by participant A30 in order to map the emergence of audience mindfulness as a method of engagement with scenography. Participant A30, in her experience of *VOID/ROOM,* spoke of a sensory overload and her inability to process the abundant symbolic information. As a coping strategy, she dealt with the overwhelming sensation of being in the environment by adopting a mindful/meditative strategy:

Participant A30	*It took me a couple of minutes to settle down and I was kind of checking out the objects in the room and trying to project what might happen with them, but once I had worked out what was in the room I settled.*
Interviewer	So there was a moment of orientation, so then it changed then for you*?*
Participant A30	*Once I had done that it became almost more meditative; I meditate, so I think I was almost – it was very similar to that.*
Interviewer	What's that experience then?
Participant A30	*Shutting down all the external mental chatter and stimulus and being very focused on one thing, which is normally the breath but in there it was just the sounds I was hearing.*
Interviewer	Was that a shutting down of your own thoughts or was it a shutting down of what else was around you?

Participant A30	*I often struggle to process visual and sound at the same time. I shut my eyes at one point when the narrative was on, so that I could focus on the words and the things you were saying.*

The same participant later extended this by reflecting on an experience of being 'present':

Interviewer	Your role within the piece, as a body in that space, how would you describe that as an experience?
Participant A30	*I guess I am viewing it. I've come alone to view this installation but I think I was just present whilst it was happening.*

According to Victor Nell, a similar bottlenecking, or overload of signs and information can occur whilst reading. Nell suggests that immersion is hampered by difficult materials because 'consciousness is a processing bottleneck, and it is already comprehended messages […] that fully engage the receiver's conscious attention' (quoted in Ryan 2001: 96). This is a useful insight when applied to understanding the nature of processing sensory and symbolic information in the scenographic space. Over-stimulation and unfamiliar messages can slow reception processes, causing a conscious bottleneck. Participant A30 deploys a coping mechanism in order to filter out visual material; this suggests that multiple streams of sensory information can impact and overload scenographic reception, which may actually be counterproductive to creating sensations of immersion. It is worth noting that a significant number of participants struggled to comprehend the spoken voice presented in the piece – perhaps due to an over-stimulation of the senses and the disembodied nature of the voice. The reflections offered by Participant A30, particularly their outline of a strategy of engagement, alerted me to the possibility that audiences might adopt mindfulness tactics when dealing with scenography. This insight allowed me to

examine my own craft as a scenographer and to think about creative tactics to elicit mindful behaviour in participants in Cycles Two and Three.

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a path through which to examine and embrace groundlessness[3] with the ultimate intention of developing compassion. According to Varela et al.,

> [m]indfulness means that the mind is present in embodied everyday experience; mindfulness techniques are designed to lead the mind back from its theories and reoccupation, back from the abstract attitude, to the situation of one's experience itself.

> (Varela *et al.* 1991: 22)

The main thrust of mindfulness – in meditative practice – is not to become absorbed, but to render the mind able to be present with itself long enough to gain an insight into its own functioning (1991: 24). When becoming mindful, we are often reminded of how 'disconnected humans normally are from their very experience' (1991: 25). Meditation as a practice, similar to that expressed by participant A30, offers a method to interrupt our habitual flow:

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[3] Groundlessness is a part of Mahayana Buddhism tradition that recognises a link between absolutism and nihilism. Verela et al. note that 'within the tradition of mindfulness/awareness meditation, the motivation has been to develop a direct and stable insight into absolutism and nihilism as forms of grasping that result from the attempt to find a stable ego-self and so limit our lived world to the experience of suffering and frustration. By progressively learning to let go of these tendencies to grasp, one can begin to appreciate that all phenomena are free of any absolute ground that such 'groundless (sunyata) is the very fabric of dependent coorigination' (Varela *et al.* 1991: 144). The groundlessness perspective can also be presented through Merleau-Ponty's account that 'perception is not a science of the world, it is not even an act, a deliberate taking up of a position; it is the background from which all acts stand out, and is presupposed by them. The world is not an object such that I have in my possession the law of its making; it is the natural setting of, and field for, all my thoughts and all my explicit perception' (Merleau-Ponty, 2002: xi–xii). Merleau-Ponty's position is of a middle way, between inner and outer, self and world. Groundless is a letting go of grasping extremes.

> [t]he dissociation of mind and body, of awareness from experience, is the result of habit, and these habits can be broken. As the meditator again and again interrupts the flow of discursive thought and returns to be present with his breath or daily activity, there is a gradual taming of the mind's restlessness.
>
> (Varela *et al.* 1991: 25-26)

An example of this is where a participant might be made aware of his or her habitual behaviour within performance, therefore activating a contemplative self-awareness. Encouraging processes of self-reflection in performance gives rise to the following questions: how might self-awareness operate in relation to scenography, and how might we place mindfulness within the realm of theatre attendance, away from skilled meditative practice?

In applying mindfulness to audience experience, I am not suggesting that the participant shut out external stimuli by, for example, completely and attentively focusing on the breath. Instead, we might consider mindfulness in terms of audience experience as an embracing of the external scenographic material. This can be achieved through processes of self-reflection and an awareness of habitual behaviour and cognitive modes of engagement that disrupt normative modes of engagement.

Attention, for example, is a conditioned and normative mode of theatrical engagement that could be displaced by mindful participation. Crary discusses the nature of attention throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century. He asserts that

> what stands out is how attention continues to be posed as a normative and implicitly natural function whose impairment produces a range of symptoms and behaviours that variously disrupt social cohesion.
>
> (Crary 2001: 35)

Inattention is considered socially disruptive; attention therefore becomes a normative mode of engagement. Normative modes of engagement in theatrical experience are institutionally, socially and spatially constructed towards audience productivity. Richard Wagner (1813–1883) epitomised this approach. For him, deeply attentive or 'higher' forms of attention were favoured over 'lower' distracted forms of listening; the former, for Wagner, was a pure and ethically superior mode of perceptual engagement (2001: 249). Wagner's assertion extended to his own theatre design and architecture for the Festspielhaus in Bayreuth. Here, Wagner's control over the attentiveness of the audience was in effect to subordinate them to the will of the artist and to 'generate a collective state of reception worthy of an art with such social aspirations' (2001: 250). For Wagner, it was the architectural design of the auditorium, with the audience in the darkness and the orchestra pit hidden (Palmer 2013: 79) that aided most in conditioning the audience – rather than the stage design. In environmental performance, the audience have free bodily movement and are surrounded by multiple possible distractions that might disrupt normative modes of attention by encouraging audiences to explore, use their bodies and seek out performance material.

Langer (1989) offers the most significant insight into mindfulness in Western psychology, where she builds her position on mindfulness' apparent opposite, 'mindlessness'. Langer observes that '[i]n daily life we do not notice what we are doing unless there is a problem' (Langer 1989: 43). For Langer, a disruption of automatic behaviour (mindlessness), for example, can bring about a reflective modality. It is this reflective process (mindfulness) of awareness of automatic behaviour, in contrast to attentive modes of engagement such as those advocated by

Wagner, that I believe encourages deeper associations between individuals and scenography.

As I developed techniques to encourage 'mindfulness/awareness' in my practice, I also formed theoretical frameworks around my analysis. Inspired by Langer's writing, I was able to reorganise the audience responses from my headings above and to align these more closely with key chapters of Langer's (1989) writing. Below, I have identified the following headings to form a taxonomy of audience mindfulness, partly inspired by my audience response and my creative practice, and influenced through Langer's writing:

1. **Awareness of Bodily Sensations**
   Via the deficient body

2. **Unlearning of Normative Cognitive Modes of Engagement**
   Suspending desire to seek out meaning

3. **Cutting Across Automatic Behaviour**
   Mindlessness and self-questioning

4. **Possibility**
   Forming new categories and multiple possibilities of experience

1.   Awareness of Bodily Sensations

An explicit scenographic tactic that I employed in Cycles Two and Three was to draw attention to the body through sensorimotor action. The following extract is taken from the written score of *'and it all comes down to this…'*. In this extract from section two of the performance, the participants sat in deckchairs, each with small pendant bulb in front of them. They were instructed via a voice in the headphones to reflect upon their body:

Take out your hand
hold out your hand
(like you do to feel if the rain has begun to fall)

Take a look, take a deep look.
Do you ever wonder, at the creases,
each line a road taken or the less taken
stretching from fingertip to fingertip.
(It will take many years to cover the span of a hand)

The object of perception becomes the hand of the participant. The instruction appears personal as it is directed toward each individual participant – both via the personal pronoun 'you' and the use of headphones to direct the spoken text to each individual's ear. For one audience member, as they performed the small physical action, it brought about a personal significance: '*You read a story to me, and then we looked at my hand together in the light – my lined and aging hand that looks like my mother's hand when I was young'* (C37). This self-awareness is brought about by explicit instruction to enact sensorimotor activity; the bulb illuminating the skin revealed details usually unobserved. Each audience member becomes a scenographic object that inspires imaginative subjective responses. Below, I further expand on participant C37's

experience as a process of imaginative travelling, but it is presented here as a demonstration of how a participant's body can be used as a scenographic tool to position the audience as part of the scenography.

Awareness of Bodily Sensation Via the Deficient Body

In Cycle Two, participants expressed a form a sensory saturation, but this was not expressed as a physical bombardment, rather as a disappearance of the body:

it felt like…

> *Sense of silence, of a very vast space, constellation, profoundly lonely space, but a calmness making that solitude almost addictive. Lost my body for a while. And could have stayed for hours.*

B40

Although the phrase 'lost my body for a while' implies an 'absence', this is arguably not the same absence that Leder (1990) demonstrates through sensorimotor intentionality. Leder articulates how 'actions are motivated and organized by outer-directed concern' (1990: 19), and that in action the body recedes. However, in some situations attention can 'shift so as to reside within the body here-and-now' (1990: 19), such as meditative attention towards the breath. This engagement becomes what Heidegger terms as a 'deficient' mode of our usual concern with the world (Leder, 1990: 19). This deficiency, as Fenemore notes, 'implies not a hierarchy, but an extra-ordinary mode of embodiment such that absence is the norm and presence the "deficiency" from that norm' (Fenemore 2001: 78-79). Further audience reflections on *If anyone wonders…* expressed feelings of '*being under water'* (B8), '*being in a bath without getting wet'* (B12), a '*morning shower'* (B13), '*a floatation tank of societal cares and nothing at all*' (B17); the immersive metaphor of water is abundant and

indicative of an 'extra-ordinary mode of embodiment' (2001: 78–79). These sensations express a body in full saturation, not a loss of awareness of the body, but where an all-encompassing sensory stimulation actually draws attention towards the body in the here-and-now moment. The act of being immersed in water, although used metaphorically by participants, is an act of transition between mediums.

2.   Unlearning of Normative Cognitive Modes of Engagement

I have already mentioned how attention can be considered a normative mode of engagement. Mindfulness tactics can encourage audiences to unlearn normative cognitive processes. Participants in my practice commonly considered their experience on a continuum between active and passive modes of engagement. The binary position of action and passivity in spectatorship is one Rancière contests. For him,

> spectatorship is not passivity that must be turned into activity. It is our normal situation. We learn and teach, we act and know, as spectators who link what they see with what they have seen and told, done and dreamed.
>
> (Rancière 2007: 277)

Although Rancière calls for the emancipation of the audience in theoretical terms, by which he means 'the blurring of the boundary between those who act and those who look; between individuals and members of a collective body' (Rancière 2009: 19), participants still considered their experiences in binary terms of being active and passive. For example, participants A1 and A25, who attended *VOID/ROOM*, articulated a shift between both active and passive modes of engagement, becoming more 'passive' – in their words – as the performance progressed.

The participants who referred to their engagement as being 'active' were associating this concept with their own preconception of being physically engaged with the scenography. A sense of 'passivity', on the other hand, was expressed as a non-physical engagement, such as sitting back and relaxing. For participant A12, the sense of passivity was regarded as a positive and pleasurable experience: '*It was really beautiful to be in that space, there was a moment when you were allowed not to do anything*' (A12), and '*I felt I could be active or passive or just sit down in the armchair*' (A25). The decision to become passive is a conscious one, where the participants feel as though they have a choice over their engagement. The awareness of choice – '*I felt I could be active or passive*' – can be regarded as a mindful process that offers agency to the participant. The participant experiences a level of perceived, if not actual, control over their chosen mode of cognitive engagement.

Mindfulness as a practice does not merely mean a skilled process of meditation, which would otherwise be problematic for a time-limited non-skilled audience, but rather, mindfulness can be considered within the realm of the quotidian – in daily processes in which we notice, or at moments where we are consciously brought out of habit. For example, the simple action of watering a plant (Langer: 1989: 81) might aid in our awareness of self and environment by providing purpose to actions. Links can be made here to simple actions or tasks that audiences complete in attending to scenography. In my practice, cognitive processes, such as questioning the nature of reading, where written text is rewritten or crossed out or where the words uttered were different from those written down, all challenge audiences to let go of usual habits. Another example would be inviting audiences to explore the space as they enter the environment, rather than taking a seated position. According to Varela

et al., mindfulness is best described 'as a letting go of habits of mindlessness, as an *un*learning rather than learning' (1991: 29). As the individual takes control of the meaning-making process, they conduct a process of *un*learning, working against normative modes of attentive engagement, as I shall detail further.

Although a participant might feel passive, this can still be considered as a process of mindful emancipation. Participant A4 expressed their engagement with *VOID/ROOM* as a process of letting it 'wash':

It was the setting up of expectations, that feeling of nervousness 'oh my god what's going to happen', then settling into it and really concentrating and really listening, and then allowing myself to let it wash a little bit more and be a little open to how its making me respond, rather than trying to work out what I'm meant to feel.

A4

Over time, this participant allowed herself to be more 'open' to how the performance was making her respond, rather than seeking out meaning. This comment suggests a tuning into the different possible modes of engagement, a process in which the audience member selects the appropriate tools and strategies to best make sense of the work, in this case an *un*learning through time. This sense of tuning, according to Richard Coyne 'connects to the lived experience of temporal and spatial adjustment (Coyne 2010: xvi). Participant A4 settles into a mode of reception where an attentive strategy of seeking out meaning is replaced with what I call a 'sampling' or 'filtering' of the performance material. A sampling of material is a process that allows scenographic material to 'wash' or 'pass over' the participant. The participant, through a process of sensory and cognitive filtering, rejects materials they regard as less significant, allowing them to select the material that grabs their attention, opening up possible subjective associations of scenographic materials. This is an important

observation as it suggests that not all performance material should be experienced as significant. Participants might reject performance moments, design elements and images not of interest or significance to them personally. Participant A4 demonstrates a process of 'temporal and spatial adjustment', working with the flow of scenographic materials and being guided by their significance. The process of mindfulness in this case is more akin to tuning an instrument than playing it (Varela *et al.* 1991: 29). Whilst the participant might have chosen a strategy that they assert to be passive, that hints at a disinterest, or that shows a lack of attention, the experience of 'letting go', of making semantic sense of the scenography and of selecting material that is personally significant appears to have been liberating.

For the following participant, a sense of agency is gained in this mindful encounter: '*there was a really great sense that I could sit here and do whatever I want or meditate…*' (A11). For participant A11, a sense of pleasure materialises as they allow their attention to focus upon their own arising thoughts: '*to try to not think about it too much… just to notice that the thoughts are arising'* (A11). Participant A11 allowed their own imaginative process to emerge, noticing rather than forcing connections between material. A11's comments suggest they are also accustomed to meditative practice. The individual acts as a director of their experience, 'composing fields of association between words, sounds, bodies, movement, light and objects' (Lehmann 2006: 111) through a spatialised 'scenic poem' (2006: 111). In this context, however, the individual's own subjective associations become part of the composition.

In opposition to the mindful strategies adopted by A11 and A30, participant A8 demonstrated a normative mode of engagement, where they vigorously attempted to connect the fragments of material and symbolic information inherent in the objects,

images and books within the space. Whilst this approach was common among participants in the initial stages of the experience, A8 adopts this strategy throughout. Although participant A8 expressed a 'settling down', they remained highly attentive and expectant of more material in order to help them make sense of the work. Participant A8 also commented upon my own demeanour as the researcher, the spatial setup of the foyer and the poster image, which, for them, all suggested a more minimal experience than the performance actually delivered. The abundance of objects appeared to rupture this minimal impression; the objects therefore struck the participant as being significant or meaningful, in effect becoming scenographic clues to be read or decoded. To some extent this was the intention, but only insofar as the objects intended to establish a sense of place. This highlights the importance of conditioning the audience prior to their experience, which was an active strategy employed at the beginning of Cycle Three, where I allowed audiences to explore the space in the initial section of the performance.

A common link between these experiences is how time operated in guiding participants towards mindful engagement. The audience's awareness of time, which is identified as a shift between being active and passive, brings forth a process of temporal spatial adjustment. A mindful approach is a continual adjustment of the participant's own sense of time in relation to the performance and is best thought of as a type of 'tuning'. Tuning is a manifold process of a participant's general disposition (their mood) and their subjective experience of time in relation to performance time, bringing the subject and artwork together. This might manifest in how audiences take time to adjust to different modes of reception. It is helpful to think of two spheres of time: the audience and the performance; mindfulness enables the individual to align

the two spheres. Later, I demonstrate more clearly how scenography might gesture towards a process of mindful tuning, a placement of the participant within a larger scenographic composition, as a cycling between the audience's own sense of time and the here-and-now time of performance.

3.   Cutting Across Automatic Behaviour

Cutting cross 'automatic behaviour' (Langer 1989: 12) expands upon the process of the *un*learning of cognitive engagement and considers this in relation to automatic bodily and behavioural processes. Automatic behaviours are learnt by habit (Langer, 1989: 16) and can lead to mindless behaviour; an example of this in daily life might be attempting to use the office keys to open the front door at home. When in this mode, 'we take in limited signals from the world' (1989: 12), basing our experience on repetition. Scenographic environments have the potential to challenge habitual processes, enabling the audience to question their automatic engagements. I shall first recount an experience of an error made by a front-of-house team member in relation to instructions given to the audience prior to entering one of the performances of *and it all…* In the following example, I can identify how the negotiation of rules of engagement might aid in mindful processes:

During the Friday 6pm showing, the audience were instructed to take their seats. On the first night, I gave specific instructions to the FOH team that requested participants head into the space where they would then be guided through the experience. My intention was, at first, to encourage a process of exploration and discovery before the audience took a seated position. In this particular showing – that I observed from above on the theatre's balcony – participants took their seats and began to test the headphones (which were not active for the first eighteen minutes). The audience sat for nearly ten minutes before one or two participants decided that they would get back on their feet and begin to explore. It was not until after the show that I enquired as to why participants sat down, to which one responded, '*we were told to take a seat*'. Upon seeing the seats, the FOH staff member assumed that this was a seated experience and informed participants to enter and take a seat. After a period of time participants became ill-at-ease with the prospect of being seated with little activity and were compelled to explore, to be inquisitive by standing up and exploring the space.

Although not an artistic intention, the audience were required to work out that they needed to move in order to experience all that was offered to them. Questioning behaviour can aid in cutting across habitual modes of engagement. The negotiation of the rules of performance can, however, be a disruptive process in which meaningful relations to the event might not be established. For example, participant C28 commented how other audience members helped them figure out their place within the work: '*I felt really awkward & vulnerable. I was glad I had other people around to follow otherwise I wouldn't of* [sic] *had the confidence to move (only when the headphones were on!)*'. Learning from other audience members and negotiating the rules of engagement cuts across automatic modes of behaviour, placing the participant in a self-awareness of engagement that hinges between being productive and disruptive.

Bodily engagement with scenography can also aid in drawing attention to habitual process. Participant A9 wrote me a letter in response to *VOID/ROOM,* in which he reflected upon his habitual activity *after* the event:

[…] I had no direct frame of reference for my behaviour within the space. Despite this, I had the feeling of habitual behaviour occurring – sitting and watching the television […] afterward I began to consider my habitual behaviour. I began to question whether I simply go through the motions of daily life and I wondered why I do not seek to improve my behaviour and environment – epitomised by the bucket. Every person has their 'bucket catching raindrops' that they do not redress.

A9

For this participant his own automatic behaviour, in the world outside the performance, was brought into question through his lived experience of the scenography during the performance. The open-ended potential of the scenography, such as the television, mirror and bucket, was taken on by the participant to form his own subjective significance. The expression above does not reflect an imagined scenographic other in which the objects are only representative of a fictional world; it is expressive of an embodied reflection where the participant's own circumstance and subjectivity are brought into direct tactile relationship with the scenographic materials. Another response similarly picked up on this impression during the experience:

… I immediately went for the comfy chair rather than the bench and then realised I was sitting in front of a television, it sort of made me thinking about a default setting where I sit in front of a TV, although I very rarely switch it on these days.

A13

The objects of *VOID/ROOM* harboured a familiarity and derived much of their expressive power from their everyday use in the real world (McAuley 1999: 179). Gay McAuley discusses the gesture of objects by applying Marcel Jousse's concept of 'the gesture of things' (le geste de choses). Jousse proposes that we really only know things to the extent that they 'perform or "gestualise" themselves (se gestualisent) in

us' (1999: 179). Objects invite participation and elicit behaviour. The pedestrian and everyday nature of the chair and television contribute to an embodied behavioural gesture in us. This gesture, in my practice (unlike in McAuley's application), is not lived out by the actor, but is an embodied experience for the participant. When participant A9 re-encounters these objects in daily life, after their experience of the performance, a bodily remembrance of the thematic concerns of the piece is replayed. The gesture of the objects, as lived through the body of the participant, inspired a 'mindfulness/awareness' of bodily habit. Drawing attention to automatic behaviour might foster a 'mindfulness/awareness', indicating that mindfulness is not, therefore, a skill to be mastered, but a quotidian process experienced as a lived self-reflection.

4.   Possibility

Possibility is the process of forming multiple imaginative interpretations of events, things and situations. Campbell Edinborough (2011) applies mindfulness and possibility to a performance context by asserting mindfulness as a method in which to help develop decision-making skills in performer training. Edinborough's adoption of mindfulness in performer training seeks to bring about awareness of automatic behaviour and to open up the performer to new and multiple possibilities of action. Edinborough summarises Langer's (1989) approach to mindfulness by suggesting that 'mindfulness is the ability to attend to the nature of a process before committing to a specific outcome. It is the ability to develop new categories and new ways of seeing' (Edinborough 2011: 22). Edinborough notes of the actor: '[t]he mindful individual is able to relate her decision-making to the changing nature of her presence within varying environments' (Edinborough 2011: 23). As opposed to the de-categorisation of objects and materials (as with some Eastern traditions), mindfulness in Langer's

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approach opens up objects, experiences and situations to the realm of possibility, multiple perspectives, and new and numerous clarifications:

> [j]ust as mindlessness is the rigid reliance on old categories, mindfulness means the continual creation of new ones. Categorizing and recategorizing, labelling and relabeling as one masters the world are processes natural to children.

> (Langer 1989: 63)

Important to Langer's argument is the playful and explorative nature of labelling and re-categorising the world about us. The objects presented in Cycle One appeared to create concrete receptions. Participant A13 discussed how the furniture of the room provided them with a clear sense of their grandparents' home. For participant A15, the objects were distinctly connected to a family mountain retreat. In both situations, the objects clearly locate the participants in a particular place and are expressive of a process of clear categorisation. In Cycles Two and Three, play offers a mode of engagement that encourages an interpretation of multiple categories. Participant C7 reveals this playful nature in their comments:

it felt like…

A real moment of contemplation, peacefulness and relaxation. A very generous experience – even when you do the wrong thing! It felt clear, transparent jars, clear water, reflection, ghosts – they felt pure, like the childhood game of staring into marbles and imagining a whole world inside.

C7

The imaginative sense of wonder and purity rekindles a sense of playful childlike engagement. In other comments, particularly the following reflection taken from Cycle Two, a sense of playful possibility appears more fluid and metaphorical:

it felt like…

> *Being under water*
> *4 am on Sunday morning after a lot of red wine*
> *A disaster aftermath in a city*
> *- I got all of these at different points*

B8

The categorisation here is plural, mixing a sense of place with different moods and feelings. In both these examples, the body is implicit in the comments, a drunken body and a soothed body, formed through a level of mental projection. Langer identifies how the mind provides the context for the body and mental projection situates the body in that context: '[w]hen the "mind" is in a context, the "body" is necessarily also in that context' (Langer 1989: 177). The participants above demonstrate a psychosomatic experience of mental projection and bodily sensation forged through an openness of scenographic materials. This process is fluid and changeable, with the participant accepting and embracing multiple possibilities of place and feelings. In a response to *and it all…,* participant C43 demonstrates a similar openness: 'What sense can you make of *your* journey through this experience*? Is it necessary to make "sense" of it? Can it not just be a soothing interlude by the sea*?' This participant is open to the possibility of the fluidity of the theatrical experience itself, choosing to value their experience as a particular feeling, rather than understand it within an existing paradigm of 'coherent' theatre.

Mindfulness formulates an integrated picture of the self within the environment – an embodied process of thought, emotion, body and mind (Edinborough 2011: 23). The implication for scenography is in how the materials inspire multiple possibilities of interpretation and exploration. It is difficult to attribute mindful responses to specific scenographic materials from these comments alone:

however, the analysis of Cycle Two and my conception of a scenographic landscape, which I outline below, offer clear links between scenography and mindful, playful possibilities of materials.

Concluding Audience Mindfulness

'Mindfulness/awareness' in performance appears at odds with common assumptions of immersion, such as diminishing of critical distance and increasing emotional involvement in what is happening (Grau 2003: 13), where a sense of immersion could be seen to fail if attention is given to the (perceptual) *how* rather than the (productive) *what* of experience. 'Mindfulness/awareness' offers a distinct mode of embodied reflection that brings the mindful participant into a conscious self-awareness with scenography. I have discovered how my scenographic practice aids in drawing attention to automatic behaviour, offering agency to the sense-making process and by orchestrating materials to offer multiple possibilities of categorisation. Furthermore, 'mindfulness/awareness' not only acts as an explicit tactic of engagement but it can also be considered as part of the experience. Varela et al. assert that:

> What this formulation intends to convey is that reflection is not just *on* experience, but reflection *is* a form of experience itself – and that reflective form of experience can be performed within mindfulness/awareness. When reflection is done in that way, it can cut the chain of habitual thought patterns and preconceptions such that it can be an open-ended reflection, open to possibilities other than those contained in one's current representations of the life space. We call this form of reflection, *mindful, open-ended reflection*.

> (Varela *et al.* 1991: 27 emphasis in original)

What is important to my study is that mindfulness is a dissolving of mindlessness, rather than the acquiring of a practical skill. Mindfulness makes the participant aware

of their experience; 'mindfulness/awareness' aligns bodily and imaginative process through reflection, creating an open-ended space of possibility. My argument is that mindfulness helps establish deeper, more meaningful *relations* between the participant and scenography.

My modelling of audience immersion is positioned within a 'mindfulness/awareness' context. During my analysis I have been able to identify three metaphorical concepts as to how audiences might become more deeply immersed in a set of relational transactions with scenography. These categories are Immersion as Landscape, Immersion as Weather and Immersion as Journey. The three constituent parts express the plurality of immersion and collectively make up my larger model of audience immersion:

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│              Audience Mindfulness                 │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
          │              │              │
┌──────────────┐ ┌──────────────┐ ┌──────────────┐
│ Immersion as │ │ Immersion as │ │ Immersion as │
│  Landscape   │ │   Weather    │ │   Journey    │
└──────────────┘ └──────────────┘ └──────────────┘
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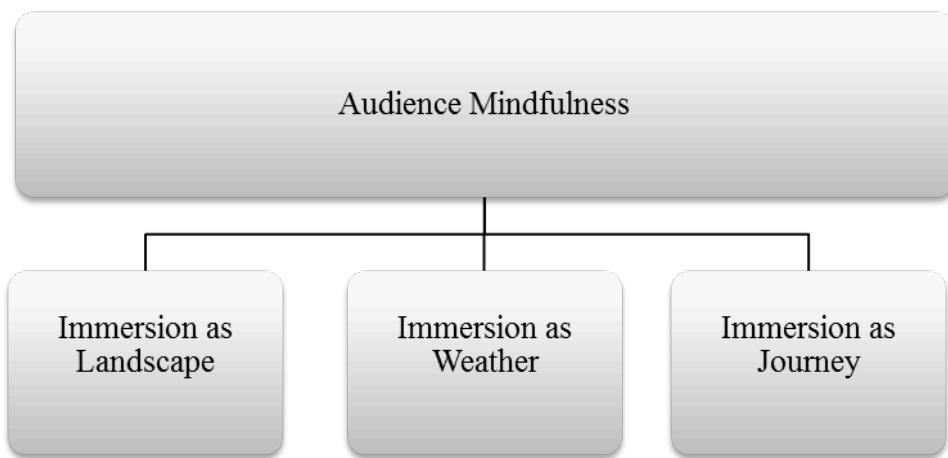
FIGURE 25: Model of audience immersion. Audience mindfulness leading to constituent parts of comprising Landscape, Weather and Journey

In the following section, I present a model of audience immersion as outlined above. I do not claim a universal theory of immersion that can be applied to all performance

work and scenography. This model is based upon the specific scenographic compositions of my creative practice, which I hope will be useful for other practitioners, companies and theorists looking to gain deeper insights into the experience of immersion and the potential applications of scenography in order to facilitate 'immersive' experience.

MODELLING AUDIENCE IMMERSION (ANALYSIS)

To begin, I consider landscape as the threshold in which participants engage with the surface materials of design. The shaping of the landscape and audience is manifested through a physical and imaginative 'doing' of scenography. Second, I broaden notions of landscape to consider the elements of scenography combined to form a 'scenographic weather'. Weather is conceptualised as the atmospheric movement of scenography in and around the participant. I predominantly focus on the 'air' within a space as a medium of performance. I propose the elements of light, sound and haze are not the objects of perception but become the medium of perception in performance. Finally, I consider how audiences might come to navigate environmental performance. I outline how audiences might come to root themselves and replace their roots in performance as an ongoing negotiation of scenographic materials. Together, landscape, weather and journey represent plural manifestations of audience immersion in scenography.

IMMERSION AS LANDSCAPE

In this conception, I focus my analysis on the specific tactical and imaginative engagement of Cycle Two: *If anyone wonders….* In framing this project I proposed the question (1.B): *In what ways does physical engagement with scenography and space alter scenographic reception?* The specific nature of this performance encouraged a direct physical and intimate engagement between the audience and the scenographic materials. Here, I apply concepts of landscape as a metaphorical and theoretical framework in which to consider processes of incorporation between participant body and scenography. I conceptualise audience engagement and scenography as mutually emergent through what I term a 'scenographic landscape'. This takes account of the individual and collective engagement with scenography as an active and emergent doing.

The Scenographer and Audience as Flâneur(s)

I wait until nightfall. It is late. I gather my camera and a few objects that produce light: torches, a solar-powered lamp, some neon glow sticks and a flashing pantomime wand. I set out on foot and head towards a small construction site not far from my home, beside a busy main road. I had spotted the site a few days earlier and was intrigued and captivated by the dirt piles and other construction materials that lay about. As I arrive on site, I am faced with an array of industrial objects: wooden planks, piles of earth, traffic cones, a JCB digger and some large concrete sewage pipes, which I crawl through. I begin to physically explore the space. I become fascinated with tracks carved out by the digging equipment – the land is quite literally being 'sculpted'. I begin documenting the terrain, using still images to reveal, through long exposure, light trails across the terrain. Up close the topography is delicate; small gaps and fissures carve mini-pathways through the soil. I gain a heightened sense of attention towards my feet as I navigate the crumbling earth beneath me. The pictures act as reminders, revealing my journey.
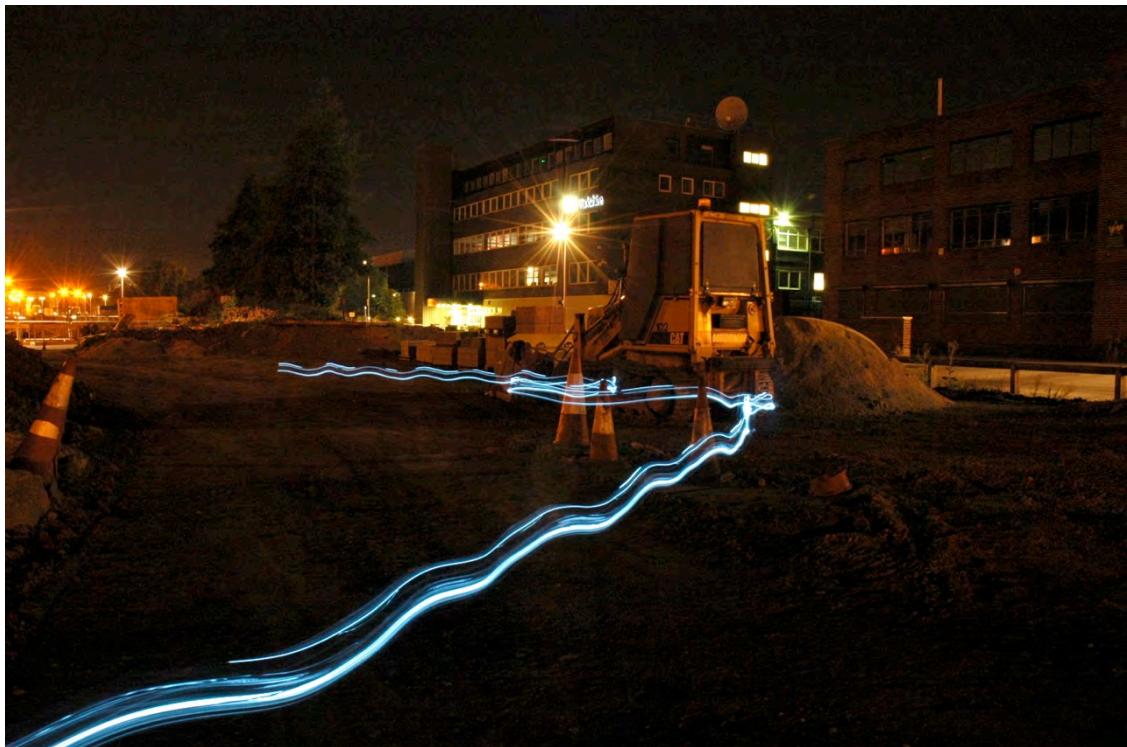
FIGURE 26: Image taken from experiments in light exposure

Throughout the process of creating *If anyone wonders…* I used the city as my source material, recording, capturing and exploring my relationship with the urban surroundings. I followed currents in the crowd, trod carefully over the cracks in the dirt, and allowed the slow blinking lights on the horizon to captivate my attention. I was alert and attentive, working with the city. I allowed myself to dwell and reflect. I made invisible pathways through my movement; my body shifted as I changed focus from the soil beneath my feet to the flickering lights on the horizon.

The reflection above is an example of how I placed my body at the centre of the creative process. As I continued my explorations, these experiences grew. I slowly formed and shaped the imaginary space of performance. I was engaged in an imaginative process of sculpting with my surroundings. As I worked through my body, the spatial design of *If anyone wonders…* began to form. The process was an act

of gathering and composition, as I sketched, recorded, listened and felt my way through the city.

The significance of my scenographic process, undertaken in the creation of the work, later materialised as an embodied process of spectatorship during the performance event. The explorative action of gathering material and sensing my way around the city was apparent in the gathering and composition required of the audience in performance. Some participants took on the process of creatively composing with the scenographic material before them. Audience reflections and video documentation demonstrated a significant amount of play brought about through physical and imaginative engagement. It appears that some participants take on the position of a flâneur.

By considering audience engagement as a type of flâneurship, I seek to articulate audience participation as a physical and imaginative 'strolling' of the performance environment. The flâneur and the city are intimately entwined; they are conjoined concepts that can both be considered physical and imaginative processes. Janet Wolff (1994), in her discussion of the flâneur, reasserts James Donald's radical presentation of the city as an imagined environment:

> 'The city' does not just refer to a set of buildings in a particular place. To put it polemically, there is no such *thing* as a city. Rather, *the city* designates the space produced by the interaction of historically and geographically specific institutions, social relations of production and reproduction, practices of government, forms and media of communications and so forth…*The city*, then, is above all a presentation...I would argue that the city constitutes *an imagined environment.*
>
> <div align="right">(quoted in Wolff: 128 emphasis in orginal)</div>

The act of flânerie, like the city, can be viewed as an imaginative process as much as it is a physical action. Keith Tester informs us that 'the flâneur does not need to travel vast physical spaces to cover vast imaginative spaces' (1994, 9). It is the imagined, behavioural and poetic characteristic of the flâneur that is of interest to my practice as a scenographer. In my conception of the audience as flâneur, I am concerned with how participants physically and imaginatively engage with scenography within a theatrical context – in my case, a black-box studio.

The flâneur, as originally envisaged by Charles Baudelaire, is a character willing to immerse himself, not just in, but *with* an environment. Baudelaire suggests of the flâneur that 'the crowd is his domain, just as the air is the bird's, and water that of the fish. His passion and his profession is to merge with the crowd' (quoted in Tester 1994: 2). This urban character is at ease among the people of the city, intimately within, but readily alert. Pierre Larousse later observed of the individual engaged in flânerie:

> his eyes are open, his ears ready, searching for something entirely different from what the crowd gathers to see. A word dropped by chance will reveal to him one of those character traits that cannot be invented and must be drawn directly from life; those physiognomies so naively attentive will furnish the painter with the expression he was dreaming of; a noise, insignificant to every other ear, will strike that of the musician and give him the cue for harmonic combination, even for the thinker, the philosopher lost in his reverie, this external agitation is profitable: it stirs up his ideas as the storm stirs the waves of the sea.
>
> (quoted in Benjamin 1999: 453)

What the flâneur extracts from the environment are moments of imaginative arousal, a process that could be applied to my own scenographic engagement with the city: part imaginative, part reflective and part spatial construction. The audience in the immersive environment of *If anyone wonders…* could be seen to be positioned into a

scenographic act of imaginative construction, exploring the world of the performance and seeking out profitable agitation. This process can be seen in the comment of a participant who reflected that

it felt like…

> *Walking through a cityscape at night hearing snatches of peoples conversations while trying not to tred* [sic] *on very beautiful, luminous insects who clearly have stones of their own and who look much like tiny stars glowing on the ground.*

B48

As participants walked through the space, they formed and constructed their own dramaturgical impressions. Although the physical space was limited, further notions of walking materialised in other audience comments such as 'it felt like… *Searching for safety where there is none but finding others to walk with'* (B50). Such reflections not only demonstrate a process of gathering and seeking out profitable scenographic agitation, but also allude to the metaphorical and physical motor activity of walking. Ingold examines the nature of walking, reading and writing, arguing that these processes are intimately woven together. He suggests they are as much imaginative practices as they are physical actions:

> letters and words inscribed on the page of a manuscript have just as much of a material presence as do footprints and tracks impressed on the ground, and both prompt the question of the relation between the observation of marks and traces inscribed or impressed in surfaces in the world and the imagining that is carried on, as it were, on the hither side of eyesight, 'in the mind'. Reading and writing surely involve the exercise of both eye and mind, and the same must be true of walking.

> (Ingold 2010: 16)

Ingold is unpacking the intimate weaving between body and mind through a process of inscription and walking, drawing connections to the activity of the flâneur. The participant reflection above is suggestive of someone walking through a city, hearing

'snatches of conversation', and then responding to the environment in a poetic manner. When walking and moving through space, we are active in body and mind. As we walk, the imagination carries us forward.

Human figures in the space can also be seen as part of an overall scenography. One participant reflected that it was '*really striking to be able to watch other people move through the figures, some of the beams casting more interesting shadows suggesting loneliness in a city*' (B47). Objects are not the only potentially profitable material: the audience body – in this case in relation to the projected light – becomes part of the environmental image. As participants entered the performance space, they too formed part of the scenographic and perceptual world. The conceptualisation of the audience as flâneur in *If anyone wonders…* positions the audience as an active body, seeking and building narratives from the poetic material before them. The audience-flâneur enters into a physical yet fictional world where they take on the action of seeking out profitable agitation.

Raymond Lucas in his chapter 'Taking a Line for a Walk' (2008) adds to the profile of the flâneur by suggesting that he 'inscribes upon the city, writing rather than reading it. This is an important distinction: his spectatorship is an active one, which imposes his will upon the city streets creating a narrative as he goes along' (Lucas 2008: 171). This characteristic helps me to connect the creative potential of the flâneur directly with traditional modes of theatrical spectatorship. Some participants observed how they began to see or hear stories unfolding within the environment: '*I was listening to the stories of the little people around me. I chose which ones were having the stories by which ones caught the light as they caught my eye*' (B42) and '*It felt involving needing to make a choice for my little woman. Wanted her to be in a small*

group of 3' (B46). These types of response express an imaginative process of inscription: there is an active working *with* and connecting *of* the scenographic elements. Parallels can be drawn here with Rancière's notions of the emancipated spectator of whom he notes:

> [t]he spectator also acts, like the pupil or scholar. She observes, selects, compares, interprets. She links what she sees to a host of other things that she has seen on stages, in other kinds of places. She composes her own poem with the elements of the poem before her.

> (Rancière 2009: 13)

Spectatorship, according to Rancière, is an active process of composition with the presented performance elements. However, unlike the viewing spectator sitting in an auditorium, in the environmental space of *If anyone wonders…* the participant is a mobile body engaged in complex sensorimotor action. The audience-flâneur – like his urban original – moves through space, discovering rather than merely being presented with material; he inscribes rather than reads the performance. The audience-flâneur is engaged in an active cyclical process of gathering and composing, brought about through active bodily engagement.

Processes of inscription rely upon the imaginative strategies of the audience. However, the act of flânerie can only take us so far. While I believe the concept of the audience as flâneur can be usefully applied to performances in which the audience are free to stroll – as with Punchdrunk's works, in which the audience piece together fragments of performance material – the audience experience of *If anyone wonders…* can be seen to offer a deep holistic connection with the performance event as participants became part of the landscape rather than ghosts within it. The relationship between participant and design extends beyond the reading and inscription of the

performance, and materialises as a form of incorporation. Incorporation, I propose, is the synthesis of imaginative inscription and an active physical doing or working with scenography; this can be brought about by considering the design of performance as a form of landscape.

What is Landscape?

A brief spatial outline of landscape is important due to dominant associations with visual culture and in particular with painting. Landscape, like scenography, has struggled with its own particular ocular-centric tradition. However, landscape can be conceptualised as a unifying term, encompassing the physical environment and the body. Scenographic approaches to landscape have mostly been concerned with actual landscapes, often formed through a site-specific lens. Liina Unt (2008), discussing scenography in the natural landscapes, asserts that 'landscape includes different interfaces that involve time, space, mental and material modes as well as several agents' (Unt 2008: 320). This offers a frame within which to recognise that the experience of landscape is comprised of several layers. Scenography, like landscape, can be seen as a manifold experience of mental and material processes. In order to bring about a closer formation between audience, environment and scenography, I conceptualise audience engagement, in my own practice, through what I term a 'scenographic landscape'.

In perceptual terms, and according to landscape architect Simon Bell, landscape is the immediate and localised 'field of our present actions' where the landscape can be seen as 'the part of environment that we can engage with at a given time' (Bell 1999: 66). The field of the model figures, torches and the participant body

can be seen as that part of the environmental design that can be physically engaged with at any given moment.

An etymological examination of landscape reveals an embodied, rather than the common pictorial, definition. Ingold (2011) synthesises observations made by Alpers (1983), Jay (1988), Carruthers (1998) and Olwig (2008) in order to challenge the common linking of landscape to painting. He argues that this linking arises from a misunderstanding of the suffix 'scape' for a 'scopic regime' and explains this misunderstanding by reference to the superficial resemblance between *scape* and *scope*. In fact, 'scope' derives from the Greek *skopos* – 'literally the target of the bowman, the mark towards which he gazes as he aims' (Carruthers 1998: 79 quoted in Ingold 2011: 126) – whereas 'scape' comes from the Old English *sceppan* or *skyppan*, meaning 'to shape' (Ingold 2011: 126). It is, I suggest, this notion of a shaping of the land that connects with the scenographic objects of performance. In *If anyone wonders…* the audience were able to physically move the torches and model figures. As the participants individually manipulated the model figures, the scenographic landscape was being shaped over time by contributions from the other participants throughout the day. Like Ingold, I would like to return to landscape, not as a pictorial representation but through an embodied understanding: 'there is no division between inner and outer world – respectively of mind and matter, meaning and substance […] through living in it, the landscape becomes part of us, just as we are part of it' (Ingold 2000: 191).

Recognising landscape as an embodied practice rather than a visual phenomenon places the body centrally within it. For Ingold, landscape is multisensory and immersive:

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> [t]he power of the prototypical concept of landscape lies precisely in the fact that it is not tied to any specific sensory register – whether of vision, hearing, touch, taste or smell. In ordinary perceptual practice these registers cooperate so closely, and with such overlap of function, that their respective contributions are impossible to tease apart.
>
> (Ingold 2011: 136)

The experience of landscape is a multisensory immersion that engages the whole body. Furthermore, a bodily engagement with landscape can be seen as an active process of doing. Kenneth Olwig refers to a dictionary definition of landscape as 'a particular area of activity […] where what counts is not what you see or how you are seen to *perform*, but what you *do'* (Olwig 2008: emphasis in original). Participant engagement in *If anyone wonders…* suggested an active and intentional doing of scenography through the manipulation of objects, opening up an active and multisensory commingling with the performance world. The objects of scenography were shaped by the audience, as much as they shaped the participant. The audience became an active and malleable part of the scenographic composition.

Towards a Scenographic Landscape

As the audience entered the studio space of *If anyone wonders…*, they were encouraged to move through the terrain and find a place in which to leave their own chosen model figure. Video documentation of the installation captured the audience moving slowly around the space, revealing how some participants chose to shift their own physical position. Individuals continually shifted their perspective by standing, sitting, lying or kneeling in the central space. Some participants observed from the sides; others decided to play with their height and lowered themselves to the micro perspective of the miniature people. The following comments are taken from three different participants and demonstrate this active shifting of bodily position:

> *I had a strong desire to be small like them, so I lied down amongst them.*

B56

> *I lean down, get my head on the floor, and see the figures loom larger, the light glows through them, ghosts in the city.*

B68

> *Twilight zones of play, imagining, futures + pasts while the present is stretched and expanded. Perspective can always shift and be illuminated.*

B65

Here there is a playful response to shifting scale by changing physical position. The 'field' (as one participant described it) of tiny figures sought to encourage locomotion horizontally, through and around, and the use of scale sought to engage with the vertical axis by movement up and down. The diffusion of the sound aimed to encourage participants to wander through the space. Projectors were positioned so as to capture the audience bodies as they moved through the space. The twinkling projection light gave the impression of time passing. Some participants created their own formations with the model figures, where the manipulation of torchlight and sweeping shadows appeared to captivate their attention. The installation offered multiple modes of physical play and bodily engagement.

These physical actions appear to bring about a greater sense of personal involvement with the performance, intimately weaving the audience into the fabric of the scenography. In perceptual terms, Bell acknowledges that a greater involvement in landscape affords a higher degree of intelligent perception:

> [t]here is evidence that different people will look at the same scene but perceive different shapes and patterns depending on their knowledge, experience, culture and so on; this further reinforces the theory that active, selective and intelligent perception is normal, as opposed to passive sampling.

The greater the involvement by the observer in the landscape the greater the degree of intelligent perception and active visual thinking that occurs.

(Bell 1999: 53)

Active perception is a subjective process that can bring about a higher degree of immersive connectedness with the performance world. Subtle shifts in body motility and locomotion can help to forge a deeper, more intelligent perception. As the participants shifted their perspectives, the model figures took on a larger significance; active physicality expands imaginative composition. As more participants placed their model figures into the landscape, the space began to alter: a physical shaping of the performance unfolded. When the installation was finished I was able to observe how these figures had been moved into different formations (FIGURE 27). One was placed on top of an upright torch, like a statue on a plinth surveying the land.
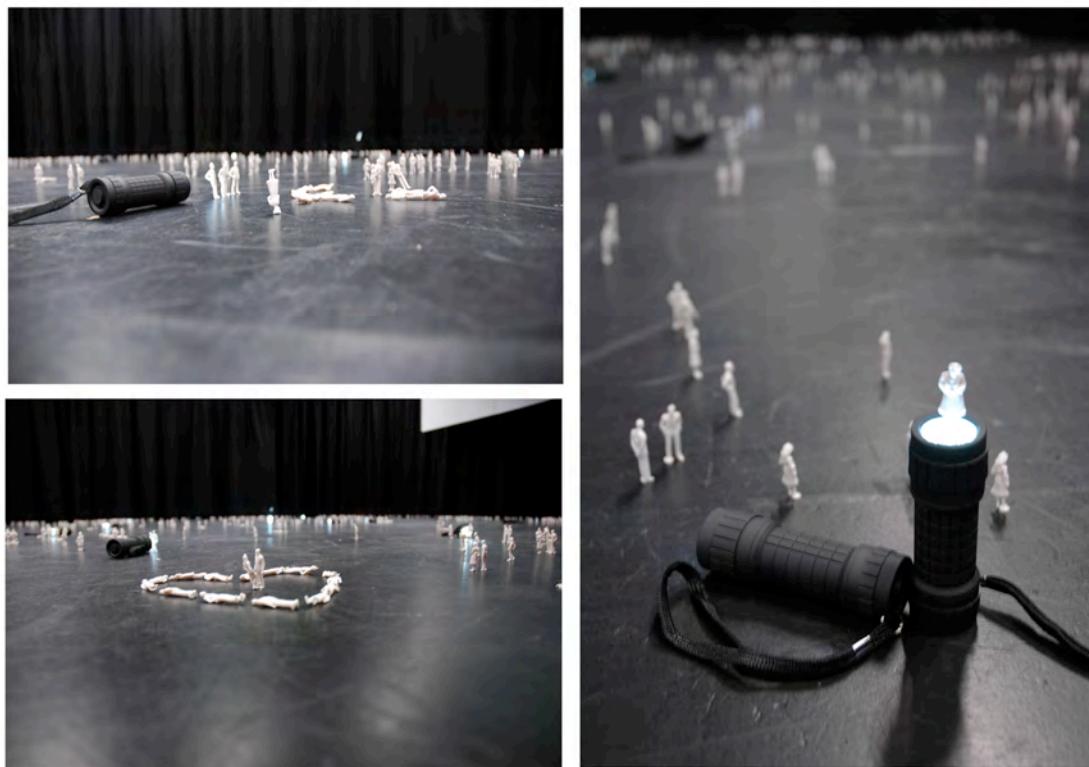
FIGURE 27: Model figures positioned into different formations after the event had finished

Another figure was placed away from the main field, alone upon the handle of the door. Some figures were placed in small triangular setups, creating intimate relationships between the gendered figures. There was even a ritualistic-looking circular gathering. Some participants commented on the impact of these established formations made by participants who had experienced the installation earlier in the day:

> *I had an internal debate about whether, after placing my figure down, I was allowed to remove others – clearly some had been already placed before the audience come in, yet I felt slightly conflicted about "moving" other people's figures.*

B56

A *doing* of scenography challenges the audience to reflect upon their relations with others. Although the individual perception of a scenographic landscape is subjective, action is social, collective and formed through time. This returns us to Olwig's observation of landscape:

> […] a place of a culture, as defined by common customs and language, rather than the space of a state, defined by maps, rules and statutes […] This is the land 'scaped', 'shaped' or created as place and polity by people through their practice of dwelling – their 'doing' of landscape.
>
> (Olwig 2008: 81 - 82)

The scenographic landscape of *If anyone wonders…* was formed through the participants' doing of scenography, an individual and collective process. These engagements begin to demonstrate an intimate relationship between audience and performance in which participants become more deeply entwined with the construction of the performance event. The following two participants demonstrate a further poetic and holistic commingling with the performance:

it felt like…

> *Morphing in and out of body, self and crowd; between individual bodies and social bodies, hovering at the cusp of practicing a placing of my body myself.*

B36

> *It's like a painting where you are the paint and the canvas making a mark with shadows and air!*

B18

These participant reflections express a holistic immersion in the performance, a conceptual oneness with scenographic material. The term 'morphing' is demonstrative of an embodied process, as the participant's body is intimately entwined with the scenography. The commingling of the body and landscape is in flux, part of a continual shifting between the personal and the social. This is not merely inscription, but arguably a process of incorporation. Mike Pearson – who within his own performance practice and writing articulates a clear argument towards natural landscape as a form of embodiment – summarises Ingold's articulation of movement, tracks and paths as embodied, suggesting that

> […] this embodiment is not inscription but rather incorporation. Landscape has no pre-existing form that is then inscribed with human activity: both being and environment are mutually emergent; continuously brought into being together; tracks and paths may equally prescribe movement.

> (Pearson 2006: 12)

The same emergent process can be seen within *If anyone wonders….* The scenographic landscape of this piece was not merely a product for consumption; it was neither predetermined nor fixed. As the participants shaped the scenography, a collective experience emerged. It is a distinct experience of isolation and individual agency, coupled with a wider sense of shared collective ground where action informs action. *If anyone wonders…* can be seen as improvisatory, within a clearly defined

frame. One participant's manipulation of the model figures was another participant's invitation to join the ludic exchange. Scenographic incorporation is a practice of placing and re-placing the body in the landscape.

Summary: Immersion as Landscape

The audience-flâneur is open to the world of performance, exploring and seeking out 'profitable agitation'. The explorative walking of the environment for the audience is part imaginative and part physical, where the gathering and compositional strategies employed in my own scenographic processes during the creation of the event partly materialised as a mode of audience engagement within the experience of the event. The audience-flâneur merges with the scenography; they are reflective and contemplative, imaginatively composing and inscribing with the scenographic material.

I conceptualise audience experience of scenography through landscape as an embodied process of incorporation. A scenographic landscape is a manifold experience of cognitive, corporeal, material and spatial agents that manifests itself through an active 'doing' of the scenographic world. This doing takes place in a localised 'field of action' (Bell 1999: 66), which narrows the environmental frame to focus on the audience's ability to move physically through and within the performance space. A field of action contains scenographic objects, sound and light materials that invite bodily motility. Bodily action can bring about an imaginative arousal and intelligent perception, which can further entwine the participant with the scenographic world.

Immersion as Landscape extends our understanding of audiences not as distant observers, but bound up with the design materials through a cycling of action and reflection. The mindful individual engages in a multisensory commingling with scenography. This process can be seen as a 'morphing' of scenographic reception, action and creation, '*where you are the paint and the canvas'* (B18). The individual shapes the scenography with others in a collective and emergent doing. The experience of these actions reinforces the notion that there is no division between 'inner and outer world – respectively of mind and matter, meaning and substance […] through living in it, the landscape becomes part of us, just as we are part of it' (Ingold 2000: 191). The audience and scenography are mutually emergent: through the audience, engaged in a process of doing, a scenographic landscape emerges.

IMMERSION AS WEATHER

In the previous section, Immersion as Landscape, I considered audience engagement as a physical and imaginative doing of scenography, with specific reference to Cycle Two. In the following section, I move away from the shaping of the surface of design, in order to consider immersion through the production of affect. In this section, I analyse responses to all three cycles of practice. Here, I explore the perceptual conditions and metaphorical conceptions of weather, in order to consider how design can be experienced as an atmospheric phenomenon which is acted upon and within the body (Welton 2012: 131). I conceptualise the experience of design through the fluxes and flows of the 'air' – the atmospheric conditions of what fills space. In my environmental spaces, the medium or 'air' of the space becomes the multisensory condition for experiencing design elements such as haze, light and sound. I conclude by proposing how a participant might come to experience scenography as a 'bidirectional incorporation' (Leder 1990: 166) of internal and external relation. I then consider how a cycling of the body and atmospheric conditions might lead to a compassionate absorption of scenography.

Weather Impressions

it felt like…

> *dancing in the wind…*
> *flying between the clouds…*
> *being a star, one of the smallest ones…*
> *floating in the air…*
> *the smell of the grass.*

C24

My concept of Immersion as Weather has been partly inspired through my own aesthetic interest in shaping mood and creating atmosphere in performance. In my

post-practice analysis, I found participants highly attentive and expressive of the atmospheres that I had created. Reflections, such as the one found above, offer an imaginative conception of the participant projecting their body, *in*, *amongst* and *being* – as part of the scenography. These types of expressive comments can be found throughout the reflections to Cycles Two and Three, with participants sharing impressions such as feeling the wind, an awareness of their own breath, bodily connections with the sky and feeling a connection with the air, as expressed by participant C24. In Cycle Two, *If anyone wonders…,* participants expressed feelings of being 'in' a substance, akin to a sensation of getting wet or taking a shower. In Cycle One, participants noted the affective experience of the darkness as an active part of the scenographic reception. These responses led me to consider how weather can be used as a conceptual and phenomenological framework in which to consider audience immersion in aesthetic experience.

Peter Zumthor (2006) outlines nine elements in the creation of atmosphere in his own architectural practice. I have structured my analysis, below, using Zumthor's model; this approach offers a succinct way to present my findings and acknowledges the intuitive nature, or as Zumthor states 'emotional sensibility' (2006: 13), of the way I have been using scenography to create compositions that move audiences. First, I shall outline what I mean by weather and then consider how this can be applied to scenographic thinking.

What is the Weather?

According to Ingold (2005), the perception of the weather has received little attention as an academic subject (2005: 97). Similarly, Welton observes in performance analysis, 'what *fills* space has received less attention' (Welton 2012: 130 emphasis in orginal). The atmosphere and biosphere are part of a larger metasystem of energy exchange: the weather is felt as a local, direct and immediate phenomenon (Weinstock 2010: 43). The weather is changeable, minute-by-minute, but it is also durational through the changes in the seasons. The air that surrounds us in day-to-day life affects the body in profound physiological and perceptual ways – often without our noticing – by carrying and diffusing light, sound and odour. For example, the feeling of temperature and humidity of a space, decreased vision in thick fog, a strong wind that catches our breath, or the smell of a damp field all create physiological responses. The weather can totally transform our perception of a space or environment; a sudden downpour, a gust of wind or a piercing light through the clouds all contribute to the shifting feeling and creation of mood and atmosphere in which the subject is surrounded.

The medium, as I have noted through Gibson, is what facilitates how an animal moves through an environment (1979: 16–32), and this provides significant sensory information to the subject about their environment. Gibson writes

> […] animal locomotion is not usually aimless but is guided or controlled – by light if the animal can see, by sound if the animal can hear, and by odor if the animal can smell. The medium thus contains information about things that reflect light, vibrate, or are volatile. By detecting this information, the animal guides and controls locomotion.
>
> (Gibson 1979: 17)

In day-to-day life, the perception of light, sound and odour are not objects of perception; we perceive in and through them and this guides and controls action. Ingold develops this perceptual approach by considering human existence as part of a 'weather-world' (Ingold, 2011: 115–139). He furthers Gibson's approach by articulating an entwined connection between the air and body. He suggests that in open space the body and medium mingle:

> [t]o feel the air and walk on the ground is not to make external, tactile contact with our surroundings but to mingle with them. In this mingling, as we live and breathe, the wind, light and moisture of the sky bind with the substances of the earth in the continual forging of a way through the tangle of lifelines that comprise the land.

(Ingold 2011: 115)

Ingold's observations offer a profound way to consider audience experience in environment performance. Ingold presents a subject bound up in the material elements of the air, light, wind, moisture, and breath. He presents a multisensory immersion in a weather-world that is both the 'essence of perception and the essence of what is perceived' (Ingold 2011: 117). The experience of weather 'is just as much auditory, haptic and olfactory as it is visual; indeed in most practical circumstances these sensory modalities cooperate so closely that it is impossible to disentangle their respective contributions (Ingold 2005: 97). Depending on the phenomena in question – the temperature of room, the wind brushing against the skin, or the sound of rain at night – we can attune to these various conditions, which activates self-awareness, drawing attention to our immersion in the world. Welton suggests how changes in the weather are neither a wholly subjective nor objective position:

> [i]n noticing a change in the weather, we notice also a corresponding change in ourselves: it has grown colder, because I have grown colder. Sensing (rather than instrumentally measuring) it to be thus is neither to make a wholly objective judgement, nor an entirely subjective claim; rather, it falls somewhere in between the two as a feeling of a change (a movement) in the atmosphere.
>
> (Welton 2012: 150)

In simple terms, I define weather through movement, a change in the air that is felt by a participant. Welton cites Gernot Böhme who suggests that atmospheres constitute the 'in-between' of environmental qualities and human sensibilities (quoted in Welton 2012: 150). If we are to consider the subjective experience of immersion in performance, then the weather, or fluxes in the medium (air), provides an essential link between the objective and subjective experience of design; in this way, perception and feeling, and environment and individual are intrinsically connected.

Scenographic Weather

The atmospherically controlled environment of the black-box studio is far removed from the natural ecology of larger weather systems and climate. It is best, therefore, to consider weather as a microclimate of performance. For this, I propose the concept of 'scenographic weather' as a part affective, part metaphorical and imaginative experience of performance design. Although Ingold suggests that 'in the theatre, the boards are real, but the weather can only be imagined' (Ingold 2005: 103), he misses the point that performance can be felt; the 'in-between' that Böhme suggests is easily dismissed as simply 'there' (Welton 2012: 130). Moreover, the environmental context of my own practice places the participant into intimate relations with haze, light and sound, where the participant and scenography can be seen to 'mingle' (Ingold 2015: 150). When audiences 'mingle' with scenography, the design elements are

experienced as part of the medium of perception, rather than as objects of perception. With the absence of performers in my practice, I engaged with the potential of scenography to move participants, and for participants to engage in movement; through movement comes understanding and thinking. Maxine Sheets-Johnstone argues that we learn to grasp objects as we engage with a 'resonant tactile-kinesthetic body dynamically attuned to the world' (2011: 226). Our experience and understanding of the world is not formed through distant observation but, as Ingold informs us, by being intimately bound up with it:

> To inhabit the open is not, then, to be stranded on a closed surface but to be immersed in the incessant movement of wind and weather, in a zone wherein substances and medium are brought together in the constitution of beings that, by way of their activity, participate in stitching the textures of the land.
>
> (Ingold 2011: 121)

We have already seen how a participant might become incorporated into performance through a scenographic landscape. Scenographic weather considers the aesthetic reception of the medium of air in performance as an affective experience. It seeks to grasp the less tangible sensations of participants feeling bound up in the fluxes and flows of the medium of performance. My concept of scenographic weather seeks to account for the ecology of participant and environment through movement, not just at the surface as I have outlined through landscape, but as a cycling of scenographic materials, body and air. I shall now outline six instances of scenographic weather, with the aim of theorising and better understanding the experience articulated by participant C24 at the start of this chapter.

1. In the Mi(d)st of Scenography

Haze and haze-like effects are routinely used in performance and art installations, often deployed to fill space with an 'atmosphere' (McKinney and Butterworth 2009: 66). In all three cycles of my practice, I deployed haze as part of the design composition. In the audience reflections, there were only minor references to the haze such as '*bubbles of light*' (B58) and '*projector lights like rainbows*' (B29). This could be because the space and haze are entered into and are then folded into the medium of perception, rather than being the object of perception. I do, however, believe that the haze can be seen as part of an overall construction of mood, rhythm and pace that might aid in the conditioning of audience experience. Haze does not only provide a substance to the air, it helps draw attention to light by creating a three-dimensionality as light passes through the mist particles. The experience is therefore a multisensory engagement of vision and touch.

The haze deployed in *and it all...* was used in different sections of the production, as one might with any other scenographic element, to create perceptual shifts in clarity and to obscure visual perception of the space in the moments of discovery. Haze makes the air and light active as conjoined elements. In experiencing haze, we come to move it, taste it and smell it, which makes us mindful of our bodies in the space. More than just giving light a materiality, haze draws attention toward the medium of air, that medium in which we inhabit and experience the performance.

In the final sequence of *and it all...*, fans pumped haze upward, causing the air and paper birds above to slowly move. As the light passed through the birds it created beams of light, a 'material solidity' (Baugh 2005: 120) that pierced through the gaps and onto the audience and floor below. Crucially, this moment took place in the

dramatic climax of the piece. The light through the haze and the movement of the birds, as a representation of release, can be considered in Svoboda's term as a 'psycho-plastic' space (Svoboda cited in Burian 1971: 31). Svoboda's concept emphasises the intangible forces of time, space and movement, to create a scenographic 'dynamism' (1971: 31). The scenic dynamism seeks to transform space in response to the 'psychic pulse of the dramatic action' (1971: 31). Svoboda's concept is principally developed through the experience of end-on theatre in which movement is predominantly registered optically. I would like to adapt this concept in order to bring this in relation to audience bodily engagement and to consider how the audience might come to be bound up with 'psychic pulse' of the dramatic action.

The bird sequence was intended to produce a cathartic release for the audience that I hoped would encourage a feeling of 'letting go'. The intention was that the movement of the light in the haze would inspire the audience to physically move, to look up and explore the space with their bodies, to connect with the light and sky of the performance. Environmental philosopher David Macauley reminds us that in life, '[w]ith our heads immersed in the thickness of the atmosphere or our lungs and limbs engaged with the swirling winds, we repeatedly breathe, think and dream in the regions of the air' (Macauley 2005: 307), not 'on the fixed surfaces of the landscape but in the swirling midst of the weather-world' (Ingold, 2011: 135). Merleau-Ponty in his phenomenological account of perceiving the sky asserts how our bodies are not cages for the mind and articulates an understanding where the body and environment are entwined:

> As I contemplate the blue of the sky I am not *set over against* it as an a cosmic subject; I do not possess it in thought, or spread out towards it some idea of blue such as might reveal the secret of it, I abandon myself to it and plunge into this mystery, it 'thinks itself within me', I am the sky itself as it is drawn together

and unified, and as it begins to exist for itself; my consciousness is saturated with this limitless blue.

<div align="right">(Merleau-Ponty, 2002: 249)</div>

The direct engagement of the participant in the scenographic materials (haze and light) develops Svoboda's psycho-plastic space, through a 'resonant tactile-kinesthetic body' (Sheets-Johnstone 2011: 226). When the audience is bound up through a dynamic movement of scenography, through the dramatic text (in this case the feeling of letting go), I call this 'psycho-dynamic weather'. This term more accurately accounts for an emphasis on light and haze materialised through the air as a perceptual phenomenon in its own right and as a multisensory immersion *with* the performance text.

2. Feeling the Wind

As we have learnt from Ingold, our immersion in the weather is invariably multisensory (Ingold 2005: 97). My concept of 'Feeling the Wind' uncovers how a multisensory experience of scenography can aid in the construction of touch-like sensation, where partial sensory stimulation might bring about a desire for other sensory involvement. In the analysis, I was intrigued to discover how many participants described touch-like impressions. The following responses are taken from Cycle Two, *If anyone wonders…*, and Cycle Three, *and it all…*

> *For me it was amazing perceptual experience from the entrance in the room on. I felt a kind of peace or meditation state – in similar state when I read Rumi – perfect verse for beginning! On some moments I felt like I could be in nature – forest, grass or something similar, with light breeze and nobody around. Kind of connected with myself state.*

(B54)

<div align="center">144</div>

it felt like…

> *a cool breeze, a soft hand upon my back. I close my eyes; a soft rushing of whispers as the edges of worlds collide in twilight.*

(C61)

The wind was an artistic theme in all three cycles of practice. In *If anyone wonders…* the wind was referred to textually in the script and projection, with phrases such as 'a little wind cleans the eyes', taken from the poem *Like This* by Persian poet Rumi. Also in this installation, each video was designed to capture movement, often subtle but always continuous. In the two panoramic screens, I recorded various images inspired by the movement of light. Always taken from a static camera position, I filmed the light through the branches of a tree, the flicker of a neon sign on the horizon, a wind turbine peacefully rotating in the distance and blurred car headlamps. All these clips sought to capture the light as it travelled through the air. The aim was to create a sense of movement in an otherwise predominately static environment. Despite the wind only being a representation in Cycle Two, participants still referred to their experience as having the feeling of wind.

In both of the responses above, the sense of the breeze is folded with other multisensory expressions ('*a soft hand upon my back*' (C61)) and feelings of being in nature. Machon, as noted earlier, outlines the fusing of sensory experience as a form of '(syn)aesthetic' response (2009: 17). A '(syn)aesthetic' response can be found in the imagery expressed by participants above, and the reflection in the opening to this chapter, such as the suggestion of floating and dancing in the wind and air, and harbouring a desire for smell. Participant C61 expresses a touch-like impression. In feeling (sensation) the participant is bound up in a multisensory swirling of a

scenographic weather: a cycling of sight, sound, object and spatial movement invading the participant's visual, aural and tactile awareness.

Yvon Bonenfant (2011) discusses the possibility of haptic touch in his multimedia sound performance *Beacons* (2010), which includes expressive video projection designed by me. Bonenfant argues that although light does not vibrate our tissues in the same mechanical way that sound does, in the movement and gestures of haptic response, 'vision and sound might encounter one another and dance with the same groupings of tissues, because we are seeking to find both; they ask us to reach out to them' (2011: 56). In feeling an impression of a soft hand upon their back, the participant is activating a haptic response, a combination of vision and sound. Video theorist Laura Marks suggests that 'haptic images invite the viewer to dissolve his or her subjectivity in the close and bodily contact with the image' where 'the viewer is called onto fill the gaps in the image and engage with the traces the image leaves' (Marks 2002: 13). The blurred imagery, the mist-filled space and the soft voice of the narrator help dissolve the participant's subjectivity, bringing them closer to the scenography. The body is mobilised into a 'reaching' (Bonenfant 2011: 52) towards scenography.

McKinney explores similar '(syn)aesthetic' experiences to scenography through a phenomenological lens. She draws upon Merleau-Ponty to articulate how a sensory and phenomenological encounter with scenography can merge with the audience's own memories and daydreams (2008: 61). A '(syn)aesthetic' framework fuses imagination, memory and sensory experience to 'induce changes in somatic process' and disrupt 'the boundary between the real and imaginary' (Luria, cited in

Machon 2009: 17). The following response to *If anyone wonders…* demonstrates an explicit somatic/semantic response:

it felt like…

> *A dreamy state.*
>
> *The untethered moment between dream & dreaming*
> *When detached from sorrow.*
> *You are a mountain dancing*
> *Crying stones*

B49

Here the participant inhabits 'two worlds at once, like being half awake yet still anchored in a dream' (Cytowic, cited in Machon 2009: 17–18). The fluid temporal cycling of scenographic materials, perhaps initiated through the repetitive structure of the installation, operates in the fusing of imagination, memory and physical sensation.

It is clear that participants are able to make aesthetic links between design materials:

it felt like…

> *a dream*
>
> *loved the misty clouded quality of the video used, that echoed the ethereal evocative quality of the poetry used. Felt very different to place yourself in a real sense of time. Very hypnotic combination of visual + audio + an immersive experience.*

B2

Here the participant is making connections across the senses 'dialogically' (Lehmann 2006: 85). Lehmann remarks in his discussion of synaesthesia in postdramatic theatre that when deprived of connections the individual becomes 'active' in seeking out similarities, correlations and correspondences (Lehmann 2006: 84). In the expression *'the smell of cut grass'* (C24) presented earlier, we can consider how this is might be a synaesthetic response, not just fusing sensory stimulation, but activated via its absence, a desire for sensory stimulation that brings forth a latent synaesthetic

potential in the participant (Machon 2009: 16). Another participant also demonstrated their desire for smell '*I didn't feel swamped but I felt calm + tranquil. I wanted smell + other senses*' (C45). In making corporeal and cognitive connections between scenographic materials it might inspire a desire, a 'reaching', for further simulation.

3. Feeling Darkness

Stanton Garner suggests the 'darkness […] is a pervasive extradramatic presence in the modern theater; establishing the playing space through its boundaries' (Garner 1994: 40). In 'Feeling Darkness', I seek to explain how darkness can be incorporated into a scenographic reception. For participant A26, the sensation of darkness in *VOID/ROOM* took on a material quality, becoming an active perceptual agent:

> *The darkness felt like a cloak, it really did, it really pressed I felt, it really pressed on me.*

A26

The participant demonstrates a feeling of being touched by this extradramatic presence. Participant A26 also responded by saying, '*I loved the way my eyes just didn't adjust at all, through the lighting and everything.*' Other participants also commented on their experience of the dark; for one participant the darkness was felt as unsettling as it took on sort of physical form:

> *It felt as though there could have been some sort of presence there in a way. There were quite a lot of shadows and with the way the lights changed, at one point I jumped I think, it might be because my leg moved and a shadow went across the briefcase.*

A28

The eye is continuously adjusting to light levels and there is often a short delay in processing physiological response. Continual shifts in light can cause retinal disturbances; this can be an unnerving process as participants discredit their own

physiological agitation for meaningful simulation. The experience of the darkness is not a wholly visual one; it too, like the wind, invites what Welton calls a bodily 'peering'

> that does not simply wait for light to hit the retina in receipt of visual information, but more actively seeks it out. In the sense of trepidation with respect to what might emerge out of the gloom, one is kinaesthetically aware, ready for whatever action it might necessitate, and also listening carefully, seeking to conjoin any auditory clues to fleeting or partial visual forms.
>
> (Welton 2013: 15)

The darkness is not merely an absence or nothingness: it operates at the threshold of sight; as darkness is bound up with the other sense modalities, I classify it as part of the construction of atmosphere. In trepidation, the body reaches towards the darkness. For some participants it harboured a thickness, a tactile density. The sudden shift into darkness in *VOID/ROOM* was experienced both as an actual and metaphorical condition that folds affect into vision, where 'darkness and seeing are experienced as felt' (Welton 2012: 70). Participant A26 suggested that the darkness had a particular material quality, like a garment that 'pressed' against their body. Welton discusses how theatre darkness can foreground feelings of touch:

> […] the air has a solidity lost to the transparency of light, and in its immediacy before the eye presents itself almost irresistibly to touch. The instinctively outstretched hands with which one feels one's way in a darkened room are not only there to search out and protect the body from unseen objects, but also to plunge into, and feel though, the darkness itself. In the absence of the touch of any *thing*, what is felt in or as darkness is the activity of feeling itself.
>
> (Welton 2012: 63)

The experience of darkness brings the whole body into play. The overt attention towards feeling itself can, problematically, bring about feelings of anxiety and fear,

which were compounded in the one-on-none experience of *VOID/ROOM*. Rudolf Arnheim reminds us that

> to interpret the functioning of the senses properly, one needs to keep in mind that they did not come about as instruments of cognition for cognition's sake, but evolved as biological aids for survival.

(Arnheim 1969: 20)

The unease felt in *VOID/ROOM* was exacerbated by the isolation and exposure of a solitary audience member in a perceptually open 360-degree space. '*I was on my guard,*' suggested participant A26, which is demonstrative of a bodily alertness, aroused to protect them against danger. A26 and others found the experience of *VOID/ROOM* to be disturbing and at times terrifying. Whilst it was my intention to produce an uncanny sensation with picture frames suspended on invisible walls, and by drawing attention towards the vast emptiness of the space, I did not predict or consider that the darkness would agitate some participants into an alert state of primeval fear. By illuminating the objects in section two, the performance plunged the audience members into a surrounding darkness. Darkness when experienced as an overwhelming sensation of fear disrupts any deeper meaningful significance to the performance event. In this way, darkness borders closely on an overriding production of affect, which erases mindful tendencies.

4. Lived Light

Light in theatre is often experienced through visual distance; however, movement and intimate proximity to light can bring about a lived sensation. In *VOID/ROOM*, sudden shifts in light and sound appeared to add 'life' and a sense of energy to the environment. One participant recognised the impact that the spatial proximity of light and sound had on their experience:

Participant 13	*[...] then I heard some footsteps and I become aware of someone else in the room, and it made me quite nervous and then everything changed. Not really terrifyingly frightening like a thriller or anything like that, but it was a surprise response, that sudden change, that sudden life in the room, and it was life. As we started to get the spoken word as well as the image and the lighting change, it was a presence, it was a presence, it was quite assaulting to the senses.*
Interviewer	Assaulting to the senses? In what way?
Participant 13	*It was from all, the screen was really human. This is going to sound strange; it was like someone was sitting in front of you like someone had appeared. The lighting change made me think 'Oh my God, is someone in this room with me?' but that was on another level. I was more disturbed by the TV screen, I think, and then the sound changing as well; it was the simultaneousness of it. It was outside of me and very close to me at the same time.*

The simultaneous nature of switching from section one (external representation) to section two (internal representation) brought about an uncanny sensation. This was due to the proximity of the light and sound elements as they moved from a position of being distant and diffused to being up close. Baugh reminds us of the historical impact that the electric light had in revealing theatre as a 'distinctive phenomenon of perception' (Baugh 2005: 95). He emphasises that light, through time, movement and rhythm, might have meaning and significance in and of itself (2005: 94–95). In many respects, the lighting used in *VOID/ROOM* can be considered in the context of Appia's theories of active light. Active light offers specific visual effects utilising shadow to transform the stage environment, revealing its three-dimensional form (Palmer 2013: 87). Active light is sometimes translated as living light, but essentially it sought to offer a 'fluidity and flexibility through the creation of shadow' (2013: 88). The impact was that directional light would appear more alive against the otherwise static gaslights of the time, which produced general illumination. The light and sound experience for participant A13 was lived and felt through its spatialisation, diffusion and movement as the scenes shifted around the participant's body. This movement is a

reverse of Gibson's perspective, where an observer moves from 'point to point, which reveals information about the environment (1979: 17). Instead, in the environmental space of *VOID/ROOM*, points in sound and light moved around the participant, reforming their spatial experience. The spatialisation of light and sound in relation to the participant's body extends Appia's observation of stage light and shadows as a living composition into a lived experience. The dimensions of space, the volume of light and thickness of shadow through their activation and movement are felt and lived, not just observed, and this harbours the potential to produce meaning.

5. Perceiving Background Sound

It is impossible for our environments to ever be completely silent; they are filled with the constant noise of man-made and ecological sounds. Zumthor reflects that each building 'emits a kind of tone' but is unsure of precisely why; he even suggests that 'maybe it's the wind' that gives spaces their atmospheres (2006: 31). As Brown has mentioned, the audience negotiation of noise is part of a process of establishing meaning in theatre (Brown 2010a: 132). In the environmental spaces of all three cycles, I sought to position the audience, not against a silent studio environment, but through the subtle negotiation of background noise.

The body, according to Brown, is by default always immersed in sound, and therefore the design of sound starts from a position of omnidirectional perception and distraction. Brown asserts that our daily sonic environments are a 'mashed up soundscape of possibility' in which the contamination of sound is a part of our everyday landscape (Brown 2010b: 1-3). Jean-Francois Augoyard and Henry Torgue highlight the impact of background noise in the experience of aural immersion, where, for example, the sound of the waves continuously lapping upon a beach becomes 'a

permanent framework over which individual sonic activities are superimposed' (Augoyard and Torgue 2005: 65). In essence, we are always immersed in sound. Immersion, in an aural sense, is the 'dominance of a sonic micromilieu that takes precedence over a distant or secondary perceptive field' (2005: 64). In *If anyone wonders…* the wind sound, recorded from an oscillating desk fan, became a theatrical 'urban drone' (2005: 64), which, in perceptual terms, became the permanent sonic background to the experience of *If anyone wonders…*. This established an aural world through the perception of multiple sonic layers. The sound of the theatrical wind provided a secondary perceptual field and was an intentional strategy for the sound composition and construction of an aural immersion. This is not an immersion aimed specifically towards the participant, as a form of aural saturation, but an attentive listening *from* the participant *to* the environment. The audience, in attending to sound, in particular during Cycle Two where the aural environment was mainly constant, were sustained in a perceptual juggling between foreground and background sound.

6. The Body as Weather: 'and breathe'

I was compelled by the following responses to *If anyone wonders…* from participants who expressed a direct connection to their breathing and a sense of cathartic release: *'Surprisingly moving, I was close to tears, especially when your voice gave me permission to breathe…'* (B68), *'I leave breathing a little easier and compassionate'* (B43) and *'resonate breathing space'* (B41). The focus on the breath is often thought of in relation to mindful meditative practice, mainly because it is an ever present object of attention (Varela *et al.* 1991: 24). Ingold informs us that 'we live and breathe, the wind, light and moisture of the sky' (Ingold 2011: 115). In drawing attention to the breath we become aware of the boundary of external and internal

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relations, where the two merge and fold into one another. Discussing breathing, Leder notes that '[p]hysiologically, respiration stands at the very threshold of the ecstatic and visceral, the voluntary and involuntary' (Leder 1990: 171). In controlling and drawing attention towards the breath, we become mindful of the 'presence of a natural power' (1990: 171) within us. The focusing of the audience's breath alerts the participant to a voluntary ecstatic and visceral awareness. In offering permission to breathe, the breath becomes a flow of air into the environment, creating a cycling of air, body and space. Drawing attention towards the breath is a way of establishing breathing as a process of audiences becoming aware of the medium of their experience. Scenographic weather is expressed here as movement of the air in and out of the body, where the environment is felt as a '*resonate breathing space'* (B41).

Towards Absorption and Compassion

Above, I have presented six instances of scenographic weather. These instances are formed via a mutual reciprocity between body and environment – specifically through multisensory experience of the air as medium for performance. I have outlined how in the darkness our body reaches out in trepidation and how, in attentive listening, the body is engaged in an active sonic juggling. In the lived experience of light and haze we experience the performance text. Drawing attention to the breath focuses our attention toward our close and intimate connection with our environment; scenographic weather reminds us that we stand at a threshold of internal–external relation. In our multisensory immersion in scenographic weather 'the body is enlightened, ensounded and enraptured' (Ingold, 2011: 135). In the awareness of the production of affect, we can become mindful of our relation to our environment. I

would now like to consider how the collective and overall significance of scenographic weather might lead to a form of mindful absorption with scenography.

Absorption

Absorption, in Leder's conception, is an extension of the 'one-body' paradigm. The one-body is a form of empathic identification with other humans and non-humans. Leder choses the term 'compassion', in a broad sense, to refer to an 'experiencing-with, whether it takes the form of sharing another's sorrow, joy, mourning together, or partaking in communal celebration' (1990: 161). In essence, compassionate connection expands outwards to form an even larger body, through a joining of the welfare, desires and abilities of others (1990: 163). A compassionate concern is a way of opening up to the world; absorption is an extension of compassion, a being 'open through an aesthetic sensitivity to things' (1990: 164–165). Sensitivity is brought about through a merging of the body with the rhythms and aesthetic sensibilities of the environment. As an example, Leder provides a description of walking through a landscape, where he documents a process of 'temporal spatial adjustment' (Coyne 2010: xvi) or tuning with his surroundings. As he slowly walks, he becomes aware of the rhythms of his body; gradually he notices the details of the environment, until eventually his awareness extends beyond himself to the whole landscape. Below, I reproduce Leder's experience in the forest in full, as his account shares many similar aesthetic properties with scenographic reception:

> My relaxation is the smell of pine needles and the warmth of the breeze; self and Other can only be artificially disentangled. It is by this bodily chiasm that I realize the height of a distant tree. That I am planted here in my puny frame, I am there too at the peak, towering one hundred feet high. I am likewise with the bird's graceful flight, the brook tumbling over logs and stones. This is an

experience of bidirectional incorporation; the world come alive empathically within my body, even as I experience myself as part of the body of the world.

<div align="right">(Leder 1990: 166)</div>

To be absorbed through an aesthetic sensitivity is to be swallowed into a larger body (1990: 165). This is an example of a mindful engagement, whereby the individual embraces concepts of possibility and where they empathically experience the environment from multiple perspectives.

Responding to *and it all…*, participant C24 suggested, '*This will be the flow of my body, my music, my voice, my sound…'*. This participant demonstrates a tuning into the flows and rhythms of scenographic weather, where the temporality of the environment transforms the temporality of the participant. Other audience responses also demonstrate scenographic absorption. In the following responses to *If anyone wonders…* we see a spatial bodily adjustment: '*my own scale was brought into distinct focus: a focus that forced a perception of myself that remained intimate but distant'* (B60), and '*the small big details'* (B61). These are indicative of an expression of absorption where the body and space are brought into multiplicitous and simultaneous relations, the near and the far, the micro and macro.

Summary: Immersion as Weather

The projection of flight, being in the air, the inversion of scale, and the sense of being up close and distant found in comments presented throughout this section Immersion as Weather are indicative of a mindful absorption with scenography. I propose a 'compassionate absorption' to express the expansive reception of scenography, where 'we feel the leaping beyond constriction, the spaciousness of our extended body' (Leder 1990: 166) and where we register our flesh-and-blood chiasm with the world

and where the performance becomes 'swallowed into our embodiment' (1990: 165). A compassionate absorption with scenography extends beyond an individual relation with a singular scenographic image or object; it expands to become a global compassion constituted upon multiple images ranging in size and scale.

In the opening of this section, I presented the following response from a participant who expressed a clear sense of feeling *in*, *amongst* and *being part of* the scenography:

it felt like…

dancing in the wind…
flying between the clouds…
being a star, one of the smallest ones…
floating in the air…
the smell of the grass.

C24

The six instances of scenographic weather take account of various experiences that involve the air, as a mingling of light, haze and sound, not as objects of perception but as the medium of perception. Participant C24 demonstrates a global perception of body and environment, where they can be seen to 'breathe, think and dream in the regions of the air' (Macauley 2005: 307). With this comment, it is impossible to unpack specific scenographic exchanges. I have therefore presented it as part of a '(syn)aesthetic' experience, which communicates across the senses and in imagination.

Throughout this research I have been able to observe a spatial bodily adjustment in participants where their own scale was brought into focus. Participant B60's reflections lead me to conclude that the inversion of scale, the sense of being up close and distant, and having a bird's-eye view of the action all contribute to the

multiplicitous reception of scenography, where the temporality of the environment transforms the temporality of the participant. This, I propose, can foster a compassionate absorption between scenography and the individual. The identification of a compassionate absorption is where each participant registers their flesh-bound limits, and where the performance becomes 'swallowed into our embodiment' (Leder 1990: 165). In a compassionate absorption, the body reaches out to other bodies and non-human elements; it is a compassionate embrace of the global total effect of scenography, it a conception of multiple possibilities of experience, rather than an embrace of individual or isolated images.

IMMERSION AS JOURNEY

For Cycle Three, I asked audiences: *'What sense can you make of your journey through this experience?'* I aimed to examine the impact that a developed dramaturgy would have on the audience experience through time. The project sought to bring the audience into an intimate relationship with the story of the performance through a devised fable of the boy and his kite. By using a simple story, I hoped the audience would find ways to create their own subjective meanings and connections.

In the audience analysis, there was no singular conception of the notion of journey – expressions of journey were diverse and multiple. Some participants chose to focus on their own personal journey; others felt they were following the journey of somebody else. Participants did link the narrative story on the one hand with their own subjective personal connections on the other, which are captured in the following responses: *'It felt like being a voyeur to pieces of a boy's life but <u>complicit</u>, <u>subject</u> of the unfolding happening'* (C4, underlining in original) and *'I was watching myself watching. I was able to see the future of the piece before we arrived'* (C8). Others made sense of their experience as a journey of life represented through light: *'A journey of light, with light, through light…'* (Participant C4). One chose to express their journey, as a sense of travelling:

> *'It was like being on a train 100 years ago, on my way to the coast, it felt like I was watching the landscape go by from the safety of the train carriage. It was speeding past me – but it was peaceful'*

C25

Another participant interpreted it as *'The story of life'* (C14). A slightly bewildered audience member responded with *'I didn't know where I was going – I felt like I was moving both forwards and also backwards'* (C44). Others commented: *'A fragmented*

journey enhancing my sense of my environment' (C41) and *'I was on a voyage, travelling across the planes of existence'* (C47). Other audience responses expressed sensations of being inside and outside of the piece. The responses merged different senses of time, space, movement and travel. Participants often used binaries of near and far, inside and outside, backwards and forwards. It is a pluralistic conception of journey that I would like to consider further, by examining how a 'journey', through conceptions of time and movement, might forge a connection with the performance.

Smooth and Striated Scenographic Space

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (2004) offer smooth and striated space as a conceptual pairing through which to rethink space as having nomadic or sedentary qualities. In brief, striated space is conceived as lines and trajectories that are subordinated to points; linear movements from point A to point B. In striated space, time and space are mapped and planned. In smooth space, 'the points are subordinated to the trajectory […][t]he dwelling is subordinated to the journey' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 528). The smooth and the striated are not mutually exclusive; there is passage and movement between them: 'smooth space is constantly being translated, transversed into a striated space; striated space is constantly being reversed, returned to a smooth space' (2004: 524). Deleuze and Guattari present the folding of striated and smooth space through a series of models that include the 'Technological Model' (2004: 524-528), which suggests how weaving through technological machinery can become an act of striation, and the 'Maritime Model' (2004: 528-532), which outlines voyages of the sea and the city. I would like to consider the audience experience in relation to these spatial terms, to offer a way to consider how audiences might voyage, navigate and journey through the performance and its spatial design.

An example of a striated space in performance, par excellence, would be in the experience of *You Me Bum Bum Train* (2012), devised by Morgan Lloyd and Kate Bond. In this genre-defying experience, solo participants were thrust on a voyage through a series of interlinking spaces that borrowed from mundane and extraordinary life situations. The role of performer and audience was inverted as the participants were ultimately put on show. Each participant was faced with a series of challenges in which they were forced to respond quickly. In my own experience of this piece, I found myself robbing a bank at gunpoint, hosting a TV interview with celebrity chef Jamie Oliver (in front of a large audience with live band and film crew), and serving a kebab in a replica late-night takeaway – complete with drunk customers. In this hedonistic thrill ride, the participant became the protagonist in each vignette: bank robber, host and shopkeeper. Each transition and passage to the next scene was executed with military precision and with a level of hyper-realistic detail. The process is clearly structured through time, where the navigation of space is 'plotted' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 529) and mapped in advance. The experience was sensorially overwhelming. The sense of immediacy apparent with each scene overwhelmed any awareness of the event's construction.

The journey for the participants was linear; it was moving from point to point that ultimately manifested the theatrical experience. Despite moments of improvisation, this event was ultimately about control, organisation and direction where the trajectories where subordinated to points (2004: 528). The audience member took a path along a clearly defined route through the performance, going 'from one point to another' (2004: 528). The experience of the journey, despite feeling

fragmented in spatial terms, was linear. No autonomy or agency was offered to the participant.

Smooth space is more ambiguous than striated space, more opaque, with less directionality. In the models presented by Deleuze and Guattari, the Maritime Model is the most compelling for its relationship to environmental performance. In the Maritime Model, Deleuze and Guattari state that perception of smooth space is haptic rather than optical:

> [p]erception in it is based on symptoms and evaluations rather than measures and properties. That is why smooth space is occupied by intensities, wind and noise, forces, and sonorous and tactile qualities, as in the desert, steppe or ice.
>
> (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 528-529)

I would like to explore the audience's optical and haptic experience of *and it all…* to consider how this might impact upon the audience's ability to navigate or journey through the performance, and to question the division of haptic and optical engagement. I will consider how scenography might be experienced as a qualitative journey of 'symptoms and evaluations' rather than as points in time or in terms of a destination.

The application and construction of scenographic materials in *and it all…* sought to create an impression of fluidity and movement. Ingold expands upon Deleuze and Guattari's spatial models and outlines smooth space as

an atmospheric space of movement and flux, stirred up by wind and weather, and suffused with light, sound and feeling. The eye, in smooth space, does not look *at* things but roams *among* them, finding a way through rather than aiming for a fixed target. It is an eye that is tuned not to the discrimination and identification of individual objects but to the registration of subtle variations of light and shade, and the surface textures they reveal. […] in smooth space the surface of the land – like those of the sea – open up to the sky and embrace it.

(Ingold 2011: 132)

and it all… was constructed as a total environment in which I considered multiple experiences of distances, heights, horizons, textures, shapes and patterns to create an environment ready for exploration. In smooth space 'the line is… a vector, a direction and not a dimension or metric determination' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 528). The design of the glass landscape aimed to break up possible linear formations. Ultimately, I aimed to present a total ecology, where elements continually referenced each other. The glass jars and mirrored flooring echoed the reflective surfaces of the video; together the design sought to build an impression of fluidity – an environment in motion. *and it all…* was a scenographic smooth space that allowed for the meandering of design materials, to encourage the wandering nature of the spectator's eye and to open up a space for haptic participation (Ingold 2011: 132).

Participant C26 expressed that they felt '*immersed and drifting*' when they '*maintained a local gaze*'. This appears to echo the language of Ingold, where the participant identifies a roaming gaze caught in the flow of scenographic materials. Crary discusses a similar psychic mobility in his consideration of attention and self-absorption represented in Manet's painting *The Balcony* (1868), outlined in the research context. In brief, the painting expresses a 'psychic permeability and mobility, where attentiveness becomes a fluctuating membrane, a delicately tuned pattern of folding and unfolding onto the world' (Crary 2001: 88). In other words, the

localised gaze becomes an immersion that imparts a sense of transience and flux. Lehmann, in his discussion of visual dramaturgy, outlines that in postdramatic theatre a spectator's gaze might be invited to 'dynamize' the durational stasis; the result 'is a hovering of perceptual focus between a "temporalizing" of viewing with the scenic "going alone", between the activity of seeing and the (more passive) empathy' (Lehmann 2006: 157). Crary calls this a 'nonlinear temporality' (2001: 88). Participant C26's comments can be interpreted as having a 'nonlinear temporality', where time can be seen to create a destabilising attentive self-absorption; the gaze of the participant offers up a perceptual suspension, hovering between subjective impressions and the wider sense of the space of the other.

In the scenographic smooth space of *and it all…* the eye was free to roam *among* the objects (Ingold, 2011: 132). The construction of scenographic materials in this experience offered fluidity of movement, of the body and the eye with no fixed focal point. The effect of this might induce a spatiotemporal immersion that imparts a sense of perceptual instability and a psychic mobility. Thus, the experience is productive, as it inspires a 'mindfulness/awareness' involving the playful expansion and manipulation of time – it is an imaginative journeying for the participant.

Playfulness can also be seen as characteristic of smooth space, and this returns us to processes of haptic engagement. Participant C34 suggested:

it felt like…

> *Being young again, and a little like dreaming. It felt like the world I created as child was the 'real' world. When play meets reality. When reality is playful.*

C34

We cannot play at the horizon. The play of childhood is immediate and haptic, as we have learnt through Solnit (2006: 39). Haptic engagement is of a 'mindful body at work with the materials and with the land, "sewing itself" into the textures of the world along the pathways of sensory involvement' (Ingold 2011: 133). 'Mindfulness/awareness' is the catalyst for working with materials; through our haptic engagement with them we might forge deeper connections with those materials.

In one comment, a participant reflected on the moment they were invited to look at the palm of their hand:

What sense can you make of *your* journey through this performance?

You read a story to me, and then we looked at my hand together in the light – my lined and aging hand that looks likes like my mother's hand when I was young'
C37

Participant C37 demonstrates a haptic engagement that brings about a memory of childhood, of closeness, that activates an imaginative trajectory between the here-and-now moment and their own personal memory; the participant, as Deleuze and Guattari might say, is travelling along a vector (2004: 255). The result is the construction of a subjective spatiotemporal journey through the performance, activated via a perceptual roaming and playful haptic engagement. Being at hand or in touch with the scenographic materials encourages subjective memories to emerge; this is the body of the audience 'sewing itself' (Ingold 2011: 133) into the performance.

Smooth and striated spaces are constantly being translated and traversed (Deleuze and Guattari 2003: 524). The performance structures of Cycles One and Three present a clear journey from scene to scene that striate the audience's experience. Participants were given direct instruction as to how to behave, which cuts across the smooth space of the design. The striation of engagement through

instructions and the episodic structure create a tension within the smooth scenographic space, pulling in different directions in time, memory, place, freedom and control.

The experience of *and it all…* was neither totally smooth nor striated; the comments suggest a switching between these spatial modalities. Participants reported having both a sense of distance and closeness, of being in and out or, as some suggested, being at the 'centre' of the experience:

> *It felt strange. First I was in control, I could see what I wanted and heard what I wanted. But suddenly I felt drawn into it and I could not draw myself away. I needed to know what happened and whether it would be all right in the end.*

C51

Another way to suggest that a participant might 'sew' (Ingold 2011: 133) himself or herself into the performance is to say they have become entwined with the performance. Entwining is 'fabric' in Deleuze and Guattari's Technological Model (2004: 524–528). The Technological Model considers the characteristics of textiles through processes of weaving (striated) and entanglement (smooth). In the weaving perspective we might think about the audience as the mobile element passing through the fixed structure of the performance or being woven into the fabric of the performance. This usefully accounts for the mixed, dualistic comments given by participants that can be interpreted as having both smooth (scenographic) and striated (structural) qualities.

Ingold argues that the haptic and the optical are distinctions within the striated. The experience of smooth space, therefore, is neither optical nor haptic but 'atmospheric' (2011: 134). Scenographic weather is smooth space, as it is an all-enveloping experience of light, sound and feeling. In this atmospheric manifestation

'smooth space is not set against perceivers but commingles with, and saturates, their consciousness' (2011: 134). The audience response to *and it all…* of feeling up close, distanced and at the centre of the experience can, at times, be conceived as an expression of being bound up in an atmospheric engagement. It is useful to conceive smooth space as atmospheric spaces.

In the participants' expressions of journey, there is a larger sense of accepting and joining in the ebbs and flow of the dramaturgy: '*The sense of just being and belonging on this planet. To live life as an experience and take everything as a journey, by relaxing and flowing through life*' (C17); '*I feel the performance was almost an empowering experience. Both in its nature as immersive performance and through the messages of light and time*' (C2); and '*I didn't want to leave the room & was sad when I did*' (C32). Whilst smooth spaces are not in themselves liberating, struggle is changed or displaced in them. Smooth spaces are where 'life reconstitutes its stakes, confronts new obstacles, invents new paces, switches adversaries' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 551). These participants are embracing the experience as a journey; flowing through life and time, the journey is an experience of multiple mindful possibilities.

The sense of belonging, being and wanting to remain in the space of the performance, as expressed by participant C32 above, can be considered as a 'holding' or 'dwelling' within smooth space. Deleuze and Guattari use concepts of voyage and voyaging with reference to the nomads of the city. They suggest that nomads are nomads 'by dint of not moving, not migrating, of holding a smooth space they refuse to leave'. This is a voyage in place (2004: 532). But to think is also to voyage:

what distinguishes the two kinds of voyages is neither a measurable quantity of movement, nor something that would be only in the mind, but the mode of spatialization, the manner of being in space, of being for space. Voyage smoothly or in striation, and think the same way…[*sic*] But there are always passages from one to the other, transformations of one within the other, reversals.

<div align="right">(Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 532)</div>

The audience journey does not need to be thought of in terms of physical movements through space, but as a journey of being in space, for space; this appeals to the rooted space of a theatre studio. In *and it all…* it appears there is a strong sense of imaginative travelling, a contentment to be in the space, in some cases 'of being for space', such as that expressed by participant C24, who responded with, '*This will be the flow of my body, my music, my voice, my sound…*'. Although participants expressed a connection with the space, this was not linked to a sense of ownership or control of the space. The following participant expressed a feeling of being a guest:

it felt like…

> *A journey to a cosy home with a welcoming backyard but not a home I knew. I was a guest in someone else's intimate space. At the same time I was told stories important to them probably as we walked down the streets of their town, near the sea, after a rather simple but scrumptious lunch.*

C29

The participant above is a traveller, a nomad, journeying smoothly along a vector; this is not about destination or arrival. Ultimately this is an expression of journey – an atmospheric dwelling in smooth space.

Towards Mobility

Although the audience did not physically move through different architectural spaces, some participants referred to their experience as a form of transportation: '*It felt like being under a sheet with a torch in a den being transported to a place of midsummer*

eve's beauty' (C4). In order to further understand the implications for this type of transportation, I turn to concepts of mobility in which to grasp the larger significance of movement and communication expressed by participants.

Mobility, in its most defined form, is a displacement between points. Cresswell explores the different scales of mobility in order to bridge the gap between the human body and larger more complex systems of movement. He observes that '[m]ovement is rarely just movement; it carries with it the burden of meaning and it is this meaning that jumps scales' (Cresswell 2006: 6-7). Cresswell relates these meanings to socio-political manifestations, asserting that movement is rarely just about getting from A to B: 'the line that connects them, despite its apparent immateriality, is both meaningful and laden with power' (Cresswell 2006: 9). The following participant reflected that *it felt like…* '*Leaving space to explore the mechanics of time/elements usually not consciously thought about'* (C16). This can be interpreted as an opening up of space and time. Reflecting on these comments leads me to consider the participant as a traveller through spatial and imaginative dramaturgical points – the line that connects these points is where the meaning and significance arises – and this is ultimately a journey of meaning over distance.

Technological developments in social media and telecommunications are, according to Urry (2007), forming new fluidities between modes of communication and physical travel that are often difficult to stabilise (Urry 2007: 5). The mobility turn foregrounds the relationship between movement and communication, and offers new perspectives on meaning-making. As audiences of my practice came into contact with the spaces of performance and other participants, the nature of the way they

communicated and negotiated the scenography, individually and collectively, was foregrounded.

My application and use of technology as a distinct scenographic element needs to be considered within a larger context of mobile and pervasive media. The wireless headphones deployed in all three cycles not only mirror the rise in portable (and personalised) sound devices, but also the rise in the ability to stream media through wireless signal transmission, transparent systems and mobile access to data. This new mobility in performance, particularly the application of headphone technologies – notably wireless headphones – has expanded over the past decade through companies such as David Rosenberg, Slung Low, Rotozaza, Blast Theory, Rimini Protokoll and Janet Cardiff. The use of wireless headphones provides the possibility of instant transportation to different aural milieus. In my practice, I used narrating voice delivered through headphones to position the participant in particular dramaturgical and perceptual relations with the scenography. In *and it all…* there was a continual shifting from first- to third-person perspectives in order to destabilise the audience's perspective on the work – to offer a double experience of being part of it and reflecting upon it. In *VOID/ROOM* the headphones were used to create an unnerving position in which the sound of water dripping in the space could occasionally be heard inside the head.

David Overend (2013) offers a fascinating exploration of mobility in relation to Bourriaud, and in particular Bourriaud's notion of 'altermodern', a less critically adopted term. In *Relational Aesthetics* (2002)*,* Bourriaud conceptualises the possibility for the *form* of art, taking as its theoretical horizon 'the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and

private symbolic space' (2002: 14). Art invites an opening back into the world. This has particular resonance for gallery spaces and black-box studios, spaces that are often regarded as closed off from the outside world by creating their own frames of symbolic reference and associations. In altermodernity, this model is expanded to include globalisation 'fuelled by the flow of bodies, by our cultural wandering' (Bourriaud, cited in Overend 2012: 367). Overend asserts that in Bourriaud's altermodernity, the gallery space 'invites a mode of engagement that temporarily 'roots' the subject of the artwork' (2012: 368). The 'radicant' root metaphor is used to suggest multiple anchor points through movement, as opposed to a 'radical' structure that fixes itself to a single location (2012: 368). Bourriaud suggests:

> With its once dynamic and dialogical signification, the adjective 'radicant' captures this contemporary subject, caught between the need for a connection with its environment and the forces of uprooting, between globalization and singularity, between identity and opening to the other. It defines the subject as an object of negotiation.

> (Bourriaud 2009b: 51)

The diverse comments to *and it all…* are reflective of Bourriaud's non-fixed, radicant metaphor. Participants expressed the sensation of being both isolated and connected: *'it felt vast and wide to varying extremes throughout. That feeling in-significant can be strangely peaceful'* (C22) and *'Awareness of self, awareness then of one's relationship to others, awareness of quantum-scale, place in the universe'* (C64). Through the participants' own individual journeys they become conscious of the journeys of others, relating this through the scenography and the worlds and ideas they represent. The scenography of *and it all…* sought to express these ideas of the singular and the global in the following ways:

- The nesting of singular objects, such as the wine glasses and jars to form a larger body of water, a sea of glass.

- By shifting our sense of scale: the light bulbs that hung in front of each participant became individual suns as well as many stars.

- The isolated experience of wearing the headphones and sharing in moments of exchange through gift giving.

- Viewing other audience members as part of the overall scenographic design.

- Switching perspective between first- and third-person narrative.

Each of these techniques defines the subject as the 'object of negotiation' (Bourriaud 2009b: 51), as the participants consider their place in relation to others and the scenographic world.

Bourriaud positions his radicant root metaphor in opposition to Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome; for Bourriaud the singular subject is a central aspect of his conception:

> unlike the rhizome, which is defined as a multiplicity that brackets out the question of the subject from the beginning, the radicant takes the form of a trajectory or path; the advance of a singular subject'

> (Bourriaud 2009b: 55)

The rhizome, with its points that can and must connect, has neither subject nor object; the radicant, on the other hand, implies a subject. Looking at the nature of the audience experience of *and it all…* it is clear the artwork positions the audience as a subject within it, taking on many of the qualities of a radicant metaphor by constructing multiple subjective trajectories through the performance. Participant C35

responded by identifying a negation between their physical presence and the fictional text:

> *'I felt like an observer of somebody else's childhood memories. My own role was not a vital one, but I was there and so become a witness to somebody else's dream, and in that sense I was needed.*

C35

For this participant, their relationship with the performance unfolds as a negotiation that ultimately legitimises the participant's presence within the work. The subject's identity is formed and developed through the experience. Participant C35 demonstrates a negotiation of finding their place within the logic of the performance. Bourriaud states how the radicant root attaches to a place or situation:

> [t]he radicant differs from the rhizome in its emphasis on the itinerary, the path, as a dialogical or intersubjective narrative that unfolds between the subject and the surfaces it traverses, to which it attaches its roots to produce what might be termed an installation: one "installs oneself" in a place or situation in a makeshift or precarious way, and the subject's identity is nothing but the temporary result of this encampment, during which acts of translation are performed. Translation of a path into the local language, translation of oneself into a milieu – translation in both directions. Thus, the radicant subject appears as a construction or montage, in other words, as a work born of endless negotiation.
>
> (Bourriaud 2009b:55-56)

Bourriaud places much of his focus on the artwork operating as a form of endless negotiation; for me, the audience is central to this process. If we consider the audience installing themselves in makeshift or precarious ways, this might lead to possible processes of negotiation between audience and scenography. The audience temporarily roots and replaces their roots as they embark on an ongoing negotiation with scenographic materials. In the absence of a located place or site for performance,

the black-box studio hosts a scenographic space that provides its own language ready for translation – to be negotiated by the audience.

The precarious nature of the scenography presented in *and it all…*, and the generalised references to the sea without a distinct sense of location, is representative of my overall process as a scenographer. As with all three cycles of practice, I collected images, sounds and video sequences as I encountered my environments. In Cycle Three, I was guided by reflections in surfaces, puddles, windows and water. I sought to document the air and sky and was compelled to find open spaces to capture a sense of distance, as with the flight of birds as they swooped overhead. For *and it all…,* I ventured further afield. I travelled by car to the coast – 70 miles from the city – to film boats across the sea, lighthouse warning lights and the sun as it journeyed across the sky. As an artist, I made physical journeys. The final composition was a collage of place, distance and time. In Bourriaud's manifesto for 'Altermodern' he suggests that the artist is the

> prototype of the contemporary traveller whose passage through signs and formats refers to a contemporary experience of mobility, travel and trespassing. This evolution can be seen in the way works are made: a new type of form is appearing, the journey-form, made of lines drawn both in space and time, materialising trajectories rather than destinations. The form of the work expresses a course, a wandering, rather than a fixed space-time.

> (Bourriaud 2009a)

The journey began with my own artistic movements in time and place. I was building a new place through the memories and fragments of others. The design, particularly the glass sea, sat precariously within a black-box studio offering a sense of place but without presenting a fixed geographical location. The participants, like the scenographer, took on their own subjective trajectory; they were the traveller who

negotiates the singular and multiple, the near and the far, the haptic and the optical, the global and the local. A radicant scenography is a wandering, a course that inspires an individual journey of negotiation.

Summary: Immersion as Journey

The nature of journeying is a subjective process. By considering the audience journey I have been able to identify the construction of a smooth scenographic space that encourages an atmospheric engagement with scenography. In the smooth scenographic space, the eye is not fixed and is set to roam among materials (Ingold 2011: 132). The playful, haptic qualities can lead to subjective imaginative trajectories in time and space, suggestive of a *'moving both forwards and also backwards'* (B44) in time and space. The experience of a journey is based on 'symptoms and evaluations', not measurements or destinations. The localised gaze can lead to a 'temporalizing' of vision (Lehmann 2006: 157) or a 'nonlinear temporality' (Crary 2001: 88). Journeys are not always smooth; playful interaction might become striated through a tight performance structure, and through the audience members' own anxieties about how to engage with the event. Audience journeying can be a voyage of place, a dwelling in the smooth space. In this way, the audience become nomads, holding on, not moving. Voyaging in thought and place is a mindful process, allowing space for contemplation and the negotiation of a sense of place and belonging.

The audience journey can also be considered through the burden of meaning (Cresswell 2006: 6–7) that materialises via a trajectory between points. The opening up of time and space invites meaning in the flux and flow of bodies in space. The environmental space of *and it all…* invited a sense of social mobility of bodies, in

relation to others and a wider global signification, an '*awareness of self, awareness then of one's relationship to others, awareness of quantum-scale, place in the universe*' (C64). Cresswell, on discussing Bernard Tschumi's architecture of the Parc de la Villette in Paris, articulates how '[t]he space is not there to tell you what to do, but to provide opportunity to move, and in doing so, make things happen' (Cresswell 2006: 51). Mobility is an invitation to move imaginatively through time and physically through a displacement between points.

Through Overend and Bourriaud it is clear that singular and global perspectives can materialise through a translation of oneself into a milieu. Bourriaud's radicant root metaphor is useful to consider locating the scenographer and audience in a process of rooting or 'installing oneself' (Bourriaud 2009b: 55) precariously in an environment that inspires a wandering, an individual journey of negotiation.

Immersion as Journey offers a way to think about audience immersion as an emerging 'journey-form' (Bourriaud 2009b: 55), centred upon the audience's negotiation of scenography through time, inside the black-box studio. Rather than journeying through spaces, as with other perspectives on journeying, such as walking practices and an urban exploration, Immersion as Journey considers the audience as travellers, placing and re-placing themselves in an environment, a displacement between points and perspectives rather than physical location.

The 'journey-form' accounts for plural manifestations of journey. The studio space with its rigid architecture plays host to a mobile spectatorship, fostering an immersion not in destination or in arrival, but in trajectories of movement, time and memory.

CONCLUSION

I shall now revisit the overall aims for the research project, summarise my findings and outline the implications for this research. This research examined the nature of scenography in the construction of audience immersion in performance. My overarching research questions were:

1 **How do audiences engage with scenography in performance events that place the body as central to their reception?**

2 **How might audience immersion in performance be modelled?**

Through a hermeneutic process of cycles and iterations, I examined the ways audiences might encounter scenography in design-led performance. By constructing three cycles of practice, I focused the study through three further sub-questions that framed the development and focus for each project:

Cycle One: *VOID/ROOM*

1.A   In what ways can altering proximity and the diffusion of sound and light in space alter the experience of performance?

Cycle Two: *If anyone wonders why rocks breakdown*

1.B   In what ways does physical engagement with scenography alter scenographic reception?

Cycle Three: *and it all comes down to this…*

1.C   How might a shifting between physical and cognitive experience of scenography impact upon audience reception?

1.D   How might journey be used to aid in the experience of immersion?

The individual sub-questions were used to construct the practice around specific research intentions. I structured my analysis of the ways audiences engage with scenography (research question one) through a three-part model of interlinking concepts presented as Landscape, Weather and Journey. I present these collectively as a larger thesis of audience immersion as an embodied engagement with scenography.

Modelling Audience Immersion

Immersion in performance is a subjective process; therefore, I have chosen not to present a universal model of immersion but to outline possible, plural immersions in my scenographic practice. Although presented under separate headings, I offer these as a larger model of audience immersion formed through the physical, imaginative and mindful engagement with scenography. I have chosen to present my findings through a nuanced understanding of audience experience, rather than as a model that might be applied to all performance bracketed under the heading 'immersive'. I have argued that 'mindfulness/awareness' can act as a specific mode of embodied engagement with scenography that might foster deeper relations between participants and design materials. I have presented these deeper relational encounters as 'scenographic landscape', 'scenographic weather' and 'radicant scenography'. This is the first time scenography has been theorised specifically focusing on audience immersion in theatrical environments.

The three-part model differs from dominant discourses on immersion such as that offered by Machon (2013), where I do not seek to define 'immersive practice' as she does; rather, I consider how immersion might be manifested through a relational encounter between participant and environment. Unlike Machon, I account for multiple individual manifestations of immersion activated via scenographic relations.

Rather than offering a 'scale of immersivity' (2013: 93) in which scenography is presented separately from space, sound, bodies and audience, I present a holistic understanding of scenography as a manifold of these elements. In contrast to Machon, who is insistent on the concept of the event being 'wholly immersive' or presenting a 'complete immersive experience' (2013: 101), my argument is formed through a perceptual understanding of the ways participants and performance environments might become entwined. Audience immersion, in my conception, is a set of relational encounters that might be experienced as fleeting or momentary, as a passage, a change from one state to another. My audience immersion model looks specifically at how scenography acts as an agent for participation. My thinking builds directly upon McKinney's (2008) scenographic research, where she re-examines the role of designers, performers and audience. With the absence of live performers in my practice, I propose ways in which participants might become bound up with scenographic materials. I develop McKinney's ideas around a 'scenographic exchange' where 'scenography is an act of co-creation in that it may require the synthesis of the concrete and conceptual' (2008: 86). I extend McKinney's thinking by applying 'mindfulness/awareness' as an overarching mode of engagement with scenography in order to draw together embodied and reflective processes.

Audience Mindfulness/Awareness

Dominant discourses on immersive theatre centre upon the environment of performance to create all-encompassing worlds (Machon 2013: 93), with design elements such as sound often aiming at a sensory saturation of the participant (Brown 2011: 10). What has emerged as an important point in this investigation is how 'mindfulness/awareness' offers an alternative mode of audience engagement with

scenography, which extends Klich and Scheer's thinking around an 'intuitive reflection' (2012: 151). 'Mindfulness/awareness' contrasts Grau's argument that in immersive experience critical distance recedes (2003: 13). Instead, audience 'mindfulness/awareness' offers an alternative perspective that considers reflection as an active part of the experience itself (Varela *et al.* 1991: 27). Rather than mindfulness functioning as an inwardly isolated mode of engagement, where participants might focus on their own breath, 'mindfulness/awareness' articulates how audiences connect outwards with the environment. Thus, 'mindfulness/awareness' encourages reflection upon mindless behaviour and of one's relation to human and non-human elements.

'Mindfulness/awareness' offers an original approach to understanding audience sensory and cognitive engagement with scenography. Through my analysis I have identified constituent elements of audience 'mindfulness/awareness' in performance: awareness of bodily sensations, unlearning of cognitive modes of engagement, cutting across automatic behaviour and forming new categories framed through notions of imaginative possibility.

Scenography can inspire bodily reflections on habitual processes through physical engagement. I have identified how scenography can affect the body, causing physiological responses, heightening perceptual awareness, where the participant becomes aware of their own sensory immersion in the here-and-now, as an 'extra-ordinary' (Fenemore 2001:78–79) mode of embodiment. Through processes of tuning – a temporal and spatial adjustment between body and scenography – participants respond to the design by questioning their position in relation to the scenography. Cognitively, attentive strategies are replaced by a sampling of performance material

where participants might respond with a process of 'letting it wash', not forcing meaning and significance but allowing it to arise.

Although I have stated the importance of mindfulness as a dissolving of mindlessness – rather than the acquiring of a practical skill – some of my audiences over the course of this research might have become accustomed to my approach of constructing reflective environments. I intend to continue nurturing audiences through regular engagement with my practice, which I hope might aid in the process of developing 'mindfulness/awareness' as a specific strategy for audience engagement over time.

'Mindfulness/awareness' can be applied to wider art-based and theatre practices, particularly to work where the performing body is absent or marginalised in the experience; this might include events such as Janet Cardiff's audio walks, where attention is drawn to perceptual engagement. It will also aid understandings of installation art, where the participant comes into direct tactile contact with design materials. Rather than thinking of audiences as either active or passive, 'mindfulness/awareness' opens up a way to consider a theatrical experience as an embodied, reflective mode of engagement, where reflection forms part of the intended reception.

Developing compassion is the ultimate intention of mindfulness in daily life (Varela *et al.* 1991: 22). As a strategy for audience engagement, compassion is a form of empathic identification with others, both human and non-human. By experiencing with others we come to share in communal expressions of sorrow, joy and celebration

(Leder 1990: 161). For the non-human aspects, this experiencing-with might lead to further processes of absorption between individual and scenography.

Modelling Audience Immersion

The aim of my model is to present ways in which audiences might engage with design that fosters relational connections with the performance. The three-part model builds: from a position of surface engagement with design, then as an atmospheric engagement and finally as an experience of trajectory through time and space. I shall now summarise my findings.

Immersion as Landscape

I applied landscape and walking practices as lenses through which to consider the direct physical and imaginative engagement with design. In examining the audience experience, I first looked towards my own creative process in the construction of *If anyone wonders….* This led me to consider how walking, exploring and engaging with the city environment invited me to become a flâneur of the city, seeking out 'profitable agitation' (Benjamin 1999). My active selection and composition of materials as the scenographer, I propose, was reflected in the process of audience engagement within the theatrical studio environment, where participants responded by moving, seeking and selecting their own profitable material. I applied concepts of walking and flânerie as a part-imaginative and part-physical activity through theoretical perspectives outlined by Tester, Ingold, Benjamin and Rancière. The audience move in and through the scenography, discovering rather than being presented with material, inscribing rather than merely reading the performance.

To extend notions of inscription further, and to account for deeper processes of incorporation with scenography, I turned to landscape as a localised 'field of our present actions' (Bell 1999: 66); this lens accounts for the immediate haptic perception of the environment. By considering landscape through Olwig's embodied conception of 'doing', rather than through its scopic conception, we open up landscape and scenography as an entwined practice, an active doing that fosters a process of 'morphing' between the participant's body and physical design materials.

The spatialisation of scenography in *If anyone wonders…* sought to encourage physical exploration of the space; the scale of the model figures, the possible movement of the torches, the mirrored projection screens on either side of the space, and the targeted sound through the individual speakers all sought to place the audience in an active and mobile position. Through sensorimotor action, the audience moved their bodies horizontally and vertically, which inspired shifts in perspective that encouraged the participants to question their own placement in and as part of the scenographic landscape.

The individual participant shapes the scenography with others in a collective and emergent doing, a continual shifting between the personal and the social. Through the audience body being engaged in a process of doing, an immersion in a scenographic landscape takes shape. This conception is useful in thinking about 'free-to-roam' performances, where the audience is offered some autonomy over their engagement, and to consider the ways in which material objects might be used to shape experience.

Immersion as Weather

In Immersion as Weather I considered the affective experience of scenography – a combination of light, haze and sound experienced as the medium of perception rather than as objects of perception – as phenomenon that is acted upon and within the body (Welton 2012: 131). Through all three cycles of practice, I was keen to understand how the less tangible, experiential aspects of design, rather than just images, might make an impact upon audience reception. I propose 'scenographic weather' as a conceptual frame in which to consider bodily engagement in and through the medium of air, in performance, as an aesthetic experience. Under the umbrella of scenographic weather, I proposed six instances that contribute to its overall experience: In the Mi(d)st of Scenography, Feeling the Wind, Feeling Darkness, Lived Light, Perceiving Background Sound and The Body as Weather: 'and breathe'.

The use of theatrical haze foregrounds the sensation of our own immersion in the air, where the participant can become immersed in his or her own perceptual awareness. Haze, when framed within a contained and sustained theatrical environment, becomes a medium that participants physically enter. Haze fosters self-awareness, drawing attention to the air, which is a multisensory condition for touching, seeing and hearing in performance. In articulating the dynamic use of haze deployed in *and it all…,* I noted Svoboda's articulation of a 'psycho-plastic space' (Burian 1971: 31), in which the scenic design reponds to the 'psychic pulse of the dramatic action' (1971: 31). In the environmental context of *and it all…,* the light was felt by participants through the haze, in the here-and-now, and as part of the dramatic action. This became a lived experience of the performance text where the participant was bound up in the production of affect. I proposed the term 'psycho-dynamic

weather' to more accurately express the individual being caught up in the dynamics of the medium (the haze/air), light, sound, objects and performance text.

The wind was applied as a conceptual expression of touch and in the fostering of a touch-like sensation through a '(syn)aesthetic' reaching, which encourages a desire for multisensory experience. In the desire for connection, a participant becomes active in seeking out similarities, correlations and correspondences between scenographic elements.

Darkness was discovered to be an active scenographic material that further encouraged processes of bodily reaching. In some responses to *VOID/ROOM*, the darkness appeared to have a tactile density that was felt. The experience of darkness can also bring about feelings of anxiety and fear that disrupt the ability to forge deeper meaningful relations with the performance event.

Light, as experienced in the same performance space as the participants, draws the audience into a lived experience. Rather than observing light, where an observer moves from 'point to point' (Gibson 1979: 17), scenographic shifts in light can move points around the participant, subsequently reforming spatial experience. Appia conceives the movement and rhythm of light as 'living light'. I further this notion and extend it to include spatial proximity in relation to the body. In order to grasp the direct audience engagement with light, I have used the term 'lived light' to capture the audience movement in and through light as a medium of performance.

Through my practice, I found that participants were becoming sustained in a perceptual juggling of sound through the development of both a primary and secondary sonic field. Far from saturating the participant in abundant targeted sound

aimed at immersion (Brown 2010b), the use of headphones, combined with sound diffusion, presented multiple sound fields that brought about an ambiguous perceptual shifting between foreground and background. Therefore, listening through headphones became an immersion via extension, listening outward rather than inwards. This formed part of the construction of an aural world that encouraged an active and attentive listening. Therefore listening became part of a relational context.

Respiration, as both a physical action and a physic operation, was used as an example of a threshold of where body meets scenography. The control and attention towards the breath of the audience offered a tactic for scenographic engagement that alerted the audience to voluntary and involuntary ecstatic and visceral awareness (Leder 1990: 171). This encouraged the development of a 'mindfulness/awareness'.

In our multisensory immersion in scenographic weather, 'the body is enlightened, ensounded and enraptured' (Ingold, 2011: 135). The six instances of scenographic weather illustrate the larger significance and potential for absorption with scenography. A 'compassionate absorption' is where the body reaches out and touches other bodies and non-human elements; it is a compassionate embrace of the global and multiple elements of scenography rather than of individual images. The inversion of scale, the sense of being up close and distant, and the bird's-eye view through the impression of flight all contribute to the multiplicitous reception of scenography that I propose can foster a compassionate absorption between body and scenography. Not all elements of scenographic weather may induce a sensation of compassionate absorption. Compassion is premised on a subjective spatial temporal adjustment in which the body and environment might align through an aesthetic sensitivity to things (Leder 1990: 164–165). Subjective feelings, such as fear of the

darkness, might interrupt this sensitivity, as I found with the darkness deployed in Cycle One, *VOID/ROOM*. The success of scenographic weather might be evaluated as to whether a participant is set against the scenography, as with the fear of the dark, or to what extent the atmospheric conditions allow them to abandon themselves into its mystery (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 249).

Immersion as Journey

Immersion as Journey conceptualises audience experience through the performance over time. It outlines the construction and subsequent navigation of scenographic smooth space. It questions the nature of haptic and optical engagement with materials. In scenographic smooth space, the eye is free to roam among the materials (Ingold 2011: 132); this is achieved by the nesting of singular and multiple objects and by providing multiple focal points in space. Over time, this can bring about a localised gaze that can lead to a 'temporalizing' of vision (Lehmann 2006: 157) or a 'nonlinear temporality' (Crary 2001: 88) that encourages processes of dwelling or of holding on to space. Immersion as Journey is not about goals or destination; it is a process of experiencing space through 'symptoms and evaluations' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 528-529) that might involve changes in direction.

A playful haptic engagement might lead to subjective imaginative trajectories in time and space, suggestive of a '*moving both forwards and also backwards*' (B44). Meaning can be established in the trajectory between these points, where the value is in the navigation and journey over the arrival and destination. Immersion as Journey considers the possibility of rooting or installing oneself precariously in an environment, providing a sense of place that is not fixed in its location. I apply Bourriaud's radicant root metaphor to scenography, a process in which the audience

temporarily roots and replaces their roots as they journey through an ongoing negotiation with scenographic materials.

The participants, just as I as scenographer, take on their own subjective trajectory. The participant is a traveller who negotiates the singular and multiple, the near and the far, the haptic and the optical, the global and the local. A radicant scenography is a wandering, a course that inspires an individual journey of negotiation.

Impact and Implications

In defining the research parameters – to specifically explore the role of scenography, with the exclusion of performers – I have developed an original form of practice within a larger field of immersive and scenographic practices that operates as a hybrid between art installation and performance. As a scenographer, I have devised new ways in which to engage audiences in order for them connect and respond to the scenographic material. The practice-led component has investigated the direct impact of scenography within a range of immersive theatrical environments that makes a significant contribution to the wider field of scenographic enquiry. Moreover, these findings can be applied to wider practices and performance thinking such as site-specific, promenade and installation art, where the negotiation between participant and environment is central to the experience.

This research addresses a gap in the understanding of the subjective experience of audiences, whose voice is often marginalised in performance analysis. A major strength of this method is that it has allowed me to triangulate my thinking and helped me to gain an informed understanding of audience experiences. I am aware there are

much wider concerns as to the nature of audience immersion that this thesis cannot address, such as game play (understanding the rules of engagement) and first-person narrative involvement. However, by responding to emergent concepts throughout the process, I have been able to adjust my approach and respond to theory in practice as well as in post-performance analysis. I hope this research will provide a useful tool for theorists and practitioners to consider how scenography can facilitate audience immersion through a mutually emergent process. I hope this research opens up a way to think about scenography not as an object of perception but as a medium of experience.

My body of practice has begun to make an impact into immersive theatre as a genre of performance and, more generally, design-led practice. I have presented the practice and theory at major UK and international conferences and published some of my thinking around 'Scenographic Landscapes' (Shearing 2014) and audience negotiation of sound and touch in wider immersive practice (Shearing 2015). Engaging publicly with my practice has enabled me to challenge myself at each stage of the process and has helped me to place my practice within the current cultural landscape. I plan to continue my journey as a practitioner–researcher by considering the social and political implications of immersing audiences.

Further Questions

Throughout this research, immersive experiences have continued to grow in popularity with the expansion of companies such Secret Cinema and Punchdrunk offering large-scale commercial enterprises. These events provide richly detailed environments on an impressive scale, but to what extent might audiences relate to and connect with these worlds? My research goes some way to answering this question,

but further questions emerge as to the value of this practice, its lasting impact and how audiences might be prepared or conditioned for these experiences. In my practice, I will further consider the extent to which 'mindfulness/awareness' might be conditioned, as a longer-term project, but also how scenography might provide openings to encourage 'mindfulness/awareness' during performance. Further questions might now be asked of how scenography might act as a tool to reform our relational encounters in public spaces, outside the black-box studio.

Audience Immersion and the Experience of Scenography

To conclude, this investigation has revealed a process of audience immersion in design-led performance premised upon relational encounters with scenography. My scenographic practice has created an intervention between performance and art-based contexts that have required the development of new tactics for audience engagement. I have discovered new ways in which scenography can operate as an agent for physical and imaginative engagement. Rather than approaching scenography as material that is presented to an audience, throughout this thesis I have articulated a three-part model of immersion that positions the audience as both individually and socially entwined with the design material. I have approached the audience as creative thinkers, who compose *with* the elements of performance (Rancière 2009: 13). I have expanded upon Rancière's conception by considering both cognitive and physical modes of engagement.

I have put forward three original perspectives as to how audiences might forge an immersive connection with scenography. 'Immersion as Landscape' articulates a physical shaping of the surface of design in order to understand deeper imaginative and physical processes of incorporation with scenography – an emergent process of

body and environment. 'Immersion as Weather' proposes how participants might become entwined with scenography as a medium of experience, through a multisensory commingling of body and design materials. 'Immersion as Journey' conceptualises how individuals might navigate and dwell within space, which is achieved through an atmospheric experience of scenographic 'smooth space'. I put forward the concept of a radicant scenography in which audiences are invited to negotiate a precarious environment that inspires a wandering, an individual journey of negotiation of scenography. Audience immersion is an emergent process that is continually coming into being through subjective correspondence with scenography. When scenography becomes saturated in a participant's consciousness, the sensation of immersion begins to materialise.

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Appendix A Presentations and Publications

PUBLICATIONS

Shearing, D. (2014) **'Scenographic Landscapes'**, Studies in Theatre and Performance, Routledge, pp. 1–15, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14682761.2013.877291

Shearing, D. (2013) **'This rise of immersive theatre puts design in the spotlight'**, World Stage Design, www.wsd2013.com/blog-category/this-rise-of-immersive-theatre-puts-design-in-the-spotlight/

Shearing, D. (2015) **'Immersive performance: the voyeur within'**, in Rodosthenous, G. (ed.) *Theatre as Voyeurism: The Pleasure(s) of Watching*, Palgrave Macmillan.

PRESENTATIONS

Audience Embodiment: Making and Mindfulness, School of Performance and Cultural Industries Research Seminar (October 7, 2013).

Exhibition, World Stage Design (8–15 September 2013). **Winner of Best Installation Design.**

Scenographic Landscapes, TaPRA Glasgow (4–6 September 2013).

Research Symposium: Performance & Immersion, contributing panel member and event coordinator, Performance Technologies research group, School of Performance and Cultural Industries, University of Leeds (30 November 2012).

Scenographic Landscapes, IFTR Scenography Working Group, Prague (October 2012).

Shift coordinator, peer reviewer, 'Performance Studies International PSi18', School of Performance and Cultural Industries, University of Leeds (27 June–1 July 2012).

Immersive Audio – the voyeur within, 'Performance Research: Creative Exchanges', Central School of Speech and Drama (19 January 2012).

Practice-Based Research Design: Audience Ethics and Rocks. 'Research Seminar – Researching through Practice', School of Performance and Cultural Industries, Alec Clegg Studio (7 November 2011).

The Scenographer as Co-Author of Experience. 'Authoring Theatre: New performance, text and the return of the auteur', Central School of Speech and Drama (14–16 July 2011).

Open Spatial Lab (Architecture Section), UK Participant, Prague Quadrennial 2011 (16–26 June 2011), www.pq.cz/en/architecture.html.

The Scenographer as Co-Author of Experience, 'Relation and Participation, Approach to Performance', Aberystwyth Arts Centre/ Department of Theatre, Film and TV Studies, Aberystwyth University (2–4 May 2011).

Conscious Landscapes: making sense of immersive performance environments, 'Digital Resources in Arts and Humanities: Sensual Technologies: Collaborative Practices of Interdisciplinary', Brunel University (5–8 September 2010).

Making sense of immersive performance environments: active scenography, 'Showcase – Postgraduate Research Conference', University of Leeds (14 December 2010).

Appendix B *VOID/ROOM* **Website Booking Form**

VOID / ROOM

BOOK - ABOUT - CONTACT
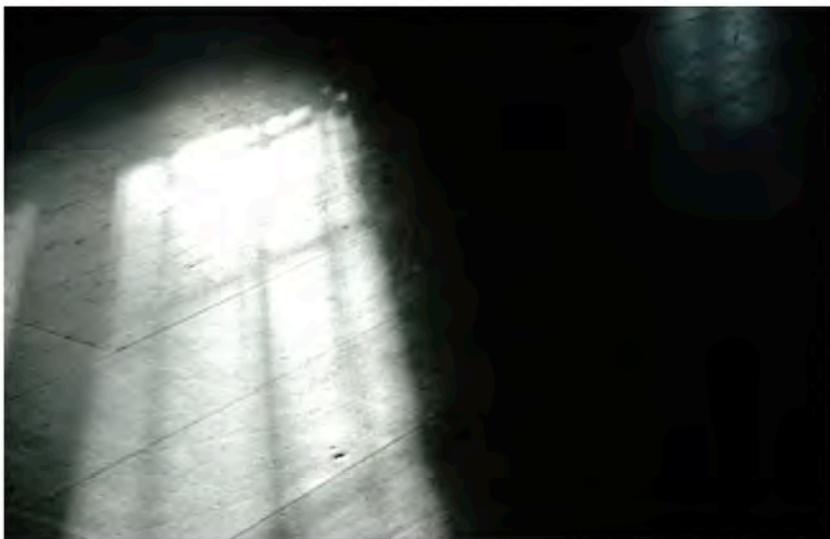
VOID / ROOM is a 10 minute immersive sound and visual installation designed for one person. This is a research event and participants will be asked share their thoughts, feelings and experience in a post event interview which will take 5 minutes.

To book please click the ROOM button below to send an email, please provide your full name. Please note this is a timed event and latecomers may not be admitted. If you have any questions about the booking process please email David Shearing.

VOID / ROOM will be taking place at stage@leeds on the main University of Leeds Campus - click here for map. YOU WILL RECEIVE A CONFIRMATION EMAIL WITHIN 24 HOURS.

Wednesday 21 July 2010		**Thursday 22 July 2010**	
Wednesday 21 July - 13:00	VOID	Thursday 22 July - 13:00	VOID
Wednesday 21 July - 13:20	VOID	Thursday 22 July - 13:20	VOID
Wednesday 21 July - 13:40	VOID	Thursday 22 July - 13:40	VOID
Wednesday 21 July - 14:00	VOID	Thursday 22 July - 14:00	VOID
Wednesday 21 July - 14:20	VOID	Thursday 22 July - 14:20	VOID
Wednesday 21 July - 15:00	VOID	Thursday 22 July - 15:00	VOID
Wednesday 21 July - 15:20	VOID	Thursday 22 July - 15:20	VOID
Wednesday 21 July - 15:40	VOID	Thursday 22 July - 15:40	VOID
Wednesday 21 July - 16:00	VOID	Thursday 22 July - 16:00	VOID
Wednesday 21 July - 16:20	VOID	Thursday 22 July - 16:20	VOID
Wednesday 21 July - 16:40	VOID	Thursday 22 July - 16:40	VOID
Wednesday 21 July - 17:20	VOID	**Thursday 22 July - 17:20**	Room
Wednesday 21 July - 17:40	VOID	Thursday 22 July - 17:40	VOID
Wednesday 21 July - 18:00	VOID	Thursday 22 July - 18:00	VOID
Wednesday 21 July - 18:20	VOID	Thursday 22 July - 18:20	VOID
Wednesday 21 July - 18:40	VOID	Thursday 22 July - 18:40	VOID

Appendix C   *VOID/ROOM* Interview Consent Form

VOID/ROOM – Release Authorisation

Please take the time to read the following information before you sign this form.

David Shearing requests your permission to use your transcribed comments about your experience of VOID/ROOM including any video, sound recordings and written responses in which you feature to support the wider dissemination of the research. Typically this material will used in conference presentations, journal articles and on the University web pages. Transcribed and written accounts will be anonymised.

Video recording of this event YES / NO

Please sign below in order to give your permission:

Signature_____

Print _____

Thank you for your participation in this project!

Appendix D   Poems in Response to *VOID*

A certain doubleness
– Adam Strickson

I am no more lonely than a single mullein
or dandelion in a pasture
– Henry Thoreau, 'Walden'

We live in the same black house
each in our own room, alone, together.

Our lampshades are laddered tights
and paintings of flowers hang in the air.

Our house is open to the wind
and we share the same thick weather,
each on our own chair, alone, together.

We listen to the same dripping tap
each our own friend, alone, together.

The cracked panes of our windows
break sunlight onto our shaky floors.

Radio fuzz haunts our skirting boards
and we cry along to the same song forever
each in our own loves, alone, together.

We close our eyes and drift away
to swim among the blue angels
and laugh with the loon in the pond.

A Chinese girl calls in the alley
and the first leaves fall, alone, together.

11.11
– Kamal Hussain

He sits in smeared light;
As smudged as rust
turned amber turned umber
his house Gawping like
rusticated moths plastered cornices.
(There was no man)

Just a memory of his shadow
peeled to the underside of oak floor.
Where once he sat
with a mouthful of birds
humming his hopes to sleep

he tied the wind to his hair
wispy stroking fingers -
as the lingering taste of home
Is as Unsatisfying as life