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Hallways

Place and Object between Body and Narrative:

Scenographic Approaches to Devising Theatre

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

This essay seeks to explicate the final thesis production: *Hallways*. The final output is process-orientated and focuses on **devising** a piece of theatre using **sets of exercises, activities and games**. These strategies focus on the **scenographic elements** of **place** and **object** as the generative, **formative** process of exploring, discovering and building story, **narrative** and character in a **devised theatre context.** The central focus of this is scenographics as an **intermediary device** between body and narrative. This approach is not intended to exclude any other creative forces, disciplines or interests in the collaborative process of devising, but rather seeks to explore the potential of, as Hann frames it, not what scenography *is* but what scenography *does* and how that could be employed in devising theatre (2019: 5).

To structure this explication, the context that informs this research will be shared, with a particular focus on the need and potential for scenography as an intermediary device in devising theatre. To unpack these ideas key discussions around scenography and scenographics will be considered, especially in its role relative to devising and theatre making. It will consider Pamela Howard's seminal *What is Scenography?* (2002), Gay McAuley's *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in Theatre* (1999) and Rachel Hann's provocative work *Beyond Scenography* (2019) as the primary guides to explore the potential and possibility of scenography as a generative and formative approach for theatre-making. Using a combination of framing theory and reflections on theatre pieces created thus far (*Still Life, Eden/Bound* and *the things that were passed down),* the essay will describe and explore specific exercises and activities that use the scenographic elements of place and object as strategies or approaches for creating narrative. The last section of this essay frames the final production for this creative practice-led research project, *Hallways*.

Context

The entry point and context of this research is reflective both of my personal need for scenography and scenographics in the theatre-making process, and of observations made during a project, *Wishing 4 Wellness,* in 2016/2017. This was an interdisciplinary creative facilitation project that

focused on awareness of biomedical knowledge and behaviour change around sexual and reproductive health with young womxn from Masiphumelele.

When I first started discovering ways to make theatre it was through the modalities of performance and dramaturgy at a tertiary institute. I quickly realised that I rarely felt safe using my body as the primary tool or site for devising, creative expression and developing theatre. I have since realised that much of that discomfort was as a result of having a body that was marked with trauma. I changed my major to theatre design and found an expression for some of the ideas, experiences and scapes that I was unable to explore in performance. However, I mostly participated in theatre as a production designer responding to scripts and the needs of directors and performers. I often felt as though I was layering something on top of, rather than embedded in, the final production. When I was involved in theatre-making or devising I participated as a designer but always collaborated with performers and directors as I felt the work I was doing was a distinctly different practice from theatre-making and required the guidance or intervention of the traditional theatre-maker, the director and performers, to achieve its goals.

This assumption was challenged, for me, in the *Wishing 4 Wellness* project and specifically during the making of the *Taxi Talks* performance. I had a peripheral role in the performance component of the project, *Taxi Talks*; my main contribution was the design and construction of a taxi that operated as a facilitation, performance and installation space. The taxi first existed in facilitation as found objects and roughly demarcated spaces; it developed into a structure with cladding in which a performance occurred and finally was positioned as an installation piece which included a documentary screened at the back of the taxi. The installation was on UCT's medical campus (October 2017) and the Fishhoek library (December 2017).

The taxi was developed by the participants using the objects and space with various performance facilitations guided by Bobbie Fitchen and Ntomboxolo Makhutshi of Dynamic Facilitators. The participants predominantly use minibus taxis as their primary form of transport; it is a shared reference point and familiar space where ideas, identities and social interactions and hierarchies specific to their context are played out. Through games and improvisation (predominantly based on the work of Boal and Friere), the taxi operated as a space for oft-taboo conversations that could not be held in the homes of the participants. It held a collection of characters, events and stories onto which the participants played out their judgements, fears, social anxieties and hopes.

Neither scenography nor theatre design were separate nor defined methodologies in this process, but were interwoven into the established performance and drama components of the facilitation. However, the process generated a narrative that was initially seeded by playing with the scenographic elements of space and objects and so indicated a viability in creating story through scenography, rather than scenography playing a supporting role to a directorial or performance vision. Reflecting on this methodology employed by the young womxn, coupled with my own need for a process that would allow me to make theatre without using my body as the primary site, laid the foundation for a shift in my own theatre practice and the focus of this research.

What could scenography offer as an approach?

Scenography in this contextual phase of my research appeared to offer solutions for two theatre-making problems. The first solution was an alternative to my body as the primary tool or site for devising. This need is emphasised by Mackey's definition of a site as "as a geographical location without particular personal attachment or inhabitation" (Mackey, 2016). This is not to say that the site is devoid of meaning or history, but rather that it may not be a personal attachment to the person engaging it. I do not experience my body as a neutral site, devoid of personal attachment and implication, and scenography offered a potential **mediation** between traumatised body and narrative.

The second was the scenographic role in facilitating a group of womxn to create a piece of work that was discussing taboo or difficult subject matter. In both cases, scenography was used as a mediator in the theatre-making process. This research seeks to unpack those ideas further, but also aims to explore other value points or applications in this approach of scenographics as an **intermediary device** between body and narrative in a devised theatre context.

Some of the other benefits or applications emerged during *Taxi Talks* and were then explored throughout the research process. These observations can be read through what scenographics might offer in the relationship between performer/participants in the theatre-making process and then for an audience member to read and experience in the presentation of a theatre piece. The key idea in scenographics as an approach to theatre-making is the potential layering of semiotic and phenomenological strata able to be excavated through the devising, and then in the eventual reception of the work. This potential was observed in *Taxi Talks,* experimented with in the practical research throughout and lays the foundation for the final production, *Hallways*.

The first possibility for scenography as an intermediary device is the **physical and emotional accessibility through the semiotic value** of objects and place. Semiotics are primarily concerned with the structures of representation and in *Taxi Talks* was focused on connotation and shared reference points (Elam, 1980: 9). The most important shared reference point was the taxi itself. The most common association with the taxi was one of discomfort, threat and fear. However, through the process of exploring and often subverting the associations of various objects, the taxi became an important transformative place and was reclaimed by the young womxn. The taxi, and then the narratives that developed through it, were devised through demarcated areas and semiotically loaded objects.

The objects the participants used were mostly familiar and intimate, living simultaneously in the moment of wanting to “make theatre” but also in their daily lives. Examples of these objects were beer crates, which first took on the reference of older men sitting outdoors, drinking beer and discussing community affairs, and then translated into the seats of the taxi for the young womxn to have the same kinds of discussions, often from the opposing point of view. This marked an important moment of subversion and agency as they created narratives about themselves.

Fig 1. Bobbie Fitchen. 2017. T*axi Exterior* [Photograph] (Personal Collection)

Fig 2. Bobbie Fitchen. 2017. T*axi Interior* [Photograph] (Personal Collection)

The womxn were asked to bring found objects and to take photographs on the walking routes they took in their community. These objects were used as stimulus for exploring events or experiences that happened there, which developed both into a metonymic element, embedded in the interior of the taxi as part of visual landscape and map of the community, but also informed narrative beats and characters in the story they developed.

Fig 3. Bobbie Fitchen. 2017. T*axi Collage* [Photograph] (Personal Collection)

Fig 4. Bobbie Fitchen. 2017. T*axi Map* [Photograph] (Personal Collection)

They were also asked to bring special objects from their homes. These were objects marked with sentimental value and placed under the crate/seats for audience members to discover, layering their experience of the performance and installation with additional representational clues and hints about the world and characters that had been created. The last set of objects were introduced by the facilitators and were associated with the focus on biomedical knowledge that underpinned the intention of the project. These objects were often unfamiliar and sometimes threatening with associations of doctors, pain and death. Their purpose as part of healthy practices of bodily knowledge and autonomy were explored and discussed in the devising process. They then became playfully embedded in the taxi as a visual dialogue between their lives, communities and the introduction of new knowledge.

Fig 5. Bobbie Fitchen. 2017. T*axi Front* [Photograph] (Personal Collection)

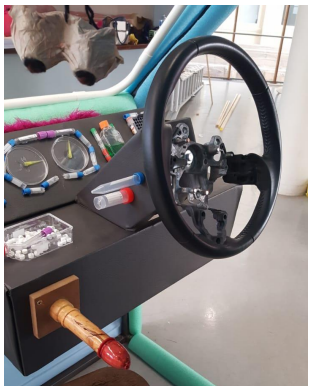

Fig 6. Bobbie Fitchen. 2017. T*axi Wheel* [Photograph] (Personal Collection)

The shared or juxtaposing experiences, associations and references that manifest tangibly and explicitly in the objects, and the taxi devised from those objects, created a deeply personal visual language between not just the participants but audience members as well. This scenographic starting point meant that the eventual narrative was layered with recognisable and important imagery and ideas for both the participants and audience members.

Seeding a narrative with this semiotic weight was a key focus of the practical research. An entry point into the viability of this is framed by Garner's offering of props/objects as functioning metonymically for the entirety of the dramatic world (1998: 57). Similarly, if the entirety of the world can be read through the object, then why not devised through the object with the same degree of encoding?

The point of engagement for theatre-makers and audience is not just located in the semiotic value of the objects and place and what they might represent, and to whom, but also in their **phenomenological potential.** Phenomenology, as defined by Johnston, is "the philosophical study [of] phenomena — how the world shows itself to conscious experience" (2018:2). In short, phenomenology is not the study of "mere appearances" but "the things as they are." (Johnston, 2018:3) and getting "back to the things themselves" (Grant, 2012: 12).

Practical applications and methods of phenomenology are diverse and fluid (Grant, 2012:11). Sofer explores an application of phenomenology explicitly in theatre objects explaining that "the stage object is a site of disclosure as well as reference: an empirical, sensory presence that transcends mere signification" (2017: 674). My practice focus tended towards materiality and its implications in objects. What does "the thing itself" offer us in devising, especially in relation to the body? The value of an object as opposed to, for example, an image is the personal, physical interaction with it. Its material weight and values hold additional and different experiences to the prompt of only sight or sound. It holds the potential for memory and sensory exploration. This exploration of memory as tied to objects, and what that might make available to a theatre-maker, could be framed by Sofer's exploration of objects in relation to time and its potential as a "palimpsestic time machine" (Sofer, 2017: 676). This idea of objects containing the traces of other moments and bodies was an important element in *the things that were passed down* as the different senses were engaged to "unlock" the traces, memories and emotions housed in the objects. The smell of the riding crop, sterile but also salty from the sweat of a palm, evoked powerful bodily responses that helped recollect memories and images I had of the abuse associated with them.

The experiential quality associated with phenomenology is tied to a focus in the experiments of *Eden/Bound* as we sought to explore how an audience might *feel* in a place and what that might offer in devising. In practise, this meant using experiential prompts like textures, smells and sounds to orientate a place through which to devise.

Grant notes a distinct tension between this approach and semiotics, as practical applications of phenomenology in theatre seek to reclaim the object from the network of signs and structures (2012: 9). However these two frameworks are valuable to consider as the responses and engagement when objects may be connotative and able to be read with a sign system. But there may also be experiences that are more embodied, less obvious to locate, in which case practical phenomenology and materiality may offer some approaches and insights. Much of our experimentation in layering meaning into narrative was through the objects we used in place. They offered a unique aspect of representational “readability and writability”, and an ephemeral, personal quality in their material dimensions, that moved beyond the plane of the image and into a network of both signs and physical experiences able to be explored.

In *Still Life* the collection of a gin bottle, belt and spoon created an experience of violence. It was partly the semiotic relationship and assemblage, in time and place, of those items. Individually, they could have carried far less aggressive notions, but combined, and in movement as participants attempted to heighten or lessen the implication of their violence, they were cemented in the shared reference point. However, it was also a sensory experience: the sounds of the belt buckle sharply clanging against the glass of the bottle, the thud of the wooden spoon hitting the floor as a participant hurried to remove it from the scene. The combination of the semiotic weight and the textures of the phenomenological is what located the violence in the objects and place, and the unfolding narrative associated with it.

Though these are important potential applications and explorations, the value of scenography as an intermediary device between body and narrative in devising theatre hinges on its potential to be formative and generative in the theatre-making process.

The following academic frameworks and research locate and argue for scenography, and more specifically scenographics, in this exact position.

Methodology

Creative practice-led research

Scenography and scenographics as strategy for devised theatre will be explored through a creative practice-led research methodology. This methodology "focuses on the nature of creative practice, leading to new knowledge of operational significance for that practice, in order to advance knowledge about or within practice" (Skains, 2018: 85). An element of this approach as opposed to, for example, practice and research, is the relationship between the creative practice and the critical offerings involved in it (Skains, 2018: 85).

Practice-led research, and particularly in how I have approached it, is an iterative process of practice, reflection and theory responding to and informing an ongoing process. The final creative output will be framed and informed by various theoretical underpinnings as well as reflections on work and processes engaged throughout.

Key action terminology and concepts

Devising theatre: a framework

"Devised theatre can start from anything." (Oddey, 1994: 1)

Alison Oddey's opening statement of *Devising Theatre*: *A practical and theoretical handbook* offers an encouraging point of departure with its implications of fluidity, alternatives and relative lack of limits, for how and why scenography may work as an approach for devising theatre.

A key choice for why devising theatre is being considered as the framework for exploring this strategy is because of the alternative offerings and the destabilising of hierarchies found in conventionally formed theatre: that which prioritises the playwright and director, but leaves little creative flexibility and contribution for the other participants, including the scenographer (Oddey, 1994: 4, Hickie, 2009: 46). Devised theatre is not defined by a particular set of recognisable aesthetics or styles but conceived through processes of experimentation and sets of creative strategies (Hickie, 2009: 62).This focus offers a shift in the role of scenography away from serving as

only the aesthetic layer of a piece of theatre, but potentially positions it as an active player in its formation with its own unique ways of working.

Oddey defines how these devising processes work: through a “group of people who set up an initial framework or structure to explore and experiment with ideas, images, concepts, themes or specific stimuli that might include music, text, objects, paintings or movement” (Oddey, 1994: 1). This seems to offer a comfortable guideline for how scenography in devising might work; a group of people set up a framework (a methodology, strategy or approach comprising games, activities and exercises) to explore and experiment with specific stimuli (object and place) to create a piece of work. Oddey, however, also notes the importance of devising as a process is defined, in part, by its engagement with a group, focusing on ideas of collaboration, process and multi-vision, and resisting the “single vision” of a director figure, which makes it a potentially challenging framework for creative practice that is personal and singular, as in the example of *the things that were passed down* which I devised alone (1994: 3). This however is challenged by Hickie who notes that, though rare, devised theatre can be generated by a solo performer or auteur director (2009:62).

Though connections can be drawn between how scenography and devising might speak to each other, locating, historically and practically, where and how scenography fits into the devising process is not explicitly addressed in Oddey’s work. This is affirmed by Hickie who explores a history and context for scenography in the devising context and highlights that its position, process and contribution is under-researched and documented, due mostly to the fluid nature of the devising process and includes Oddey’s work in this limitation (Hickie, 2009: 2). Despite this lack of specifics, Hickie notes that devised theatre, because of its democratic treatment of creative input and expression, as the space where “scenography may be allowed to come into its own... as an aesthetic tool capable of adding its own layer of meaning to the theatrical performance, and indeed fundamentally influencing the form and content of the end performance product” (2009: 63).

While Oddey and others do not necessarily offer the specifics of scenographers and scenography as a formative participant, they do offer strategies intended for other disciplines that could be adapted and reimagined to apply to scenography. Hickie offers some loose descriptions of the potential strategy with “using visual, three-dimensional tools an environment can be created in which the actors can ‘play’, utilising objects, colour, shape, and space as stimuli for performance creation” (2009: 66).

Therefore, while specific strategies for using scenography in devised theatre are not always well documented, it does seem to offer a potentially rich framework for exploring scenography as a distinctive strategy to contribute to the devising process. In order to unpack these approaches, an understanding of the unique potential of scenography and its placement in the theatre-making process requires further exploration.

Scenography and scenographics: place and object

"...there is no theatre practice without scenography" (Hann 2019: 2)

Both Howard and Hann argue the need to challenge the position of the scenographer and scenography relative to performance and director vision in the theatre-making process. Hann draws attention to "established orthodoxies of theatre practice, such as scenography's symbiosis with stage and design as a servicing *for* performance" (2019: 14). Howard relates the descriptions given by designers about their relationship to directors and a disturbing infrastructure is exposed "above all, it emerged, a designer had to be like a wife — supportive, a friend and a partner, ready to cooperate… good with money, decorative, good sense of humour, and accepting that no relationship is finite and when someone else came along, you would be passed over" (2006: 26). The troubling gendered comparison should not be cast aside; there is a hierarchy revealed in this relationship premised on antiquated notions that denies both the equality and the potential of the designer in the creative process. This role of scenographer or designer as participatory and reactive rather than formative and creative is also affirmed by Hannah and Harsløf: "The contemporary scenographer is generally expected to serve and supplement the theatre director's imagination rather than initiate projects or experiments with their spatial realm" (2008: 12).

Howard offers a different, synchronous relationship between directors and designers that attempts to avoid the "master servant relationship, euphemism for collaboration and to develop real working practices which are appropriate for the theatre of today" (2006: 28). The focus on creating a shared vocabulary, a set of expectations and established processes between director and designer is also the focus of Roznowski and Domer's book, *Collaboration in the Theatre: A Practical Guide for Designers and Directors* (2009). Hann, however, seeks to disrupt the very notion of the scenographer's role in the formative process of theatre-making. This is a key framework through which to posit the placement of scenography in its generative potential.

Hann positions scenography as central to all theatre-making with a re-reading of the “stage-scene” symbiosis in Ancient Greek theatre. By exploring the very placement of a *skēnē* (a tent or hut that marked an “off-world”) in the *orchēstra* Hann posits scenographic interventions as fundamental and formative to the process of “worlding” and therefore the very structure of theatre-making. In this she contends that scenography is an activity intended not only for scenographers, as some kind of distinct participant, but rather as a holistic strategy for theatre-making that implicates directors, performers, choreographers and dramaturgs (2019:3). With this assertion Hann immediately disrupts the assumed role of scenography in the process of theatre-making and offers an alternative for its applications — one that is aligned with the formative input.

One of Hann’s key focuses is scenography as a crafting of place orientation. This focus on “place” instead of “space” is unusual. The concept of place as fixed, reductive and figurative, and space as open-ended and active is one of the more typical approaches to scenography and its placement, and is shared by theatre theorist Howard (2009) who dedicates entire chapters of her work to the potential available in a space with a key idea offered as space lying “silent, empty, inert” waiting to be “conquered, harnessed, changed” through interventions of scenography (Howard, 2009: 1).

Hann, however, argues against the concept of space as the empty canvas or the “abstract placeless void from which creativity emerges” (2019: 919). Foucault (1986) and Lefebvre (1991) explore how space is embedded with and produced by systems of power. Hann uses this to argue that the ideological positioning of space as open and ethereal nullifies this knowledge. She, therefore, disregards the terminology of space, unless referring to the spatial, because of this particular positioning with power and illusions of transparency and neutrality (2019: 949). Instead of space she focuses on scenography as place orientation, as a crafting of “stage-place” and, in fact, highlights scenographies' capacities to potentially reveal the political and ideological ordering of spaces (2019: 968). Hann’s place orientation resists the idea of scenography as static — as a set piece located on a stage — but rather considers how scenography orientates a place, both physical and the *feeling* of a place, through multiple dynamics including the relationships between bodies and objects, the atmospheric qualities as well as the learned social conventions of the place. She situates it as a “process of material acclimatisation that occurs *in time”*; framing it as assemblage, in process and affective (Hann 2019: 814).

As part of this shift Hann also differentiates concepts of scenography and scenographics, a distinction that creates a direction for how devising using scenography, in this project, might look. Hann presents scenography as associated with *crafting* and scenographic traits with *orientating.* She

frames this distinction more explicitly by aligning scenography with light, costume, scenery, sound — associating the categories with the stagecraft; and scenographics with locationality, light, sound, texture, scent, memory — aligning it closer to concepts of process and assemblage (Hann, R. 2018).

Scenographics or scenographic traits offer less distinctive methods or outcomes than scenography but focus on place orientation and the physical, social and atmospheric qualities that will reveal the feeling of place. This conceptual difference reflects a similar relationship to ideas of performance and performativity, theatre and theatricality, choreography and choreographic (Hann, 2019: 4). These scenographic traits are where I am focusing my creative research. While Hann does not explicitly denote it, it feels as though the stage craft associated with scenography is too closely aligned with the orthodoxies earlier described; the ones that do not position scenographic input as necessarily formative in theatre-making. Because the quality of scenographic traits offers an insight into, as she terms it, not what scenography *is* but what scenography *does* there feels like a looser, experiential, more experimental application of the qualities that may more comfortably challenge the position of scenographic input in the devising process.

Through these frameworks I will focus on scenographics rather than scenography, and place rather than space. Earlier in this paper I made reference to “space” especially when discussing *Taxi Talks.* I am choosing to keep that terminology as it is the wording we used in that context, and adjusting it now to retrofit a different concept feels inauthentic. Moving forward in the paper there are still moments of tension between these terms, but I will work to acknowledge them and, if unresolved, attempt to enjoy their implication of a project in process, reflecting and shifting to engage new ideas both in theory and in creative practice.

Hann provides a strong framework for the unusual element of place in exploring scenographic mediations in devising theatre. The other scenographic element, object, is more common to the formative process of theatre and its value is well documented. McAuley dedicates a chapter to objects in performance and highlights its value as a versatile element on stage able to be flexible, multifunctional and take on multiple meanings (1999:170). She explores their potential in performance as signifier but also in the process of rehearsal in developing character and situation (1999:200), indicating as an example Grotowski’s use of props to create “dynamic orchestration” of dramatic action (1999:172). McAuley signals the use of props to facilitate action (1999:177), as well as misused or misappropriated props to indicate a shift of energies or faculties (1999:197). Hann includes considerations of objects as she argues that “scenographics are interventional acts of place orientation” and uses the placement of a lone chair in a seminar room, slightly angled and orientated

towards her and her colleagues. She declares the chair “scenographic”, where the object and its placement or orientation has evoked a distinct potential for dramatic action and an invitation for potential action (2019:1141).

Similarly, the use of objects as a stimulus in devising theatre is not a revolutionary concept. Hickie refers explicitly to the value of the found object in the rehearsal process and references Tadeusz Kantor’s description of a “Bio-Object” — an organic combination of object and actor which provided the stimulus for the physical form of a performance (2009: 71).

This already acknowledged value of the object in devising theatre positions it comfortably in a generative category. A key difference in how this research has approached the object in devising is as less of a stimulus (as it is often used) and rather as an ongoing, embedded feature of generating narrative throughout the process and in performance. This approach, and explorations of place orientation as the features of scenographics as an intermediary device between body and narrative, can be seen in the three pieces of theatre developed thus far.

Place and object as approaches to devising theatre

Still Life (2019)

Hickie offers some potential starting points for how a scenographic approach in devising might work by flagging that “at the outset of the rehearsal process, particular emphasis is placed on the establishment of a play space, with all sorts of objects, materials, research documentation, games and other rule or event-based practices available for individual or collective exploration” (Hickie, 2009: 64). This play “space” implies some kind of demarcation or delineated area to work in and the introduction of objects is a strong starting point. This approach is similar to how *Still Life* developed.

Still Life was a part performance, part facilitation intervention exploring memory, emotion and agency through object and space. At that point in the process I was navigating the language and implications of space and place, and referred to it as space, but will continue throughout this section referring to it as space/place, indicating the start of the shift in language and application. The

purpose of *Still Life* was to play out, with and through audience/participants, the emotions and memories that are tied to objects and to stage interventions that consider the meaning and influence of those objects and a potential shifting therein. This was premised out of a hunch that objects, as well as spaces/places are imbued and embedded with memories, ideas and feelings constructed through experiences; and that some kind of active scenographic intervention could reveal or construct the narratives and stories marked in those objects and their relationships to one another. This first intervention was initially conceptualised with my needs as a theatre-maker for scenography to work as a means to create theatre without using my body as the site. It focused on trauma and the ways in which objects associated with trauma could be managed through scenographic interventions in order to disrupt the associations with the object.

The performance/facilitation involved the audience being explicitly guided with “rules”: “To play: one person at a time may move any object or person in the demarcated space. You may take the object or body from anywhere in the room. You may be prompted or guided. Or not.” At first they watched me, the facilitator/performer, pull objects out of a box and lay them out on the floor. The box was in the centre of a square marked out with masking tape with distorted geometric shapes reflecting the box on each of its sides. Once the objects were all on the ground, I pulled notes of poetry from the box, read one and then placed a vignette or assemblage of objects in one of the shapes on the floor, as if prompted by the note. I gave another example using the note as a guide and introduced an audience member into one of the vignettes.

Audience members first intervened with singular objects; one person dropped a wooden brush violently onto the floor after the last prompt of “when he is at the end of his tether”. Another participant read a note and constructed an entire vignette. Some audience members inserted themselves into the assemblage and other participants manoeuvred them both as object and subject.

There were various observations and reflections that then informed the theatre pieces and processes following it. A key point of interest was the ways in which the demarcation of space/place (with the use of masking tape on the floor) contained the vignettes explicitly and created important moments for objects to be removed completely from the intervention. Considering that the original intention was to disrupt potentially traumatic objects, this was an important factor in the element of agency as a participant could remove an object from the space/place of meaning and representation. This was an exciting moment of practice in dialogue with theory, as McAuley refers to

the power of the hidden prop in a narrative, only referred to in language or a marked absence, as important in expressing ideas too painful or difficult to manifest physically (1999:195).

The point of shared semiotic weight was also evident in *Still Life* when audience members/participants had strong reactions to certain objects (a wooden spoon, a gin bottle and a belt) that seems to collectively signify violence. The audience members/participants never voiced or discussed the implications of the objects and the spaces/places they were occupying, but through various interventions in the space/place and with the objects demonstrated a shared understanding and expectation for the developing narrative.

Fig 7. Joanna Glanville, 2019. *Minor Project Objects 2*. [Photograph] (Personal Collection)

Eden/Bound (2019)

“Scenography does not make place, it navigates place” (Hann, 2019: 949)

The potential of the explicit demarcation of space/place in *Still Life* informed the focus for the next experiment, *Eden/Bound.* This was a devised theatre piece that was the result of a series of workshops with a group of five students with various foci in theatre-making, directing, performance and scenography. This range of interests was a key decision as one of the questions being considered in this work is the placement of scenography not only as a tool for scenographers but as a holistic tool for theatre-makers. In eight three-hour workshops over the space of a month we broke

down and explored the different scenographic elements available in a place. We worked strategically to build a system to explore a place as a group, guided by various prompts.

The next section focuses on the building blocks, systems, games and activities developed that will be employed in the final research output, *Hallways*.

Two key frameworks were considered in building an approach or strategy that focuses on place for devising theatre. The first was a set of definitions offered by McAuley (1999) around the presentational space and fictional place. The second was articulating a vocabulary and process that aligned to concepts of the scenographic and place orientation as offered by Hann (2019).

McAuley unpacks the differences between space and place in the theatre in her chapter on “a taxonomy of spatial function” (1999). The key ideas that were drawn on from this work were the relationship between the spatial physical and fictional relationships, and particularly the concept of a presentational space and a fictional place. The presentational space organises the expectation of a performance of some kind; it demarcates the action. This action extends beyond the physicality of the set and scenographic elements, and encompasses all of the physical occupations of the stage by the actors, their interactions and the physical space that make up this presentational space. The fictional place refers to the place(s) “presented, represented or evoked both onstage or off” (McAuley, 1999: 92).

The starting point for the workshops was the presentational space and fictional place. We reconsidered the concept of the presentational *space* into a presentational *place* as we were applying the same principles of place orientation to both. We focused first on developing a presentational place and how a place is marked with dramatic potential, presentational and representational values. The purpose of the presentational place in the devising was twofold: to consider another layer of potential engagement for the creator; and to explore how an audience member might participate in the final theatre piece. We asked ourselves how do theatre-makers know that “something could happen” and prepare themselves to create or participate? How does the creator unlock what is already available to be navigated in the place to inform or prompt a moment in devising? How do audience members know that “something is about to happen” and prepare themselves to read, feel or experience what is being presented? And lastly, what do different scenographic elements and techniques offer that could embed a semiotic or phenomenological seed, in that moment of the presentational place, that could be grown, amplified or referred to throughout the devising process and eventually into the piece of theatre?

Once we had devised a presentational place we devised a fictional place that lived alongside, rubbed up against or sat inside the presentational place. It was the “world” in and through which the piece of theatre would be devised using the elements offered by the place. It was in both of these explorations of presentational and fictional place that we, though not explicitly aware of it at the time, were participating in an orientation of place, and a feeling of place, using various scenographic mechanisms.

We created various exercises to locate, explore and navigate the scenographic elements in and of the place. The three key features were the scenographic toolbox, the prompts and the games. A vital element was creating a shared language — because we were not all scenographers and practised in identifying and using scenographic elements explicitly in our creative practice — we created a “scenographic toolbox”. We brainstormed all the elements of a place that could be manipulated, explored, or revealed. They were captured visually to reflect not just the term itself but an association for its potential. Some of them were remarkably similar to the specific scenographics that Hann describes, like light, sound and texture. But other interesting elements were delineation, levels, smell and temperature. All of these were scenographic elements not explicitly tied to set or props but rather opportunities to amplify, navigate, orientate towards a place and a feeling of place. We would then use this language in directed ways during the prompts and games structure of the process.

Fig 8. Joanna Glanville, 2020. *Scenographic Toolbox 1*. [Photograph] (Personal Collection)

Fig 9. Joanna Glanville, 2020. *Scenographic Toolbox 2*. [Photograph] (Personal Collection)

The second approach to orientating both the presentational and fictional place was through the use of prompts. Though we were not cognisant of it at the time the directions that we took followed Hann's description of place orientation that include the "intangible atmospheric qualities (dim-bright, hot-cold, loud-quiet), along with learned social conventions (familiar-unfamiliar, friend-stranger, safe-risky)" (Hann, 2019: 813). A component of what we initially focused on was the physical elements of the presentational place and the emotional elements of the fictional place, and what that might encourage in a devising process. Our prompts were from a variety of sources including words, music, objects and images. This use of stimuli is already aligned with common devised theatre practice. Our process, however, focused on the response, which might typically have required a focus on the body, on what was available in the place to be explicitly orientated to express or respond to the prompt.

Once we had established the language and decided whether we wanted to work towards a presentational or fictional place, we chose a prompt and began orientating the place to reflect it. In an attempt to navigate what was available in the place we chose not to bring in any additional props or elements and were only able to manipulate what was in the place or use the materials that we had included in the process: newspaper, string, masking tape and black marker pens. This was one of the most powerful choices we made as a group. The limitation on materials forced an exciting response to place orientation that focused less on representation and more on an experience of the place, leaving it more open-ended in the devising process.

We then devised a set of games that directed the orientations of the place. The most successful involved combinations of types of prompts, time frames and participation of people.

The first combination involved all participants working simultaneously using the prompt to guide the place orientation. They would often chat and joke as they worked; it tended to work best with a word prompt and also a limited time frame so they would play intuitively and bounce off of each other's ideas by discussing them and then trying them out. They would all stay in the game for the entire duration. We often used this when trying to create a presentational place and considering the physical, atmospheric qualities that we could draw out. One good example was a "cold" presentational place.

To create a cold place that did not speak to the fictional but rather the presentational place, we imagined the first few moments of the place as experienced from the perspective of the audience. We walked a distance away from the rehearsal room, through sticky, humid corridors and then

entered the rehearsal room. The moment of opening the door was met with a blast of freezing air and a pitch-black room with only an ethereal swirling of blue light on the ceiling. It reminded me of images I had seen of the Aurora Borealis or Northern Lights. That reference was not really of coldness but of vastness, which has its own feelings of smallness, aloneness and coldness. The experience of the slow-moving blue light was matched by ethereal, high-pitched music, and the only bodies that could be seen were through flashes of soft light from the swirl of blue light on the ceiling; all the people were huddled around the light, tightly packed as though keeping each other warm. The place was orientated through what was available: the aircon, finding a way to black out the window, an old blue plastic water bottle found in a dustbin manipulated into a filter with a cellphone light. The orientation of bodies together signalled a feeling in the players that might trigger a feeling in the spectator. The presence of bodies on stage also signalled to the spectator that “something might happen”.

Fig 10. Joanna Glanville, 2019. *Northern Lights*. [Screenshot] (Personal Collection)

Fig 11. Joanna Glanville, 2019. *Experimenting*. [Screenshot] (Personal Collection)

An interesting potential in this approach to devising is that through considering the presentational place first, what is also being considered is how we are anticipating and wanting the audience to *feel* physically and emotionally when they see this piece of work, and how the place can be orientated to achieve that feeling or experience before the theatre piece even starts.

The second way of orienting the place was using the scenographic elements (sometimes choosing to only focus on one or two), a prompt and then a game of “tagging” or “building”. This tended to work best with prompts that were more abstract with fewer instinctively collective associations, like music or images. It also tended to work better with much longer periods of time. Tagging was a game that asked one person at a time to orientate the place while the other participants watched.

The person only left the game once they were tagged out by another person. This had a twofold effect. The first was that the person playing and orientating had to stay engaged, even if they felt they had achieved what they thought they wanted. This often meant that people pushed through their original assumptions and expectations because they were stuck there until somebody tagged them out. The second effect was that those watching had a prolonged perspective of the unfolding of the place and only tagged themselves in when they felt ready to engage. Building was a combination of tagging and collaborative group work; the participants could enter and exit the place as they wanted, watch the place unfolding as other people worked, or work alongside another person, feeding off of their offerings and reacting immediately. In both tagging and building the participants tended not to speak to each other and communicated only through their actions of navigating the place.

There were two key observations during this process. After playing a series of games that helped us formulate a specific place, through which we would then devise, one of the students noted that a “place first” strategy seeded depths and potential that could be excavated throughout the devising process. It integrated visual markers, semiotic weight and phenomenological textures more deeply and coherently than they had experienced before because it was the formative and generative component of the process. The kinds of metaphoric and metonymic value they were able to explore in the narrative building was more potent than if it had been applied as an aesthetic “layer” later in the devising.

The other insight was during a short piece using the presentational place of “rough” and the fictional place of “romantic”. An assumption that we initially had was that the place orientation would happen and then, afterwards, the devising process could happen inside the place. This was disrupted in a number of our short pieces but most obviously in the rough/romantic.

The rough/romantic devising came out of wanting to explore the presentational and fictional place in relation to one another. Because it was the first time we would be orientating both places in one game we decided to work with a more familiar strategy: a word prompt narrowed down our scenographic elements to focus on light and texture and worked in a collaborative group. The collaborators started by orientating the presentational place of “rough”, beginning as many of the other presentational places did by considering the experience of a spectator walking into the place. A spectator would have been greeted by dark space devoid of sound except that of something high pitched being dragged across the floor. Your path would have been guided by hessian strings knotted together and forming ominous sculpture-like barriers to either side of you. Your path would

have been illuminated briefly by white light flashing arrhythmically. Your movement forward would have been dictated by a jostling of bodies to either side of you, knocking you towards the back of the room, into a dark corner. As you walked, furniture was being moved violently around you — the sound of a metal table leg hitting the floor, or a chair being dragged aggressively — sometimes they would block your path and you would have to try and move around it while avoiding a colliding body. Torn up paper flitted around your face as in the aftershock of a bomb detonated moments before.

Fig 12. Joanna Glanville, 2019. *Rough*. [Screenshot] (Personal Collection)

Fig 13. Joanna Glanville, 2019. *Romantic*. [Screenshot] (Personal Collection)

Once this presentational place had been orientated the collaborators considered the fictional place “romantic”. Even as they had been working in the presentational place the devising had begun through questions and experiments in the presentational place. How did it get like this? What happened just before this? What happened just after this? What was the specific context of this place in this time? Many of the questions they were asking themselves reflected Hann’s conceptualisation of place orientation as the “process of material acclimatisation that occurs *in time”* (2019: 814). This prompted the questions that orientated the fictional place of “romantic”. They imagined the “rough” presentational as the after-effect of a romance gone wrong and devised a narrative through working “backwards” to recover the fictional place, the place at the start of the romantic relationship. The collaborators devised a love scene using the trajectory and connections between the two places, and the physical and experiential elements that had exposed, to devise not just the narrative but the blocking, characters and relationships.

This exploration cemented the idea of the place not as somewhere in which to do the devising, but inherent to the devising.

the things that were passed down (2020)

This evidence of place as narrative generating prompted the exploration of objects as an intermediary device between body and narrative in *the things that were passed down.* The research sought to prove the potential of this as a general application to narrative building, but ultimately was the one that offered solutions to a key need in my own practice: a way to feel safe making theatre, a process that would not rely on using only my traumatised body as the site.

This solo piece was originally conceived of as live performance, but due to the Covid-19 pandemic was presented as a digital reflection. The final digital work reflects both the narrative and images that came from the process, but also includes components of the scenographic strategy used in the process; it asks the reader to explore their own objects, their semiotic and phenomenological value, and the potential of their relationships and hierarchies in exposing and disrupting the meaning associated with them, as well as orientating them to explore a narrative. *the things that were passed down* explored a complex legacy of abuse in my family and was an experiment in scenographics as an intermediary in un/recovering memory and agency as narrative in the theatre-making process. It used childhood objects, a riding crop, helmet and shoes, as a mnemonic prompt, narrative guide and visual expression to excavate the narrative that I had been unable to explore with my body as the site or device.

Fig 14. Joanna Glanville, 2020. *Example of digital narrative*. [Photograph] (Personal Collection)

Fig 15. Joanna Glanville, 2020. *Example of digital process*. [Photograph] (Personal Collection)

While the objects that were used in *Taxi Talks* and *Still Life* were semiotically familiar to participants, the objects in this work had another layer of being explicitly mnemonic and phenomenological. They held a powerful resemblance to the original objects of my childhood that I was able to evoke hazy memories triggered by the objects' features like textures, smells and shapes. Tapping into the memories associated with objects of abuse was sensitive work and so engagement was far less ordered and prescriptive than *Eden/Bound.* Instead, I adopted and extended approaches from *Still Life.* I physically demarcated a place of meaning-making so that objects could be moved in and out, depending on the response to the memories. I used scenographic elements of proportion, space and levels, the values of the objects themselves, and relative to one another, to explore and affirm both their emotional weight and interventions that might unsettle that weight order to construct a narrative.

An important turning point in my practice was exploring object as body and body as object as a means of stepping in and out of the narrative building process. This had occurred during *Still Life* as well and was extended in this piece. The position and meaning of the object, and disruption of the hierarchy of between human-body-subject and object is an ongoing discussion in performance and scenographic theory. Sofer highlights key recent shifts in the thinking, including thing theory, new materialisms, object-orientated ontology, post-humanism and actor-network theory in his discussion (2017: 674). While the research I have embarked on does not explicitly align to any of these frameworks, it does rely on a disruption of active body/passive object hierarchy to allow the object to work as a mediatory stand-in for the theatre-maker both in process and performance.

Kantor's "Bio-Object" reflects this disruption with the object "on equal footing with the actor" (Juntenen, 2020: 31). In the specific work referred to, *The Dead Class* (1975), the objects are raised to human value, but the human is devalued to object status. The application of this is powerful in the context of the piece exploring the experiences of being dehumanised during the Holocaust and in occupied territories during a war. However, my practice does not seek to devalue the human, but to elevate the object to work both as representative in performance and as mediatory stand-in during the process of devising. The practical application of this in the process meant I could physically step in and out of the improvising and devising, and replace my body with an object. This meant I could observe, manipulate and engage from a position that did not require my body to carry any meaning explicitly. It allowed me to transfer meaning, in the moment, from my body to the object. I could then choose which moments would be performed by my body, and which would be performed by the objects standing in for my body.

I also introduced the use of ubiquitous objects, different sized chairs juxtaposed with the weightier, symbolic objects of the riding crop, helmet and shoes in the process and performance. This diminished some of the associative anxiety around abuse I had and allowed a narrative to effectively be unpacked. The use of the everyday objects also heightened the metaphor of the symbolic objects through their emotional contrasts.

The objects in the process of un/recovering the memories was mostly a phenomenological experience, but translation of that narrative relied on semiotic encoding of the objects so that an audience might relate to the emotional resonance of the piece. Elam's transformability of the sign[1] guided this instinct as the objects took on different representations, fulfilling different narrative beats (1980: 11). The riding crop was a crop, a stick, a penis. The helmet was a hat, a head, a girl, a vagina. The different chairs represented different people in different moments.

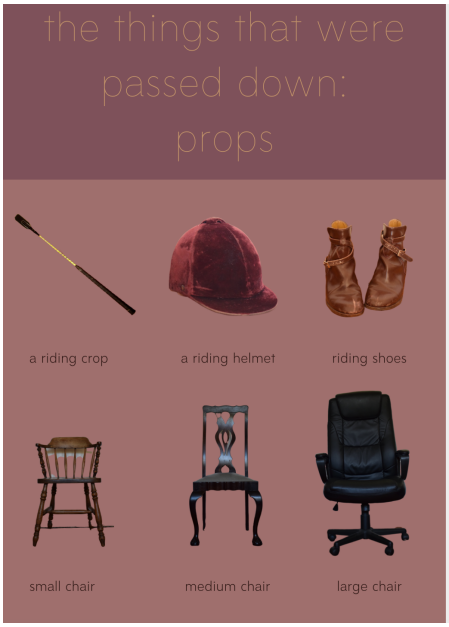

Fig 16. Joanna Glanville, 2020. *Objects*. [Photograph] (Personal Collection)

Fig 17. Joanna Glanville, 2020. *Penis/Vagina*. [Photograph] (Personal Collection)

This disruption of body/object hierarchy may seem counterintuitive in creating emotional connection with an audience, who might primarily experience themselves as human/subject rather than an

[1] The transformation of the sign-vehicle's meaning without a physical transformation

object. However the experience that I had as a theatre-maker in resisting exploring painful subject matter *with* a body, may also be experienced by an audience who might disassociate or disengage from violent content enacted *on* a body. They may, however, remain engaged with the object replacement. Using Lara Foot-Newton's *Tshepang* (2004) as an example, Fitzpatrick offers an alternative to this, highlighting the absence of the actual violated and vulnerable body, replaced with a broken broomstick and loaf of bread, means the audience must substitute another body in its place — potentially their own, and therefore heightening the emotional connection (2018: 207-208).

This experiment with objects used to generate the narrative highlighted several interesting applications: objects as mnemonic triggers for memories that can be used to create narrative, as encoded with semiotic value to be excavated by theatre-makers and read by an audience, as a mediatory stand in for the body, both in process and performance.

The applications and ideas explored here, as well as the games, systems and processes devised throughout will culminate in the final production, *Hallways*.

Hallways

The title of the final production, *Hallways,* refers to a metaphor that reflects the experience and intention of scenographics as an intermediary device between body and narrative. For the purposes of this work, I am using the term "hallway" to signify both a hallway and corridor to reference the implications of both places.

A hallway is typically a place facilitating movement from an exterior to the inner area of a building. It is often the meeting point for visitors. Corridors tend to be longer, already located in the interior and often have multiple doors leading off them. Neither of them, though, are final destinations; they are liminal and transient. Liminality implies not just a physical, geographical experience but a conceptual one (Shortt, 2014: 6). It is the place where with liberation from "structural obligations" (Turner, 1982: 27) and where "anything may happen" (Turner, 1974: 13). This flexibility and implication of experimentation provides the perfect place for scenography to shed its position in orthodoxal hierarchies of theatre-making and to stake a claim in being a generative, experimental, formative contributor to the devising process.

The hallway provides exciting visual implications for the process and the final production. The hallway is not the final destination; it is a means of getting from one place to another, of getting a body to the narrative. This in-between place could reflect a moment of **mediation** and refuge, before approaching a difficult world on the other side of a door. It could be an action of solitude, testing out the various doors of a corridor. It is a place that evokes **feelings and memories**. In a domestic setting this is the difference between walking straight into someone's bedroom or walking down a hallway lined with photographs from their childhood, their books and trinkets. It is both the owners of the bedrooms telling different stories about themselves to visitors and the visitors hunting for signs. It is a place that offers **semiotic** encoding and decoding in the expectations of the destination. It is the notices on the walls, arrows on the floors and numbered doors of a high school corridor that orientate experience and direction.

In the final process and production of this creative research, the hallway is where we, theatre-makers and audience, will test how the scenographic elements of place and object can be used to devise theatre. The potential I am hoping to explore is how scenography can be used as an intermediary device between body and narrative. This may be unpacked in terms of a traumatised body, or not. I am also looking to explore places and objects as rich sources of semiotic and phenomenological experiences for both theatre-makers and audience. We will use the games, strategies and systems created through this entire research process, to explore how to unlock that potential and manifest it into narrative. The final production is still in the process of being devised, but is likely to take the shape of an interactive installation that centres on different performances, created through the research with the students with whom I have been collaborating. There will also be participatory moments that explore and demonstrate the process of scenographics in devising theatre with theatre-makers and audience members.

This explication has sought to frame the final thesis production, *Hallways*. This was done by giving context to the research — focusing on the exploration of scenography and scenographics as an intermediary device between body and narrative. It has framed key concepts in devised theatre, scenography and scenographics, as well as defined used terminologies. It has explored the specifics of place and object, using theory and reflections on the works created thus far —*Still Life, Eden/Bound* and *the things that were passed down* — to articulate the scenographic strategies that will be employed in the final production. Lastly, it provided a controlling metaphor to reflect on the process developed through the research and to frame the final production, *Hallways*.

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