L I v I n g   R o o m

Documentation of the workshop, 15/16 November 2022, leading up to the Being Human sharing and panel discussion at Rose Bruford College, 16th November (see separate podcast recording).

This is one of three documents:

1. Living Room project overview
2. Workshop notes (this document)
3. Podcast of the panel discussion

Living Room is an ongoing inter-disciplinary research project exploring how we can turn a(ny) room into a room that can host and support a performance, facilitated by a better understanding of theatre scenography (staging/set/lighting/sound). How can we use the arts to improve the way we use the spaces we work in?

The workshop explored ideas around staging, collaboration, and scenography – working in a 'neutral' (non-theatre) space.

The workshop in part develops ideas from a previous research project called *Night On Earth*. *Night On Earth* is a practice research performance project, very loosely based on Jim Jarmusch's 1991 film of the same title. It is performed to an audience watching from within a car and is underpinned by a conceptualization of mise-en-scène that does not treat it as an abstract but as a fundamental part of the performance itself. This is a deliberate departure from Pavis's claim that the mise-en- scène is "an organising principle" instead of a concrete element of a live piece. *Night On Earth* seeks to make a performance that foregrounds those component parts that are not usually apparent to the audience in theatre productions. These parts included a car, a soundtrack (George Thorogood's *Bad to the Bone*), a building, and two actors performing simultaneously in separate rooms. The dramatic structure of *Night on Earth* is influenced by Jarmusch's idea of connecting different threads that are united by the place where they are enacted in. In this way the piece is not driven by dramaturgy but by a synthetic structure originating from an organic theme – in this case America in the 1950s, a period of ostensive peace – but which might not be demonstrably evident to the audience.

Fig 1 – Images from Night On Earth, Rose Bruford College, 2017-2019.

The Living Room workshop responded and tested ideas developed in Night On Earth, exploring ways of staging Act III/scene 4 from Macbeth (the Banquo's Ghost scene). I chose that scene somewhat randomly - looking for a piece of text from a well know play, and one that offers a staging 'problem' (how to make the ghost appear). Also, as we worked with a group of primary school children, a bold and graphic text seemed a good choice.

Working over a 3 hour session on day 1, the performers Toph, India and I created a scenographic structure for the scene. I was very directive with regards to choices being made, which included movement and blocking for the performers (playing Macbeth and Lady M). We worked at a speed that is very unusual from a performer's perspective, but quite common for my (a lighting designer's) way of working.

Here's some images from the room:

Fig 2 – Rehearsal images from Living Room, Rose Bruford College, November 2022

We started by 'cleaning up' the room, removing clutter. We then focused on aspects of the room that might be useful: the white board, the large windows and blinds, the room divider screen. Chairs. We quite quickly decided that the audience would sit in a single row of chairs along the windows, and the panellists would sit facing them, in a semi-circle arrangement. We then made some very quick decisions about staging the scene: the panel members would be the guests at the Macbeth's banquet, so 'on stage'. There would be two empty chairs for Macbeth and Lady M, and there would be two movement sequences introducing the two main characters and covering the visit of the ghost. I had preselected two music tracks (a John Lurie instrumental from Mystery Train and Oh Yeah by Roxy Music). Both were vinyl tracks so I had brought a record player. There was our scenographic structure: chairs, music, bodies. I added a single theatre light on a stand, to give some extra lighting options/control, if needed.

By the end of the first workshop session, we had confirmed a structure for the scene, blocked the movement, and included music and food/drinks for the dinner guests. Working at this speed meant no time for character work or nuance, but it did mean that we could use the room and it's properties to provide story telling support in a way that we might not have otherwise.

The second workshop on day 2 lasted 2 hours. We used the first hour to recap the work from day 1, added lighting by using the single spotlight to create mood for the dinner party and the appearance of the ghost.

The structure was:

1. On clearance, Macbeth starts playing the John Lurie track on the record player. We use a mic to amplify the action around the record player/pull focus.
2. Macbeth and Lady M movement sequence, welcoming their guests (panel)
3. Macbeth serves drinks
4. Lady M starts the dancing / puts on Roxy Music track
5. Macbeth sees the ghosts for first time
6. Sees ghost for second time
7. Sees ghost for third time
8. End

We then welcomed the Year 3/4 Primary School children and their teacher. We showed them what we had made, and then gave them specific instructions on what we wanted them to do: at the start of the performance they were gathered around the white board, writing on it 'Macbeth' and the 3 times table. They then rush on to tell Macbeth that Banquo has been murdered (after he has served the drinks) and leave the space. They then gather outside the large windows and bang on the windows loudly when the ghost appears for the second time.
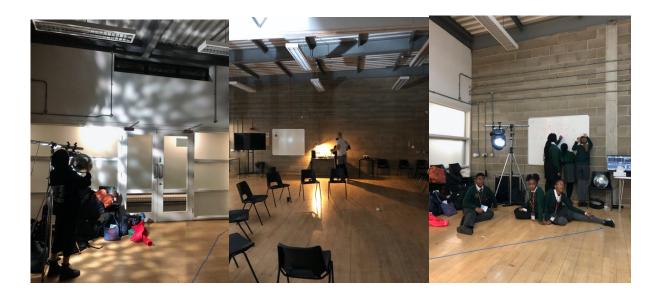
 Fig 3 – Living Room dress rehearsal.

Findings/reflection:

The workshop revealed some useful areas for further exploration. Compared to Night On Earth, having a structured text to work from felt less satisfactory then using the much more open non-linear narrative from Night On Earth. So, applying this to a possible toolkit for the way we use the spaces we work and live in: I wonder if the use of mise-en-scène and scenographic tools is better suited to buildings and rooms that have an open flow rather than a fixed use. So the toolkit might be better suited to hospitals, refugee and community centres, or terminal buildings then to classrooms or court rooms.

Next steps:

-   I would like to work with both Professor Roger Kneebone and Judge Peter Rook on developing and testing a toolkit in their work spaces.
-   Identify partners for 'open' spaces (community centres/hospitals) and test again
-   Start preparing and sharing a tool kit for the better use of the spaces we work in.

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