



sean coyle

An exegesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Auckland
University of Technology for the degree of Master of Art and Design

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Sean Anthony Coyle

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Abstract

Within this project I am exploring issues of collaboration and artistic authorship/ownership from a scenographic perspective. In particular, I shall focus on two artistic collaborations completed as coursework in 2004, *The Boxer* and *Shopping and Fucking*. *The Boxer* is a pre-recorded dance performance that has been presented on screens in a three dimensional format and *Shopping and Fucking* was a piece of theatre presented at The Silo Theatre. My collaborative contribution to these projects was one of production designer for Jacqueline Wilson's choreographic vision and Stuart Devine's theatrical direction. In 2005 I have returned to the design process for the creation of a new collaborative performance work where I as scenographer am the artistic instigator of work. This work is called *Glory Hole*.

Through my thesis project I am hoping to be able to answer the following questions;

- From a scenographic perspective, how does the collaborative process influence the spatial design decisions made?
- How does the collaborative contribution of the scenographer influence the other creative decisions made (e.g. choreography, photography, costume and direction)?

Introduction

The relevance of my M.A project to my background as a scenographer and spatial designer is multi dimensional and pivotal in my development both personally and professionally.

For over ten years I have designed over fifty theater productions, been involved in designing television and film sets and collaborated on numerous art based multi media productions. Throughout my extensive experience within these industries I have identified a need to firstly become more academically and critically rigorous in the application of my designs. My M.A project focuses on the dynamic of collaboration between myself and the other numerous industry professionals on particular creative projects.

I have, over time, developed into an individual who is skilled at reacting to a design or production brief. I am more than competent at collaborating within this established theatrical hierarchy. Through my M.A research I have focused on this nature of collaboration and have determined that in order to push my professional and personal boundaries I have to develop an understanding of these collaborative processes and to redefine and embark on a new model for which to work in my specialist areas.

My final thesis project *Glory Hole* is a manifestation of the development of a new model that hierarchically places the designer as the instigator of the creative process and product/outcome. This generally is a new way of working for me and should have a profound effect on myself in terms of determining which projects I choose , and or initiate , in the future. I have developed a model for which to, as instigator, produce projects that are important to me in terms of content. These projects will reflect issues and values that are significant to myself and once developed will be communicated to a wider audience through a greater variety of mediums and multidisciplines. I think that my M.A research and experience will make me a more multidimensional and dynamic scenographer and designer. A reactor to others ideas I will still be, but through this I will also be the instigator of projects which will take me out of my comfort zone and into exciting new creative areas and creative outcomes.

Chapter 1

Notes on Collaboration

Much has been written about the traditional theatrical collaboration of director and designers (set, costume, and lighting). Often texts examine the difficulty of shared design dialogue, for instance in Rosemary Ingram's 'From Page to Stage: How theatre designers make connections between scripts and images' she questions:

*Design conversations are notoriously difficult. How are two or more people going to be able to see what one member of the group is seeing in his or her imagination?*¹

As this is somewhat confirmed by my personal experience, my aim, with the development of a cohesive methodology is to develop an efficient framework from which to begin to understand the complexities of the shared artistic vision. Pamela Howard says it best in her seminal text 'What is Scenography?'

Collaboration is the battle for harmony on the stage, in which all the players share and seek contributions from each other in order to gain strength through unity."²

In New Zealand and Australia, practitioners are often put in environments (institutional design and production meetings) which are more about practical management than the facilitation of ideas creation. Often the nature of collaboration is compromised necessarily by the time constraints inherent in theatre making. This is often compounded by limited budgets and the fact that freelance collaborators need to move from one job to another. The ability to spend time in the early collaborative stages of the creative process becomes a luxury, rather than the norm enjoyed by many international performance / design collaborations.

¹ Ingham, R.(1998).*From Page to Stage*.Heinemann.Portsmouth (pp.46)

² Howard, P.(2002).*What is Scenography*. Routledge , London (pp102)

Working as reactor versus instigator

Historically (and hierarchically) as a spatial designer and scenographer I have predominantly been in the role of a creative reactor to the person, group and or organization that has instigated the work. The two initial creative pieces that I focused on in the first year of my M.A *Shopping and Fucking* and *The Boxer* have formed the basis of the main question I am posing. These projects had a predetermined, collaborative framework for which to work within and react to. *Shopping and Fucking* was a piece of traditional theatre which I as set, costume and lighting designer had a specific role within. Essentially I reacted to a script that was written by someone else and had to collaborate primarily with the director to respond with a spatial design. With *The Boxer* the instigator of the dance performance piece gave me very specific boundaries to work within and had a predetermined idea of what the basis of the spatial design for the filmed dance piece should be.

With both these projects the success of the response to the creative brief is to fulfill the instigators creative aims from a spatial point of view which will in turn impact in a positive way, the nature of the performances (and filming) within the space.

The Boxer project by nature was more collaborative within the process of realization than *Shopping and Fucking*. Other than the primary instigator who also was the solo performer / dancer / choreographer of *The Boxer* I was joined in a reactive collaborative process with a lighting designer, film maker and costume designer. In terms of the design aspects the collaborative process between the instigator and primary collaborators was always about reacting to the initial specific design framework.

From a hierarchical point of view therefore in both cases my role within the creative process was wholly as reactor and I had no scope or opportunity to instigate a new direction or process that would alter the predetermined framework of the projects from a spatial design point of view.

It was obvious that to fully highlight my questions in relation to the nature of collaboration I needed to embark on another project that placed me as the projects instigator, therefore turning the traditional hierarchical framework upside down. The term “Designer as Director” was formulated as a basis to create a new model for which to explore this nature of collaboration.

From this the project *Glory Hole* was born, instigated by myself and designed to attract a small number of reactors / collaborators.

Case study one – Shopping and Fucking

In early 2004 I was approached by The Silo Theatre with an offer to design the set and lighting for *Shopping and Fucking* to be directed by Stuart Devine. I decided it could become an interesting aspect of my course work for a number of reasons.

Firstly, it was a dark and provocative piece of writing that would challenge and confront many audience members. I would, as designer, have the opportunity to utilize this sense of discomfort from a spatial perspective.

Secondly, I had collaborated with Stuart Devine on a number of previous productions and had found him to be an interesting director who, whilst often traditional in theatrical thinking, was not averse to taking risks on stage.

Shopping and Fucking by Mark Ravenhill is a dark comedy that follows a trio of young Brits who sell drugs, sex, and their souls to survive. The play is made up of a series of tightly compressed scenes that deal with issues of personal, physical, spiritual and institutional abuse. Within the play both comedy and ugliness are often played against each other.

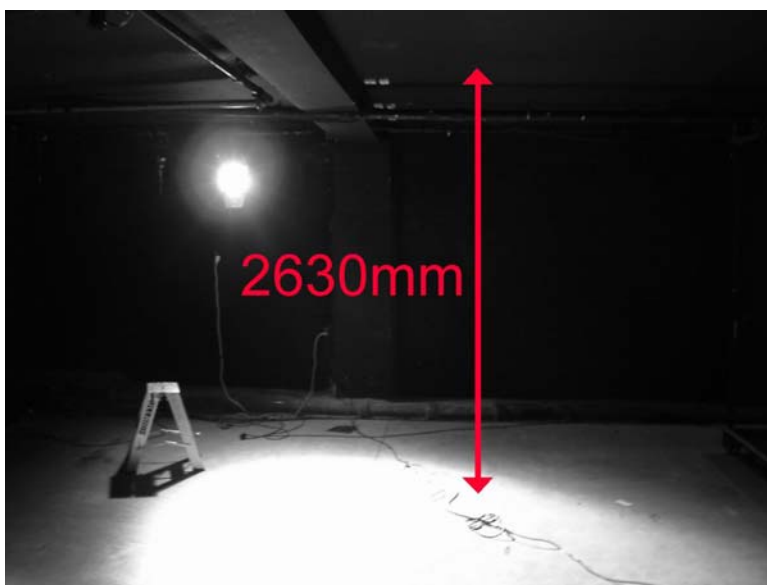
I followed my established approach to generating design ideas for theatre;

- Read play
- Re-read play
- Research world of the play
- Talk with director about the world of play
- Visually investigate theatre space
- Create scenic plot (scene by scene breakdown with authors requirements noted)
- Sketch ideas
- Meet with director and discuss ideas
- Attend rehearsals and engage in dialogue with cast about character

- Play within rehearsals with ideas of spatiality within scenes
- Create scale models
- Discuss further with director
- Create final model, working drawings, lighting design

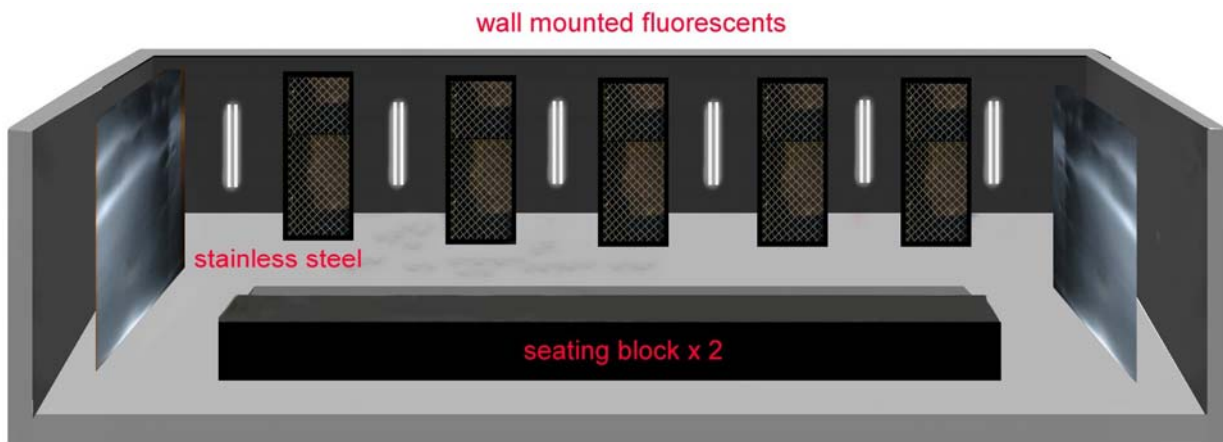
Throughout this process the idea of a packaged ugliness became embedded in my mind. I began playing with the idea that the characters world was to be bathed in the harsh and ugly light of the supermarket fluorescent and that everything within should be wrapped up like meat on a shelf. I also looked at contrasting this with the spatial notion of “shopping for sex”, in particular the world of the gay male cruise club (see Chapter Two).

The play seemed very well suited to the grubbiness of The Silo and so as designer I wanted to emphasize this. The Silo is a notoriously difficult space for designers. It is 19.5 metres long and 8.5 metres wide. The difficulty comes from the fact that from floor to ceiling it is only 2.7 metres high. When you then hang theatre lights within this you are faced with lessening what is already a very low grid. Tall actors run the risk of scalping themselves and floor to ceiling scenic elements tend to get obstructed by low hanging lights. I felt that the low ceiling would be beneficial to the audience’s experience of Shopping and Fucking – assisting us in creating a sense of claustrophobia that was inherent within the text. The architecture of the theatre became very important in the spatial decisions I made. I became interested in exploring the architectural imperfections of the space (dirty / broken concrete floor, crumbling pillars , boarded windows etc) and realized that with minimal introduced elements I could effectively create a world that was on one hand brutal and ugly and on the other aesthetically engaging .



Silo Theatre height

I decided early on in the design process that I did not want the audience seated in the standard end on configuration that had become the norm for Silo productions. Instead I opted for a long promenade like configuration where the audience would have to physically engage with the performance by watching the 19.5 metre wide stage at times like a tennis match. This wide and shallow stage allowed for interesting spatial dynamics to happen with the cast. At times we could achieve an intimacy by centralizing the performers within the space. We were also able to create emotional gulfs between the performers by separating them in the space and utilizing the expanse.



shopping and fucking seating layout

Working drawing of Shopping and Fucking set April 2004

The lighting of the show was problematic due to the issues stated earlier. I researched lighting options that would not impact on the space too much. The most effective lamps I found were small commercial lights that were generally used for lighting exhibitions. I could bolt them directly to the ceiling and so do away with “traditional” theatre lighting over the stage area. I was very interested in using a lot of side light for the production which would also eliminate the problems caused by low hanging theatre lights. I wanted to be able to shift from the cold and harsh supermarket / meat market to stark, shadowy and atmospheric lighting.

Whilst a critical and financial success (*Shopping and Fucking* broke all previous box office records for The Silo) the overall experience for me as designer was somewhat underwhelming. However what eventuated from this experience was a strong desire to be a creative instigator of performance. My research on gay male spaces also began my journey towards the creation of *Glory Hole*.



Shopping and Fucking Silo Theatre May 2004



Shopping and Fucking Silo Theatre May 2004

Case study two – The Boxer

The Boxer is a pre-recorded dance performance presented on screens in a 3-D format. It is the evolution of a project first performed in Wellington for Bats Theatre's STAB season in 1999. This first incarnation entitled *automaton* worked with a large steel cube with front projection screens on all sides. The screens formed the sides of the cube until with a rip, the front two screens were lifted and the performer suspended from a bungee dropped into the performance space.. The performer was mannequin-like suspended at varying heights within the cube. The narrative moved through a birth, life, and permanent preservation cycle; from foetal, life-giving warmth, subjected to growing pains and developments in technology, eventually retiring in a cold cryogenic state. The basis of the concept examined whether developments in technology have surpassed our own abilities to evolve, so that we simply exist in a different environment. *Automaton* had a mixed degree of creative success in its attempt to merge the relationship between technology and the performer, but was perhaps misplaced within the theatre context. Those who came seeking a linear narrative or literal interpretation left surprised at best, frustrated at worst, while those stimulated by visual experience were either absent from, or uncomfortable within a theatre setting.

Both *Automaton* and *The Boxer* have originated from the structural design which provided a canvas to work with creatively. As with time-based art, the work has never been fixed, and in *The Boxer* it continues to be a work in progress.

The Boxer's starting point is to a degree the exit point of *Automaton*. It works from a phase in *Automaton* which was referred to as the padded cell – the inescapable space of adolescence, relinquishing the carefree days of youth in the transition to responsibility and accountability. *The Boxer* moves on to interpret an observation of the adolescent mind in the adult body, creating a study in perception.

The Boxer can never be seen as a whole – it is impossible to see all four sides of the box at once. A curious spectator is required to participate in filling the gaps, drawing their own conclusions.

The Boxer drags the performer from its own detritus into this defined space - a cell, a stage, a pigeon-hole in itself. The box is at times a safe haven while at others imprisoning. Paradoxically, it is when the space is perceived to be at its most restrictive, the creativity becomes more inventive. Playfulness develops as frustration subsides. A freedom from self-consciousness is also established as though in the privacy of one's own room, but there is of course a voyeurism inherent in the fact that this individual is being watched, has been recorded and is being played back over and over leaving it open to repetitive analysis.

Jacqui Wilson, the creator of the *Boxer* concept and format, and also the choreographer, sole performer and director selected a group of specialists to create the *Boxer*. She called on my skills as a set designer to realize and design literally a box like performance space. The space had to be versatile (i.e. detachable 1-5 walls) and be workable in terms of her physical interaction with the walls and space. It also had to be made of a material that would be easily rear projected on and lit from all sides. The design would have to take into consideration that it was to be filmed simultaneously by filmmaker Florian Habicht from multiple angles.

Due to the nature of working within quite defined boundaries my design process was a lot more structured than *Shopping and Fucking*. Where I had played around spatially in rehearsals with the cast and director of *Shopping and Fucking*, with *The Boxer* the spatiality was much more predetermined. The dimensions of the “box” became extremely important and through a series of performance / spatial workshops we determined the dimensions. What became very important early on was the nature of the box. Was it a hard space or was it a soft, nurturing environment? In a series of movement and scenic workshops we played around with these possibilities.



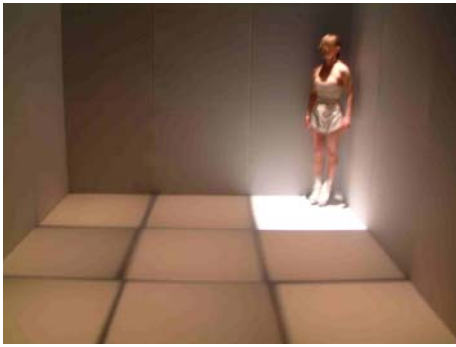
Boxer workshop July 2004

During the workshop period I brought a series of materials to play with as a collaborative group. These included plastic sheeting, hardboard and various grades of stretch fabric. Each was tested for effectiveness to light, projection, versatility and camera .

Jacqui and her producer Mel Langlotz established a creative process via numerous group meetings over a period of six months which systematically went through all of the logistical requirements of the project. The group also included a lighting designer, costume designer, composer and set builder.

For the editing and creation of the film that recorded the *Boxer* performance a final collaborative process was established which consisted of Jacqui, the producer, filmmaker and digital film editor. My involvement ceased prior to this after the performance was filmed over a two week period.

All of Jacqui's collaborators were reacting to her vision and Jacqui was very much the director and initiator of the project. As designer I had limited scope to take the design anywhere beyond what was a tight brief with a set of complicated logistical needs. The creative satisfaction as a designer was fulfilling the complex criteria and reacting to and negotiating with the other specialists, particularly with Jacqui, Florian and Marc Mateo the lighting designer. It must be noted that due to work commitments the lighting designer had to hand over the mid to later stages of his process and responsibilities to me.



The Boxer production shot taken at TAPAC November 2004



The Boxer TAPAC November 2004

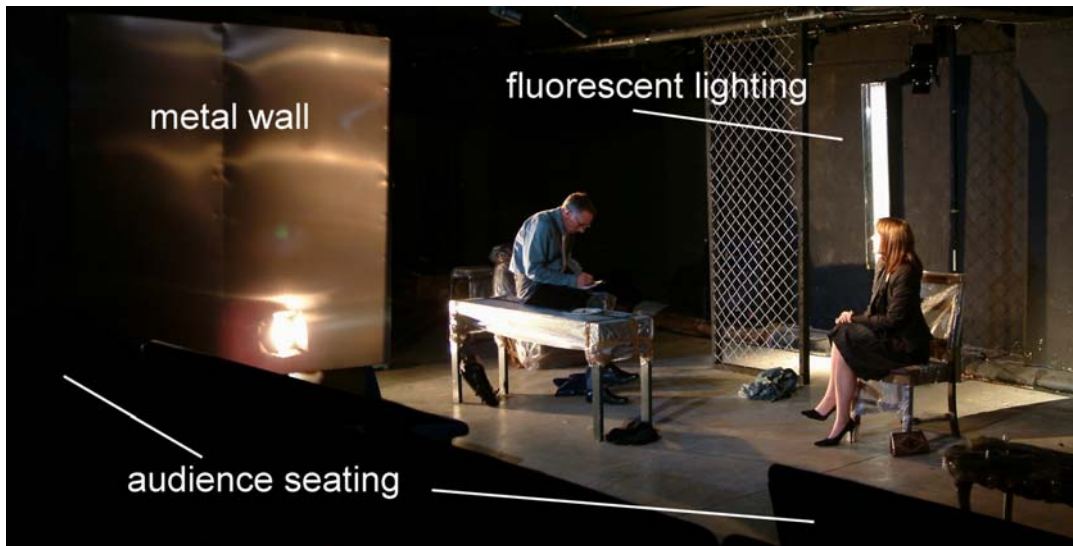
Performer / Audience Relationships

*We intend to do away with stage and auditorium, replacing them by a kind of single, undivided locale without any partitions of any kind and this will become the very scene of the action.*³

As part of my research I have been interested in exploring the impact of the manipulation of audience space in a scenographic context. How does a performance engage and involve an audience through scenographic images? I have been looking for ways to make the audience aware of the way spaces and objects shape our perception. The experience of the performance should extend understanding of the phenomenological impact of scenographic space.

I was conscious with *Shopping and Fucking* to not let the audience become passive voyeurs. The lighting and seating position did not allow for anybody to recede into the dark safety of their seat. Rather, they were often brightly lit (via a wall of fluorescent tubes) and their participation within the scenographic process was highlighted by the inclusion of highly reflective walls either end of the seating block. These created a spatial illusion of an audience seating block that carried on forever.

³ Artaud, A (1993) *The Theatre and its Double*. Calder Publications Ltd, London (p74)



Shopping and Fucking Silo Theatre May 2004

The audience, at all times, was very much placed within the world of the play. The seats were on the stage. Actors would sometimes be no more than 20 centimeters away from the front row of audience. The confrontational nature of this conscious placement of audience was very much in keeping with the themes and direction of the play.

With *Boxer* I was faced with a limited ability to be able to affect the audience decisions made. The original concept for the showing of the work was for it to be presented on four large lcd screens that would form a box so that audience can walk around and view from different angles. Alternately it can be shown via projection on four walls of a room (or box). In this example the audience is within the film so they can simply turn to see each different angle.

Both *Shopping and Fucking* and *Boxer* require some work by the audience. In both instances they are required to physically engage with performance- in *Shopping and Fucking* they are required to be constantly shifting their eye line due to the long and shallow nature of the space. While observing an actor at one end of the theatre space they may miss what is happening with another performer at the opposite end. This causes constant head movements by the audience. They are also required to engage with the scenographic space when they enter the theatre by walking across and around the “stage” and the various pieces of furniture. In *Boxer* the audience must constantly be shifting . It is not designed to be sat in front of and watched , rather it is to be experienced. The audience need to be in it or around it, moving to see a different wall and thus a different aspect of it.

Chapter Two

The Designer as Director

“Staging: This archetypal theatre language will be formed around staging not simply viewed as one degree of refraction of the script on stage, but as the starting point for theatrical creation. And the old duality between author and producer will disappear, to be replaced by a kind of single Creator using and handling this language, responsible both for the play and the action” Antonin Artaud ⁴

The premise for my research is not new. I refer to much of the writing of Adolphe Appia (1862-1928) for inspiration. Appia in his wisdom as a designer / director revolutionized the theatre. He did away with the traditional scenic design conventions of 2-dimensional perspective paintings as background and encouraged artists of the theatre to be more concerned with the theatrical space as an extension of the performer / human body. He advocated abstract rather than “naturalism” within scenographic process. Many of his theories pertaining to staging and theatre lighting are as relevant today as when he wrote them.⁵ Alongside Appia I look to the writing of Gordon Craig who as a designer / director advocated losing the faux naturalism of speech, movement, scenic representation and lighting on stage. In his text *On The Art Of The Theatre* Craig advocates the use of a symbolic design practice in theatre so as to transcend reality rather than simply representing it.

The work of these revolutionary scenographers has inspired many other theatre practitioners. The work of epic designer / director Robert Wilson pays homage to these early visionaries. He has managed to create inspiring work that has sprung from a highly visual base whilst maintaining very successful collaborative partnerships e.g Phillip Glass composer – Einstein on the Beach.

In “Performance Design in Australia” theatre director Barry Kosky discusses the importance of integrated design and direction;

⁴ Artaud, A. (1970). *The Theatre and its Double*. London, Calder & Boyars Ltd.(p72)

⁵ Beacham,R (1994) *Adolphe Appia*.Harwood Academic Publishers

I get enormously frustrated, in terms of the Australian arts media, when they separate the work of the director and the designer. They will talk about the direction being 'this and this', and the design is 'this and this', and compliment or [denigrate] one particular element; To me it is virtually impossible to separate the roles between director and designer ... Yes, the designer is in charge of the visual impact of a piece and the director is actually responsible for getting it on, but. in terms of the conceptual framework behind a piece, the role of the director/designer is very much a collaborative process for me.

He agreed that it is his visual response which inspires his direction of a production:

*I would say that text is only a trigger ...I don't think text itself can make theatre. For me the starting point for any production or process is a combination of visual imagery and music.*⁶

As a theatre designer who has worked in New Zealand and Australia I whole-heartedly agree with Koskys sentiments. The marginalizing of the scenographer by theatre practitioners to simply produce a “set” which the company can then use is frustrating . It is from this point that I have sought to create a method for creating work that is not merely in response to a design brief.

Methodology for collaborative work

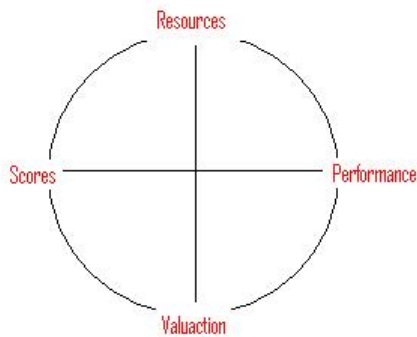
For the creation of *Glory Hole* I have been interested in finding a more applicable form of methodology for collaborative creative process. The RSVP Cycles developed by Lawrence Halprin and Jim Burns seems to be an excellent established model for workshopping and devising performance⁷. RSVP is an acronym for

- **R**esources – that is all material used in the creative process. This includes the realities of space, people, finances and things required to create. It also includes less tangible aspects of creation like objectives, feelings, prior knowledge etc.

⁶ Anderson, K and Ross, I (2001) *Performance Design in Australia*. Fine Art Publishing, Sydney (p52)

⁷ Halprin, L & Burns, J.(1974) *Taking Part*.MIT Press. Cambridge (pp27-29)

- **S**cores – these include the various instructions, plans, designs and scenarios that are created and bought to creative process.
- **V**aluation – this is where the collaborators will evaluate various feedback relating to the creative process. This then allows for the reworking of scores.
- **P**erformance – this is the outcome of previous stages of creative process.



RSVP Cycles diagram

The following is an analysis of the methodology of the collaborative process of Glory Hole using the RSVP cycle.

Glory Hole Resources

- A new model of collaboration instigated by myself.
- My personal financial and material resources.
- Sponsorship
- My scenic studio / workshop.
- Set building materials
- Existing costumes within Kneel Halts private collection.
- Existing music for workshop process.
- The combined resource of the skills, knowledge and experience of collaborators
- Catch Casting studio (for rehearsals / workshops)
- TAPAC – performance venue and workshop space
- Theatre Lights within TAPAC for performance and workshop
- Lateshift – cruise club for research

- Sound recording facilities
- AUT supervisor (Sue Gallagher)

Glory Hole Scores

- These included developing a framework for the performance through my initial research.
- The spatial designs – the content of these informed who I collaborated with, in this case Kneel Halt (a performance artist and costume designer.)
- The further developed set design concept
- Concept drawings
- Scale models
- Audio Visual score
- Scripts devised by myself and Kneel in reaction to Scenographic work. These were used for determining a starting point for content and performative direction.
- An exchange of ideas between collaborators
- Visual prompts
- Recommended readings between Kneel and myself resulted in a significant body of relevant research and periphery investigation that informed our collaborative process and determined the nature and direction of Gory Hole.
- Lighting design and lighting plan
- Sound Design
- Choreographic score
- Costume designs and plot
- Workshop scripts
- Final performance script

Glory Hole Valuation

- Experimentation – workshopping of ideas
- Digestion of workshop findings / development
- Discussions and reactions of all relevant collaborators to workshop findings
- Production meetings
- Dual analysis of content - final content to be decided upon when both collaborators are in agreement over logistics, direction and artistic merit
- Ideas and opinions of outside professionals who will observe rehearsals

Glory Hole Performance

- Six show season at TAPAC in February 2006 in conjunction with The Hero Festival



Glory Hole early marketing image

Chapter Three

The Making of Glory Hole

If repression has indeed been the fundamental link between power, knowledge, and sexuality since the classical age, it stands to reason that we will not be able to free ourselves from it except at a considerable cost. Michel Foucault

In developing the general content and polemic direction of *Glory Hole* I researched the various aspects and nature of gay male space and constructs and headed my general research with the following primary question:

Fear, phobia and sexual desire within constructed gay male space and are there parallels in mainstream spatial design?

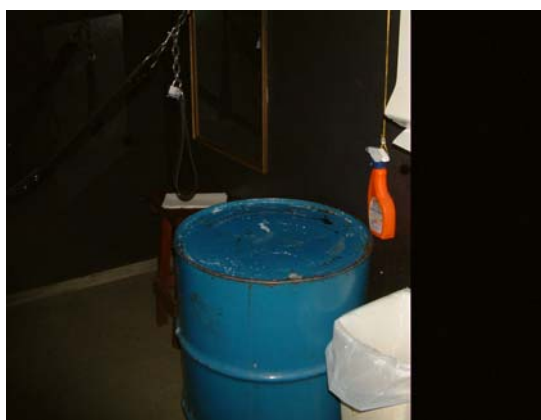
The Cruise Club

The primary vehicle of constructed gay male space is the Cruise Club which provides a sexual playground/contact point for certain sectors of the gay male community. It also provides a discreet venue for heterosexual and bisexual males to discover or experiment with their sexual desires and boundaries with gay men in a safe environment.

Common in the cruise club are theatrical simulations of “male” spaces such as car interiors, communal men’s shower rooms (as in sports environments), locker/jock changing rooms, and “butch” predominantly male working areas such as mechanics workshops. Materials common in construction are corrugated iron, mesh, metal tubing, and large 44 gallon oil drums.



Lateshift Toolshed room



Lateshift Sling room

The appropriation and adaptation of these environments to the cruise club is primarily to aid in the various role plays of gay males as they congregate and cruise. These environments are integral to the fantasy of subverting or acquiring the “normal. “Or from another perspective ,the gay colonization of mainstream hetero-male space.



Lateshift Barrel maze



Lateshift Interrogation room

It is common with any minority to claim the majorities' mechanisms and manifestations of dominance and or oppression over them. The simulated hetero-male environments of the gay cruise clubs are examples of gay males claiming these spaces and the values inherent within as their own to use or abuse as they please. The simulation is in itself a political act and could be viewed historically as an intuitive response to the imbalance of gay rights and acceptance within mainstream society.

A voyeuristic approach to these simulated environments is evident with a heightened theatricality. Often the spaces are lit in ambient light and dimly lit to heighten the reveal of the simulated space and the participants interacting within. Film-noir concepts of light and dark are prevalent and this adds to the mystery of discovery, the allusion (or reality) of danger. These environments are expressionisms of normal male work or recreational or functional spaces. Via light and the reduction of the essential elements of the general mainstream design the gay male cruise club spaces become almost parodies of the original and are designed to increase the gay participant's sense of sexual excitement. An urban hard edged aesthetic is predominant within the general cruise club simulated environments which reflect the prevalence of gay male activity in public urban areas. Also the materials used are seen as "male" in mainstream application via architecture and in male dominated occupations such as mechanics and metal work etc.

The other spatial design features prevalent within the Cruise club is the maze or cruise area. Often these spaces are a series of walls not unlike theatrical flats that create hallways rooms and dead ends that offer an environment for which men can wander through and watch or physically participate. These mazes are voyeuristic in nature and often hierarchical design elements such as platforms, steps and different levels are included. Also included are glory (holes that are cut in the walls at various heights) to aid in passive voyeurism and in voyeuristic physical and sexual activity.

These maze environments could be seen as a vehicle to normalize gay male behavior due to the simulation of the public and private space of the hallway. This conjures up parallels to the room as a meeting place or place to wait for someone. These generalized and abstracted spaces are darkened and often are in pitch black.



Lateshift maze

The theatricalised maze increases notions of or the reality of fear and even loathing. Fear of discovery, fear of being observed, the fear of physical or emotional harm. These spaces are the spaces of the outside real...a darkened room devoid of furniture or sparsely furnished with functional items designed to aid in the transference of sexual interaction.

These environments, particularly the minimal room, can be seen to relate to the space of institutional and societal legitimized environments designed to incarcerate or interrogate. This could be viewed in much the same way as the simulated male spaces, the intuitive claiming or owning of the concept of the public space and /or place of institutional moral regulation by the gay male minority.

Throughout popular culture public spaces are used as a background for dangerous and exciting and or forbidden narratives. The psychology of the darkened alleyway or hallway or room where danger/and or excitement lie is imbued and symbolized in a practical way within the maze. Notions of being stalked, chased, viewed, cornered, interrogated, oppressed, violated, liberated are potentially played out in an interactive way within and through the walls. They are projections of what are familiar to everyone (gay and straight) through the various mediums of popular culture and experience.

The Public Toilet

Constructed gay male space is also manifested within the public space of the public toilet. This is the edgy frontline of gay male expression that is in part emulated within aspects of cruise club design and spatial design elements. Not all but certain public toilets are targeted and known to certain individuals within gay and straight (closeted male) community.

They are environments that are borne from a war of attrition between gay men, the public who want to use the space as an amenity, council authorities, the police and lastly individuals and groups who target the toilets as a place for which to be violent towards gay men. Various structural and aesthetic interventions signpost these spaces as places where there is gay sexual activity. It is common for holes to be made within the walls to provide sight lines between cubicles or from cubical to open urinal space.

More rarely are circular holes cut into the cubicles door or wall to provide access for the penis or hand to be inserted into the other space. These are very similar in nature to the glory holes in the constructed male space of the cruise club. It would be logical to assume that historically the public toilet holes surfaced before the glorified holes of the cruise club.



Hand drilled hole – public toilet Auckland

The other structural and spatial elements in the design of the toilets that relate to the constructed space of the cruise club is the fact that often the cubicle walls and doors are not floor to ceiling. Rectangular channels of space at the top and bottom of the walls afford a convenient area for which to determine who and how many people are in the next cubicle or in the general toilet space. The spaces provide visual information on who may be cruising; who is legitimately using the amenity or who could be potentially a threat...it sometimes is all in the footwear...beware of robust police issue shoes. It is common for the cruiser to stand on his cubicle toilet and look over and down at the next cubicle and / or the general urinal area. This hierarchical voyeurism of viewing sexual activity from above is implemented within the spatial design of the cruise club.

The public toilet also acts as an interface and vehicle for visual and written information between individuals. It can be viewed as a message board both in a practical sense but also as illustrating a moral discourse between individuals and groups spread over society.



Toilet wall Auckland

The fear that the cruise club manufactures or simulates is very real in the public toilet by contrast. Sexual activity within can be dangerous and at times fatal for men who interact within the space of the public toilet. Fear of being arrested, surveyed, assaulted and humiliated is part of the complex mix within the experience of sexualizing the public space of the toilet.

Signs from the moral and institutional authorities adorn most public toilets and are aimed to reduce law breaking and provide the notion of a safer surveyed public space. The gay individuals who go to these public spaces are targets of this surveillance and are warned of the legal implications of their actions if caught in a compromising situation a la George Michael.

Graffiti, pornographic and homophobic images and statements are over time sprayed, scratched and penned onto the walls and doors of the public toilet space. The council in periodic acts of moral whitewash paint over the indecencies in a pragmatic cycle of censorship.

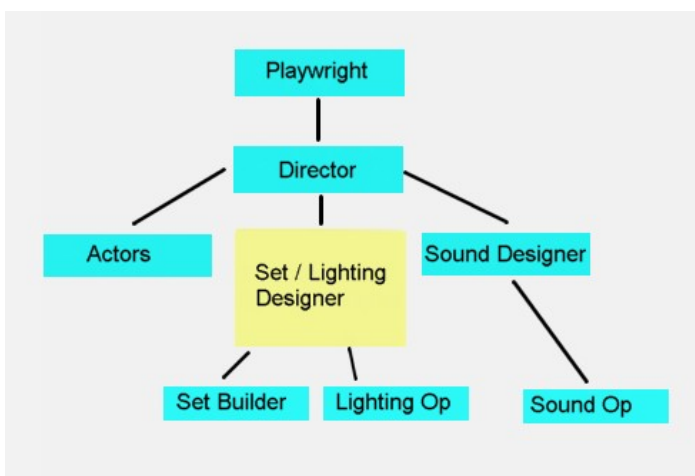
This research is the basis for the spatial design and subsequent performance content of *Glory Hole*.



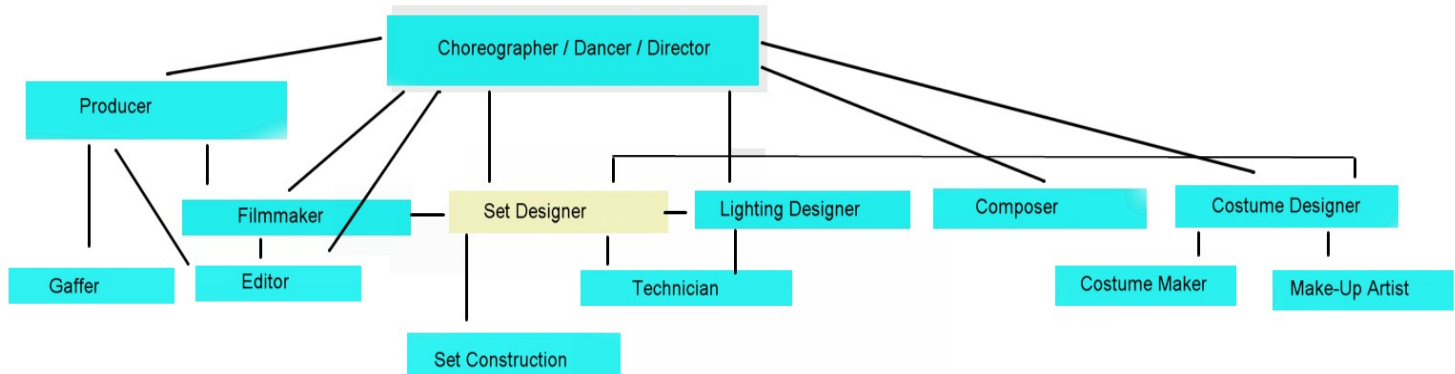
Glory hole wall Lateshift

The Turning of Theatrical Hierarchy

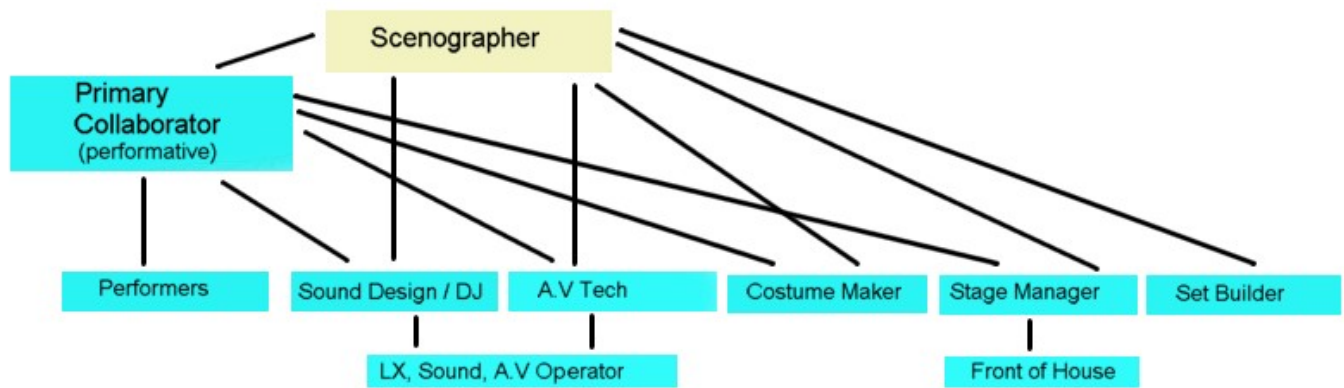
Glory Hole provides me with an alternative model for which to collaborate. Having researched and analyzed my usual collaborative process inherent within *Shopping and Fucking* and *The Boxer*, the alternate process of the designer instigating and directing the collaboration is manifest within *Glory Hole*. It allows the designer to be in power of the creative framework and puts the various design principles in the forefront of the development of content.



Collaborative Model for *Shopping and Fucking*



Collaborative Model for *The Boxer*



Collaborative Model for *Glory Hole*

The spatial design directly influences the decision on who to collaborate with as only certain types of performers and technicians/practitioners would be inclined or be lateral enough to agree to a framework and process that is outside the traditional parameters.

Glory Hole as a collaborative model sees the spatial design replacing the traditional script as the source of performative narrative and content. Through the spatial design process potential narratives are developed in response to the various set elements, spatiality and general aesthetic. The spatial design decides who and how many shall participate in the collaborative process and within the performance itself.

The narrative lies within the walls or lack of; and with in the space or lack of.

The collaborative model allows a hierarchical shift in the importance of spatial design and attracts collaborators who have the flexibility to workshop the form and the content in response to the design. The spatial narrative is transformed into a script as *Glory Hole* forms. The early stages of collaboration is crucial in determining a powerful response to the design and transformation to script and narrative. This is where the poetry and art lies. If the initial design is powerful and dynamic then it has to be matched by an equally brilliant interpretation and narrative response.

In *Glory Hole* various environments are the catalysts for performative and visual narrative and as per a traditional script act as indicators of narrative form within time and space. These environments can be interpreted as acts and function in much the same way as acts do in theatre. They dictate the ebb and flow and climax of the piece.

In terms of collaboration the designer requires the primary collaborator to understand the principles and inherent power of spatial design and bring a strong performative response to the framework dictated by the design. In finding a collaborator who fit this description was relatively easy. I was interested in finding someone highly visual who was not afraid of working outside the traditional. I had known Kneel Halt (a.k.a DeeZaStar) since I was a student at Toi Whakaari NZ Drama School in Wellington in the early nineties. I had seen much of his diverse range of work as an actor, costume designer, drag artist, performance / stunt artist and director. I felt there was no-one better to collaborate with given the polemic nature of the research. Kneel brings with him a huge wealth of knowledge when it comes to queer theory and performance.



Kneel Halt during *Glory Hole* Rehearsal

The following is a breakdown of collaborative responsibilities as workshopped by myself and Kneel Halt.

Spatial Designer/Scenographer – **Sean Coyle**

- Instigator of research of ideas, values and perimeters of content
- Development of set design via drawings and model etc
- Secure relevant space that is appropriate for design
- Workshops performance concepts with performers

Primary Collaborator – **Kneel Halt** (performance artist / costume designer)

- Collaborates in creative workshop process with designer.
- Development of script with designer in response to spatial design framework.
- Workshops performance concepts with performers

Secondary Collaborators

Scenographer if required collaborates or consults and /or instructs;

- Lighting technician
- Costume maker
- Sound designer
- Audio visual
- Sound / Lighting operators
- Set builder on construction requirements

Conclusion

Workshopping *Glory Hole*

Once Kneel and myself had come to a spatial understanding with regards the direction for the performance we began talks on possible collaborators. It became important for us to find people who would fit within our unconventional framework and who were queer. We wanted a diverse mix of performance skill base, cultures and ages. Due to our limited money it became apparent early in the process that we would be working with people who were interested in the process and content and not in the financial rewards of such a venture. It was extremely encouraging to, very early in the piece; get the support of seasoned performers John Brazier and Tai Royal. Their commitment added integrity to the project and helped secure sponsorship from various companies. With John and Tai on board we managed to piece together a cast of individuals who were willing to give up their summer to work on the devising of *Glory Hole*.

Glory Hole content

With our spatiality defined it became relatively easy to find content to fill. Kneel and myself kept referring back to the idea of a “burlesque fuck-club”. We wanted the audience to take a journey through the space and in some way be the protagonists of the performance. The performance content was dictated by the various stages in male to male cruising. With this in mind we broke the performance down into ;

- The Urge
- The Entrance
- The Familiarization
- The Recognition / Chase
- The Fuck
- The Departure

Within these various performance stages we were keen to explore issues of identity and anonymity. Foucault’s idea that identity is forever shifting and is based on interactions with other people became an important factor in exploring how men interact with each other when cruising.

The notion of people ‘having’ power became an interesting concept to explore performatively. Do people possess power or is it a mutual exchange between those exercising power and those resisting power ?

It was important in developing our performance content to stay true to our queer content. We were representing aspects of ‘Gay Culture’ on stage. All the collaborators identified as gay men and we wanted our ‘created world’ to be a cacophony of gay sounds and images. Larry Gross says in his essay ‘Out of the Mainstream: Sexual Minorities And The Mass Media’

*The ultimate expression of independence for a minority audience struggling to free itself from the dominant culture’s hegemony is to become the creators and not merely the consumers of media images.*⁸

We spent much time discussing ‘what defines a culture’ . Critics of queer culture have often dismissed its significance because they have difficulty justifying their inherent homophobia and their very basic understanding of what makes a culture. Is a culture merely having a particular language, special clothes, special foods and particular customs? It was this thinking that lead us towards exploring gay language (spoken and body).

We became excited with the possibility of using the historic gay language ‘Polari’ as a theatrical device. The language became popular in Britain in the sixties and fifties and had been common amongst prostitutes, criminals, beggars, traveling circus people and grafters. Although not used much these days it became the basis for the development of two characters Harold and Douglas (also known as two dead queens). We played with the idea of offering translation via projection to the audience but opted against. We were confident that what we were saying had more weight without literally spelling it out. There would be people in the audience that understood some or all of what Harold and Douglas said and for those that didn’t they would be put in the position of being ‘the other’. The audience would be forced to listen , engage and take away their own meaning from the various polari scenes.

We treated gay body language in a similar way to how we dealt with spoken language , spending workshop time on how gay men interact with one another physically. We created a language of

⁸ Gross, L (1989) “*Out of the Mainstream: Sexual Minorities and the Mass Media*” in *Remote Control: Television, Audiences and Cultural Power*. Routledge, London

movements based on various aspects of gay expression and identity. What physicality is identifiable as gay? In looking at this it was interesting to explore the various physical projections and stereotypes of gay sub-cultures. The fem, the butch, the top, the bottom, the leather queen, the muscle mary, the old queen, the drag queen, the bog queen, the 'straight' guy, the virgin, the curious, the predator and the slut. Much of our early experimenting was done with physical improvisations based on these character traits.

Finding a script

With a clear spatial and thematic framework with which to work with, Kneel and myself began piecing together a script / score for *Glory Hole*. Based on performance workshopping and spatial explorations we would go away and write ideas up as possible scenes, interactions, songs or projection scripts. These aspects would be inserted into our ever evolving script / score. Cast were encouraged to make various scripts their own by taking what had been established and notated by myself and Kneel and re-writing to suit their personality / cultural background. A strong example of this occurred with each of the performers "glory hole stories". These were a series of monologues told through a glory hole that were subsequently projected around the performance space. Each cast member was given a piece of base writing by Kneel and myself and encouraged to transform it into their own monologue using personal experience and language.

It was decided early on in the piece that the second half of the show would move to being more cabaret / burlesque in nature. To achieve this a lot of time was spent writing, composing and developing a series of original songs. The process for this consisted of talks around possible themes / content for songs which Kneel would take and develop lyrics for. Samuel Holloway and Karl Moser would then take lyrics and begin process of finding a sound for them. Five songs were written and composed during the workshop process.

The project was very reliant on multi-media aspects to enhance the world we created so this was another aspect of the script that had to be developed from early stages. We were adamant that we did not want to create a piece of theatre that had audio-visual elements added to it later. Instead we wanted the filmic elements to be developed from day one and be an integral part of the visual narrative. The explanations of these elements were included in the development of the script.

Performing Glory Hole



Glory Hole Rehearsal

One of the biggest challenges we faced while rehearsing *Glory Hole* was the fact that the entire flow of the piece was based on having an audience of sixty people who were to be herded and moved through the various performance stages. Because we obviously didn't have sixty people a night to rehearse with much speculation was made by cast and crew as to how long it would take a group of people to move, how much space a group would occupy and how people would react to the various elements. On our dress rehearsal we managed to get a group of about 20 students through to gauge response. It was only after this that I felt confident that the moving of the audience and the estimated audience size would work.



Caged audience – *Glory Hole* performance

A brief that Kneel and myself gave each other early on was to really play with the concept of audience expectation. We are conditioned to follow a set of rules when attending theatre. We enter the theatre, we quietly take our seat, we remain silent observers in the dark (except when something is funny – then we are allowed to laugh), we politely clap at the end of the performance and we exit the theatre. The spatial design of the piece did away with these conventions which allowed us to very early on instill in our audience a sense that they were participating in something unique.



John Brazier and Kneel Halt (Harold and Douglas) – *Glory Hole* Rehearsal

Over the course of the week that we performed *Glory Hole* it was interesting to see the very different shows that occurred based on the types of audience and how they interacted with the environment and cast. The energy generated by an almost entirely older gay male audience during a fundraiser for Body Positive was extremely different to an audience made up of theatre goers and practitioners.

Overall the experience of creating a piece of theatre that was instigated by myself as a designer has been an immensely rewarding and challenging one. The staging and content seemed to interest the public and two days into the run the season virtually sold out. The lab season that was produced of *Glory Hole* was a risk, however the support and interest it received by the gay community has been extremely humbling. This has started our journey towards creating a unique, financially viable, artistic product that can tour nationally and internationally.

Glory Hole Performance Photographs



Siaosi Mulipola and Allistair Quirke



Eye projections and audience



Audience watching cubicle dance



Cubicle dance (Ambrose! And Siaso Mulipola)



Aerial fuck show (Taiaroa Royal and Ambrose!)

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Appendices

1. Glory Hole script / score